ROMA

DURING TWO INVASIONS

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There is a destiny that makes us
brothers. None goes his way alone.
All that we put into the life of
others, comes back into our own.
Edwin Markham

Chapter 1

On that memorable day, the rain came down in buckets. A few poorly dressed young men walked in the ankle-deep mud to Rava-Ruska Street and the outskirts of town. They stopped at a triumphal arch they had erected the day before and looked excitedly up at the little red flags scattered on the arch.

Our best tailor, a poor, meek man, appeared to have grown in size over the last twenty-four hours. He explained something to the town's only tinsmith with the air of an expert. His friend, a shoemaker, came running from the opposite direction, yelling from the distance. As he approached the waiting group, we could hear his words:

"They're here! They're here!"

The men tossed their caps in the air, leaping up to catch them, and immediately dispersed throughout the town to spread the news.

The shoemaker must have been informed as to when the Red Army was due to arrive because the first heavy Soviet tanks soon came rolling in from the east. The din drowned out the voice of my younger sister Blume as we walked side by side in the rain.

We caught up with the tanks as they turned right into the marketplace at the center of Niemirov. I followed them, moving quickly through the slush. Blume had fallen behind. Soon she shouted that she had had enough; she was cold and was going home. I replied that I was staying.

The Red Army tanks parked in the marketplace. The men jumped from their tanks; they were immediately surrounded by the impoverished tinsmith and his political friends. It seemed strange to me that the same event that filled a few with joy terrified most of us.

The tinsmith's wife was shivering in her voluminous yellow dress; it was gathered at the waistline by a deep red sash and her arms were filled with roses. Where had she gotten them this time of year? She offered them to one of the Russian soldiers as he emerged from his tank.

The tinsmith, a little red flag sticking out of his frayed coat pocket, embraced another soldier. Some of his friends vied with one another to shake hands and welcome the new occupying forces.

Smiling, the Red Army men looked on, somewhat bewildered at the commotion.

Now, joining the Welcoming Committee were other people who had left their homes but remained standing close to the buildings, suspicious and fearful. Then a few who, like myself, were driven by curiosity hesitantly approached the tanks. The others followed.

Someone was playing an accordion. I pushed my way through the growing crowd and saw the same soldier who had received the bouquet of roses. He was dancing to the lively melody, oblivious to the rain. Other soldiers, equally unconcerned with the weather, joined him, forming a small ring within the larger circle of onlookers. Five Russians jumped up high and landed on their knees in the slush, splashing mud and water. As the tempo of the music increased, so did that of the dancing. Other soldiers clapped their hands and encouraged the local people to sing, dance and clap along with them.

Suddenly, I realized that Bruno, my two-and-a-half-year-old son, was probably missing me by now. I quickly returned to my parents' house in the marketplace. The entrance was blocked by my older brother Abner, who was listening with several neighbors to a mustached soldier boasting about his Russian homeland. The soldier smoothed his mustache and said,

"We have everything in abundance!"

"Do you have oranges?" asked Abner in a mixture of Polish and Russian.

The soldier didn't understand the question. He smiled, showing perfect white teeth.

"Sure. . . sure," he said.

"Do you have lemons?" Abner asked.

"What a silly question. I told you we have everything."

"Do you have lemon *factories*?"

"Of course we have!" Apparently familiar with the word "factory," he repeated, "We have many factories in Russia."

The laughter of the few neighbors encouraged Abner to make a new suggestion: "Then you must have *trouble* factories also."

"Mnogo! A lot." he said.

The neighbors laughed more loudly. Abner's handsome face remained expressionless.

"Don't be such a wise guy," said the tinsmith, who had joined us, to Abner.

"You may regret it," said our usually humble and polite shoemaker in a sharp voice.

The tinsmith and the shoemaker, both usually meek, soft-spoken individuals, were unusually outspoken today!

Suddenly, I became conscious of my wet feet, and I recalled once again that Bruno was waiting inside. I should have gone indoors immediately, but curiosity kept me transfixed.

"I was only joking," said Abner apologetically, adjusting his blond side locks behind his ears. "What I really want to know is whether they'll treat Jews better than the Germans have."

"You, Abner, a learned man, yet so ignorant! How can you compare the Russians to the Germans?" the tinsmith said. "The Germans were here only three weeks. Look at the terror they spread! They killed Duzy Hirschfeld and the Rzeszover refugee for no reason at all. The Russians are liberating people from oppression! Look how they behave; they haven't harmed a fly. They sing, they dance, they want us to be happy! I've been waiting for them for years!"

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The mustached Red Army man continued to smile.

Abner asked, "And how are Jews treated in your country?"

"We have over a hundred nationalities in Russia: Uzbecs, Mongolians, Caucasians, *Jewreys*. . . ." He had been counting on his fingers, but now he stopped, unable to think of other nationalities. "*Jewreys* and all other peoples are treated as equals—"*Wsio rowno* (all the same)," he said.

The tinsmith, a sickly man, had recovered from a coughing spell; he now asked, "What are the wages of a tinsmith in Russia? How much does a shoemaker earn?"

"Two hundred rubles a month."

The shoemaker gasped, looked hard at Abner, and said, "In Poland we have to work two months to make that kind of money."

Again the soldier smoothed his mustache and placed his hand on the shoemaker's shoulder.

"From now on, you workers will have it much better in Poland. That is why we have come, to free you poor suckers from capitalistic exploitation."

It was getting dark. Abner went inside and I followed. I had been puzzled by his conciliatory reaction to the threatening remarks of both the tinsmith and the shoemaker. Abner, the oldest, like the youngest, Blume, was following in Father's footsteps but, unlike Blume, he was in the habit of speaking up for his opinions. He was a good student of the Talmud and politically well informed, but I worried about him. Did he know about the very real dangers that loomed ahead? Was he afraid? Did he fear the newly-agressive tinsmith and shoemaker? I wanted to ask him what had brought about this sudden change in him. I wanted a full explanation, but Father, who had been waiting for Abner impatiently, stopped first.

At that moment, Bruno broke free of Blume and came running toward me, holding a book with Lenin's picture splashed over the cover. "Mummy, look what I have!" he exclaimed. "A soldier gave me this. He said Lenin is the greatest man in the world!"

"Let me have it," I said, trying to take the book away. He held onto it. "The soldier let me wear his cap, Mummy."

At last he reluctantly let go of the book, but not before I had promised to return it to him the next day.

I worried about the impact the Russian had made on my impressionable son. Suddenly, all my past quarrels with Mark concerning our child's upbringing had become meaningless.

After dinner I told Bruno it was bedtime.

"I don't want to go to bed, I want to wait for Daddy. Blume said Daddy is coming home."

"It's late, Brunusiu. You have to go to bed anyway."

"Will you wake me up when he comes?" He looked up at me with big round, blue eyes.

"I'll wake you when Daddy gets home. I promise."

I picked him up, pressed him to my body, and carried him to his room upstairs. I undressed him and kissed the familiar mole on his left shoulder before helping him into his pajamas. We rubbed noses and I tucked him in. I could see the veins showing through the pure white skin at his temples. Gently, I pinched his small, snubbed nose and I told him a story as usual. He fell asleep.

But Mark would not be coming home, certainly not that night, and perhaps not for many more. For the sake of our son, I decided to swallow my pride and start looking for him as soon as buses started running again. Where was he? Had he reached his hometown, Zloczow, unmolested? I worried about him.

I thought about Mark. If he had been here, he would never have approved of my standing outside watching the Red Army enter Niemirov. My curiosity had always irritated him. I could almost hear him agreeing with me as if he were actually facing me. "Please, Roma," he would have said, "people will think you want those bastards here. And what happened to your hair? It looks like a wet mop!"

Now, as I stood in Bruno's room, looking at myself in the mirror, I almost saw my child's face looking back at me. The same milky skin, the same color and shape of the eyes, the same nose, the same straight light-blond hair hanging down in strands. But my face lacked that intangible "something," perhaps the fragility that made Bruno so irresistible.

Tomorrow I would go to the beauty parlor. I would have my hair done, get a manicure, and, later, alter the bottle-green velvet dress Mark liked so much. Mark was a methodical man. He had had the patience to unbutton the fifty-three tiny buttons in the front. I had not worn the dress since he had gone.

Dusk had turned to darkness. Looking out the window, I saw it was still raining. Soldiers continued to arrive on tanks and horses. I sat down, listened to the even breathing of my sleeping child and felt serene. I kissed his forehead and tiptoed out of his room.

Downstairs I found a Russian quartermaster who was requesting the use of one of our four bedrooms. Then two soldiers brought in bundles of straw, which they had spread on the floor. Soon, twenty soldiers, wrapped in their brown blankets, were asleep on the straw-covered floor.

I couldn't sleep. I lay awake worrying about the effect all this would have on Bruno, and I worried, as well, about Mark. I was kept awake by the loud snoring of the soldiers in the adjoining room and by the strong smell of Machorka, a cheap Polish tobacco.

From an angle through the window I could see other Russians sitting on the sidewalk, huddled against the brick wall, sleeping in the rain.

Early in the morning all the Russians, those who had slept inside and those who had slept outdoors, quickly washed their faces at the water pumps scattered throughout the town. They mounted tanks and horses and, singing love songs to Moscow, left for Lubaczov, which lay to the west.

Chapter 2

The bus left Niemirov at 6 o'clock in the morning. It reached Lvov at 9. From there I would get the connection to Mark's home town, my final destination. I got off at Strzelecki Square and was told that the bus running from Lvov to Zloczov was scheduled to leave at 4 in the afternoon. This suited me perfectly, for it gave me time to visit my cousin, Gina Fand, who lived in Lvov. I would find out whether the Russians had requisitioned the yard goods I had hidden in her house. I would freshen up, iron my wrinkled suit and put on a more attractive blouse before continuing my trip to Mark's hometown.

On the way to the tramway station a few blocks away, a loudspeaker blasted out an announcement, first in Russian and then in Ukrainian, as to what languages would henceforth be used in the occupied territory.

A lecture on the soundness of Communism as a system followed. To separate myself from the irritating noise, I walked more quickly, but this only brought me more rapidly to the microphone at the next street corner.

In the past, whenever Russia was mentioned, I had felt uneasy. Its geographical situation distressed me. I felt as though the sky were about to fall upon me in my small two-story home. I pictured a Russian, heavily bundled up, wading in knee-high snow, moving steadily toward my door.

The stories told to me by older people who had fled Czarist Russia were hair-raising. They had fled what they had considered to be their homeland because of the terrible pogroms that had taken place there with the encouragement of the government and the the silent consent of the authorities. Most of these refugees had thought of Poland as a place in transit while awaiting visas to America or Palestine.

They had found life in Poland much easier. Poland was far more advanced and therefore more agreeable. In Czarist Russia, their children could not easily obtain a secular education. In Poland, elementary school was compulsory for all children, but the "quota system" still managed to keep most of the Jews out of universities.

After the revolution in 1917, another wave of Jews, those who wanted to escape from Russian Communism, entered Poland. Again, horrible stories of the hunger and hatred they had encountered made the rounds. Whole communities had been displaced, families torn apart and many men shot. People were taken from their beds and shipped to labor camps in Siberia. All this was done in the name of building a social oasis in the desert of an evil, capitalistic world. It was an oasis in which goods would be equally distributed among all.

Only a few weeks had passed since September 17, 1939, when the army of the Soviet Union had entered Poland. Already, huge statues of Lenin and Stalin had been erected on both sides of Valy Hetmanskie Alley, leading to the Opera House. Slogans in praise of Communism were engraved into the stone bases.

Large pictures of Lenin, Stalin and Woroszylow hung on the walls of the buildings. Voices had to be raised to be heard above the loudspeakers. Fruit pits, trash and cigarette butts littered the pavement. It was as if an elegant woman had turned common overnight.

I passed the tramway station and looked for familiar faces on the corso—Legionov, Academicka and Place Marjacki. I checked the De La Paix, Warszawski and Roma coffeehouses. I found no one.

Gina herself opened the door.

She welcomed me as if I had returned from the dead. She led me through the foyer into the living room to join her widowed stepmother, Klara, and seated me in an upholstered armchair.

"The Germans came as far as the suburbs of Lvov," she said. The mischievous smile that made her face look impish had disappeared. "We expected them in the city at any moment but they withdrew to Przemysl, to the river San, the line of demarcation Hitler and Stalin had agreed upon. We were terribly scared because of the atrocities they'd committed on their way."

"And you're not scared of the Communists?" I asked.

"Not as much as of the Germans." She sat down on the arm of my chair and put her hand on my shoulder. "You have no idea how I feared for you when I heard that the Germans had entered Niemirov. You must have gone through hell."

"Do you still have the yard goods I left with you?" I asked.

"Of course I have them. They're worth a fortune. The Russians buy everything we want to sell."

"I'm glad this worked out."

"So why aren't you smiling?"

"I thank God that the Germans retreated from Niemirov, and I should be happy, but. . . ."

Gina had led me to her bedroom, the same one we had shared when we attended high school in Lvov.

"What's the matter, Roma? You look so sad."

". . . I don't know where Mark is."

"Have the Germans got him?"

"I hope not. It's a long story."

"Tell me. . . tell me."

We sat down on her bed. I told her that Father had asked Mark and me to move in with him.

"Why such a request?" Gina asked.

"He was convinced that my knowledge of German could be helpful to him. So we moved out of our comfortable apartment against Mark's will. You know that Mark and Father never got along."

"I know, I know."

"Then two Germans came looking for Father. But he'd been warned that he was marked for execution and had gone to Radroz, the village near Niemirov, where he had Gentile friends. Since the Germans didn't find him, they took Abner and Mark. We thought they would be killed. Luckily, they weren't, although Abner was badly beaten and Mark was forced to carry pails of water from the water pump like a common water carrier. Apparently, Mark couldn't stand the humiliation because, after that, he disappeared without saying good bye. Later I found a note from him."

"The pompous fool," Gina cried.

"You never liked him."

"No, I didn't. Where did he go?"

"In the note he said he was going to see his family in Zloczov."

"Have you heard from him?" Gina looked skeptical.

"The post office in Niemirov isn't working and the buses to and from town just started running yesterday. I'm worried, so I'm catching the 4 o'clock bus for Zloczov today. Bruno misses him."

"And of course, you too," she said sarcastically.

I turned away.

Gina slipped off the bed, crouched in front of me and put both hands on my lap. Looking up, she said, "I'm sure everything will work out. You'll find Mark and live happily ever after."

"Why are you making fun of me?"

"Can't you see what I'm driving at, Roma? He should be on his way from Niemirov to you and not the other way around."

"What's the difference who's going to whom? He's my husband and Bruno's father," I replied.

"All right, all right. You'll find him in the clutches of that darling sister of his, listening to her complaints about you." She removed her hands from my lap and pushed me gently into a lying position. She covered me with an Afghan blanket and said, "Rest a bit, you look as if you need it."

For a while I stared at the reproduction of Witold Pruszkowski's "*Rusalki.*" The spritely Naiads were reflected in the yellowed mirror hanging over the old dresser I knew so well.

When I awoke, it was dark. I jumped to my feet and rushed to the living room to ask what time it was.

"It's too late to catch the bus," Gina said, as if this were a minor oversight.

"Why didn't you wake me?"

"You were sound asleep. I didn't have the heart to wake you. You can go to Zloczov tomorrow." She started to set the table for dinner.

I thought of Bruno. He had asked me to come home with Daddy *today*, but there was no point in reproaching Gina. I knew she meant well.

Gina turned to her stepmother to continue a conversation that my appearance had apparently interrupted. "I'm not minimizing the danger, Klara," she said. "In the last five weeks, thousands of professionals have been arrested and nobody knows where they are. But the whole thing will blow over in no time."

Gina shrugged. "The English will kick them out. The only thing for us to do is to sit tight and keep our mouths shut while the Russians are here." Her green eyes had changed color with the color of her dress; they were brownish as she turned to me.

"You should settle in Lvov, Roma."

"Why?"

"Because every one of the 5,000 inhabitants of Niemirov knows about your father's mills and quarries."

"The Russians nationalized them."

"And they know your husband is a lawyer and they don't like professionals. You'd better come here, where your family is unknown. You should look for a job."

"A job?"

"When they stop you on the street to show your papers, if you show them a working card, they let you go."

"Have you got a job?"

"Yes, I have. Don't you know the motto of the New System? '*Who doesn't work, shall not eat.*' I'm a receptionist in the Europa Hotel."

"A receptionist? You never worked before."

"When I applied for the job I told the Russian director I'd never handled a switchboard. He said, 'What you don't know, you will learn.' This is another motto you'll hear often. Russian civilians managing key positions need native people to run the city properly again. Klara is working too. You found us home because today is our day off."

"Tuesday?"

"You have to pull strings to get Sundays off. Well, Roma, what do you say?"

"Even if I wanted to, how could I find a job without training and experience?"

"First things first. Just make up your mind to move to Lvov and the rest will follow. Now, let's have dinner and get ready for the concert."

"What concert?"

"Klara and I had planned to go to a Chopin concert. Klara has given up her ticket so that you and I can have a nice evening."

An overcrowded tramway took us to the theater. During the concert, thoughts raced through my mind. Perhaps Gina was right? Suppose the Russian occupation lasted longer than a few weeks? True, I had the fabrics at Gina's, bought the day the war started, and Gina had said that they were now worth a fortune, but Mark's office had been closed.

At the concert, a middle-aged man sitting next to me interrupted my thoughts. He asked in Russian, "Can you tell me the name of the pianist?"

"Jan Gorbaty."

"Who is Jan Gorbaty? I find his interpretation of Chopin's ballads extremely interesting."

"He's a very famous pianist, born in Russia, but now residing in Poland; he's well known throughout Europe." I turned my back on him.

During intermission, Gina whispered, "This is your chance, Roma. The Russian you were speaking to probably holds a high position. He could do something for you. Ask him if he can help you get a job."

"Are you crazy? A total stranger?"

She smiled mischievously. Then she leaned toward the stranger and said, "*Grazdanin*, my friend needs a job."

The Russian turned to me. "What can you do?"

"Nothing!" I said, embarrassed by Gina's boldness.

"Oh," Gina exclaimed, "she's being modest. She can do anything in an office. She worked in a law office."

The Russian extracted a card from his pocket and handed it to me. "Come to my office first thing in the morning." He paused. "Do you think you could be a saleslady?"

I nodded.

After the concert, on the way to the tram station, we stopped under a street light. I took the stranger's card from my pocketbook and read:

UKRKULTORG
Department Chain Stores
Kopernica Street
Piotr Serge, Director

The following morning, coaxed by Gina, I went to Piotr Serge's office.

A Polish secretary told me to wait. I sat down near the door, tying knots in my handkerchief. Twice I stood up to leave, but I changed my mind and remained where I was.

At 9:30 Serge entered, dressed in a black leather coat and boots. He acknowledged my presence by nodding his head slightly. Today he was a different man: very formal, and very severe. He said to his secretary, "Hire her as a salesgirl."

"All salesgirls' jobs are filled, Director Serge," she replied.

"Find her a job with us. Anybody who wants to work must have a chance," and he walked into his office.

The secretary asked me to sit down next to her desk and told me there was an opening for an apprentice. I had no idea what the job entailed, but agreed to take it. She handed me an application form. Since I didn't know how to fill it out, she went over the questions with me and suggested the "appropriate" answers.

My father's occupation, as well as that of my brother, changed from businessman to coachman. I was registered under my maiden name. By way of explanation, she said, "Don't worry, it's all right. If you want the job, that's how it has to be handled."

Only one question on the application form had been answered truthfully. To the question, "Have you any relatives in foreign countries," I had answered, "No."

At lunchtime I picked Gina up at the Europa Hotel.

"Did you get the job?" she asked.

"I don't know. I have to go back in three days with some proof that I was a registered resident of Lvov before the war started. What does that mean?"

"No newcomers are allowed to settle in Lvov. That's the rule of the New System. Big cities are reserved for privileged citizens."

"So I won't get the job." I felt relieved.

Gina was silent for a few seconds. Suddenly, she hit her palm against her forehead. "Wait a minute," she said. "You registered with the Lvov Police when you went to high school with me. Did you ever give notice before you returned to Niemirov?"

"I don't remember."

"I don't think you did. But if you did, it'll be easy to fix it with the superintendent. I know him well."

"Is this 'fixing' absolutely necessary?"

She nodded vehemently. Her curly chestnut hair lifted as if it were blown by the wind. "If you did check out it will will certainly be necessary!"

"Gina, the whole thing smells bad. The secretary registered me under my maiden name and pretended not to hear me when I told her my husband was a lawyer. In one stroke my child became illegitimate. I'd be better off forgeting the whole thing."

"Oh no! It's for your own good," Gina exclaimed. "The Russians are hostile to our intelligentsia, so she cleared the way for you. Some day you may thank her for it.

Chapter 3

I arrived in Zloczov, a larger town than Niemirov boasting 13,000 inhabitants, at 8 o'clock in the evening. Few people were on Mickiewicza Street, where my in-laws lived.

Mark's only sister, Suzan, twenty-three years older than I, opened the door, her blond hair in curlers. She showed no surprise at seeing me.

"Where's Mark?" I asked, and held my breath.

"He's out."

"Thank God! How is he?"

"He's all right. But isn't your concern a little late?"

"I had to wait until the buses were running again."

"How is Bruno?" she asked in a softer voice.

"He's fine. He's growing up beneath my eyes."

Suzan's voice again became formal, almost forbidding, so I felt constrained about asking more questions. She took me to the living room and gestured to a brocade-covered easy chair. Instead of sitting down, I walked through the room to my mother-in-law's bedroom. She had been an invalid for a long time.

My mother-in-law embraced me warmly. I noticed she looked thinner than when I had seen her last. She told me that Mark was teaching Polish literature privately to a few high school girls and would be back at 9 o'clock. "He'll be so happy to see you," she said. "He was worrying all the time."

Later, her hair neatly combed, Suzan entered, and my mother-in-law seemed to draw into herself. We continued our conversation but I was aware that she was on guard. Back in the living room, sitting in the brocade covered easy chair, I felt as uncomfortable as I had in Serge's office earlier in the day.

Ever since our marriage in 1936, Suzan had reproached Mark for marrying *me*. She had worked hard to help him pay for the three degrees he had earned in various schools, and expected some kind of repayment. Her hope that her younger brother would get an 8000 dollar dowry were dashed when Mark eloped with me. Later, my parents gave us 3000 dollars. Suzan felt, as well, that Mark had degraded himself by marrying a girl with a Hasidic background. In Galicia the assimilated Jews looked down on the Hasidim. They considered that the Hasid was a fanatic, as well as being of a lower class. Most of the assimilated Jews referred to a man of the sect by the nickname *chniok*. They wanted to integrate, to become "true Poles," and thus they made a point of not speaking Yiddish like the Hasidim.

After Bruno was born in 1937, Suzan suggested that Mark take the baby and leave me. I had found her letter to Mark only a year ago. She had advised him—likely for the hundredth time—to divorce me, assuring him that although the stigma of a divorce would be attached to his name, he could still find a rich girl. According to her letter, she, Suzan, would keep our son and bring him up in a "civilized atmosphere."

Mark seemed to pay no attention to her advice, but he did not allow our child to visit my parents and, like Suzan, claimed that the orthodox influence would be bad for the child.

For my part I fervently hoped to find in Bruno some signs of my parents' integrity, dignity and honesty, characteristics that I respected more than any other.

Finally I heard the key turn in the door, and Mark came in.

"You, Roma?" he cried out joyously and took me in his arms.

He held me for a while, then leaned back to look at me.

Suzan came in and cleared her throat. "Mother wants to see you, and dinner is ready," she said.

At the dinner table, the whole conversation concerned Bruno, and I could see that Suzan loved our child.

As soon as Mark and I were alone, I said, "If you could only see Bruno. Don't you miss him?"

"I miss him very much. But you can see for yourself how sick my mother is," he replied.

"Mark, do you still love me?"

There was a second of hesitation before he answered, "I couldn't love you more than I do."

"Then pack your things and come with me."

"Never!" It was the old Mark again.

"I got a job in Lvov. Away from my family and yours, we'll have a better chance to be happy again."

He put his gold-rimmed glasses back on his face. Looking down at the Bokara rug, he said, "I'd like nothing better,but I can't leave Mother just now."

"Now, Mark, now!"

"I don't know how long Mother will last. The doctor said it's a matter of months. I have to stay on."

"What about me, what about Bruno?"

"You are strong. Stronger than I ever thought you could be. And you of all people should understand my obligation to my mother, since you are so good to your father."

"All right," I said. "So, I guess we have to be separated for a while."

"Don't be so sad, Roma. I love you and I am unhappy away from you."

I had noticed the glances he darted in the direction of the door, as if he were afraid that Suzan was watching us from behind it. Nevertheless, I melted in his arms. His assertive love-making had always made me forget his weakness in other matters.

When I awoke, Mark was already out. I closed my eyes to relive the night until I remembered that the house rule was "breakfast at eight."

I was last at the dining room table.

"Coffee or milk?" asked Suzan.

"Milk, please." I stopped short, recalling her frequent comments about my behavior, which she usually considered childish. Reconsidering, I answered, "No, I'd rather have coffee, please."

Suzan left for the kitchen. Mark reached out for my hand and kissed it. "It was beautiful; it was beautiful," he said.

Then Suzan came back with the coffeepot.

I had dropped three cubes of sugar into my cup when Suzan said sharply, "You still like sweets more than anything else."

I pretended not to have heard.

When a piece of bread caught in my throat and I started to cough, she turned to Mark, saying, "Her table manners never change."

I covered my mouth with the white damask napkin and looked imploringly at Mark. He puffed on his pipe and stared down at the table. To avoid more of Suzan's contemptuous remarks, I did not stay another day, as I had intended to.

Chapter 4

My return to Lvov a one day sooner than planned surprised Gina, but she did'nt press me for an explanation.

During the twenty-four hours before I found out whether I had the job, it was as if I had a fever. One moment I thought it was a heaven-sent opportunity, and the next moment I doubted my ability to adjust to the sudden change in my life. It would mean being alone for the first time.

I got the job and rushed to Niemirov to fetch Bruno and pack my things.

In the master bedroom, my father was sitting at a night table near a window, studying the Talmud. Our fat cat Tin-Tin was dozing on the floor.

Since the first of September, when Germany had attacked Poland and my father had lost his usefulness as a Polish government contractor for road construction, he had devoted most of his time to his great love, the Talmud. Now his eyes were twinkling; they were the identical shape and color as mine and Bruno's. He said, "Good to see you back."

However, when I told him that I had come to fetch Bruno and intended living in Lvov, his face fell again. He reached for his snuffbox, took a pinch, inhaled, and, seconds later, sneezed. I knew immediately that he was upset. Usually he sneezed louder, knowing I enjoyed it.

A man of few words, he said nothing. His deep-blue eyes expressed sadness. He held the plaid handkerchief before his nose as he sneezed again. Once the handkerchief was back in the pocket of his long black caftan, he started to run his fingers through his red beard and finally said, "And I hoped so much that I'd have an opportunity to teach my grandson a Yiddish word." By this he meant that he had hoped his grandson would also have learned to love the study of the Torah and all the Jewish traditions, as he did.

My stepmother came in. Ten years younger than my father, she was only forty. She had been like a real mother to us. Her straight black hair always seemed freshly shampooed, soft and shiny. It was parted in the center and pulled back in a knot. Adhering to the orthodox practice, her head was covered most of the time; now it was covered by a white and black polka dot kerchief. Her black, almond-shaped eyes looked sadly at me. "Who will take care of the child while you're at work?"

"Gina's step-grandmother agreed to do it. We are going to share Gina's room with her."

"One room for the three of you?" Those few words were all she said in her soft voice, but it sounded like a reprimand. I knew that childless Perele loved Bruno and would miss him. I hated to disappoint her, but, so as not to waver in my decision, I replied firmly, "My mind is made up. I told you, I already have a job. And it's very important to work if one wants to survive in the New System. You know very well that in Niemirov I would never get a job."

Perele's eyes filled with tears.

Father went to fetch my brother to say good-bye to me. Soon Abner was home. More worldly than my father, Abner spoke about the pitfalls of a big city for a lone woman. He tried to convince me to remain home in the security of a well-to-do and loving family. He, the only son, was close to our father because he adhered to Father's religious rules. But he also subscribed to a few newspapers that came to Niemirov by mail. Many Niemirover couldn't afford them came every day to our house to read a newspaper.

My respect for Abner had increased considerably when he fought for my parent's blessing to marry. Of his own choice, he had picked one of the poorest girls in the village. It took him two years to convince my parents that either they accept Sara or he would never get married. Finally, he succeeded in convincing them. Without the benefit of a dowry, my parents had given the newlyweds a room upstairs, and Abner became a partner in Father's enterprises.

Father now nervously curled one of his long side locks. Perele looked on and repeatedly made gestures as if she had to adjust a loose strand of her glossy hair.

I closed my eyes and ears to her, to Father, and to Abner's arguments. I packed some of my belongings and told my younger sister Blume to join me in Lvov. Then I kissed all of them and left with Bruno.

Chapter 5

Director Serge inspected the five stores in Lvov once a week. When he came to Store Number One, where I worked, he talked first to Frederick Tur, a Polish Jew who was a journalist by profession, but now managed the prestigious store. Then Serge came to the stockroom, my domain, and talked to me. Up to that time we had only exchanged greetings. Now he asked, "How do you like your job?"

"Packing and unpacking musical instruments certainly doesn't require any training," I said. "Neither does sweeping the floors, dusting and running errands. I had expected something more challenging." I thought he would tell me that I could quit if I didn't like the job.

Instead he said, "If you are as good as you imply you are, you will get your chance. After all, we came here to help you people, especially those who are eager to work."

"Is that the only reason you came to Poland?" The words burst from me.

"What other reason could there be? Our brothers, the Ukrainians who live in this area, were persecuted as a minority by the Poles. When the war between Germany and Poland began, the Ukrainians called for our help. If we hadn't been called we wouldn't be here today."

I looked at his stern face and into his brown eyes and wondered whether he was naive or truly ignorant. Silently I continued to pack the clarinet I had started to wrap for a customer. The truth was that the Ukrainians had not appealed to the Soviets for help, preferring a pact with Germany. Stalin, in agreement with Hitler, had simply split Poland between them and so it was an outright invasion. However, if I had spoken those thoughts aloud, I would surely have been arrested, just as many already had been, for committing a similiar crime.

According to the People's Census—the last one had been taken in 1931—Lvov had a total of 317,000 residents, of which one third were Jews. It was assumed that the first Jews had come to Lvov from Byzantium and the southeast. After the conquest of the city by Kazimir the Third, king of Poland in 1340, more Jews started to arrive from Germany and Bohemia, and they kept on coming. They gave the Jewish settlement an Ashkenazi character. In time, they developed trade between the Orient and the West and were therefore appreciated by the government, which permitted them to live inside, as well as outside, the city walls.

During the two years from 1939 to 1941, the general population of Lvov increased to about 500,000, and the Jewish population to about 150,000. Because most of the Ukrainians derived their livelihood from agriculture, they had settled in rural communities. Not many lived in Lvov proper. Having claimed their autonomy in 1918, Lvov had then become the arena of a civil war between the Ukrainians and the Poles known as *Obrona Lvova*, the Defense of Lvov. The Ukrainians were defeated; however, they never relinquished their claim. Now they calculated that, by collaborating with Nazi Germany, they would be able to populate Lvov with their compatriots and make it their capital city.

The Ukrkultorg, where I worked, was one of a chain of department stores established throughout the Russian Ukraine. It supplied the population with stationery, musical instruments, records and sporting equipment. In addition to Serge, I had met two other Russians who worked in the Ukrkultorg. They came to Poland, along with thousands of other Russian civilians, soon after the entry of the Red Army. Most of those civilians had been placed in key positions, and were to manage all the nationalized companies. The rest of the Russians had no difficulty getting jobs of their own choice.

One of the two Russians held the position of comptroller, while the other was the *miscom*. The *miscom's* job consisted of checking all traces of political backsliding. The *miscom* was responsible for raising the productivity of every single employee to the maximum. He was given responsibility for settling disputes between management and employees, and between the employees themselves. The *miscom* made decisions regarding disciplinary action to be taken against employees who failed to carry out their jobs. Had the *miscom* been in Lvov when I applied for the job, he would have scrutinized my background carefully, and I, the wife of an attorney, the daughter of "rich" parents, would never have been hired.

At first we employees thought that Serge's age—he was forty—and his long experience as director of the company would place him far ahead of the twenty-eight-year-old *miscom*. We later found out that both Serge and the comptroller feared the *miscom*, who was not only a party member, but was placed by the party in a position to oversee management as well as the lesser employees, and to be sure that neither got out of line.

Chapter 6

Bruno was happy in Klara's house. He enjoyed playing with her three children. Perhaps these children, who had no father, made him appreciate his own father's occasional visits on weekends.

We had breakfast together every morning and invariably had the same small argument. I would urge, "Bruno, darling, drink your milk."

"I hate milk."

I would gently stroke his pale cheeks and say, "I want you to grow up to be very strong." At this, Bruno would always capitulate.

"All right, Mummy."

He would take the cup in his little hands and force the milk down as if it were bitter medicine. And every day after work he would welcome me with warm hugs and excited stories about his experiences.

Now that I was working, I was in a perpetual state of hurry from the moment I got up. The fear of being late for work often made me awakeen in a cold sweat. If I were late three times, I would probably be considered a saboteur, and the verdict could well mean exile to a labor camp for five years. Thus my anxiety was well founded.

However, as the weeks went by, I was promoted, first to an assistant and later to a full-fledged salesgirl. Though I no longer swept floors or went on errands, and I received a raise in salary, the additional responsibilities increased my anxiety even more.

Our company now held many staff meetings to elect representatives and check the backgrounds of aspirants to the Trade Union. The meetings were also social gatherings. Entertainment for the "pleasure part" of the meetings was provided by the Russian management, and sometimes the more talented employees performed for their colleagues. Mira Hendler, our cashier, often played the piano.

I had never attended those meetings until Mira told me that the *miscom* had asked about me. She advised me to attend. For the next meeting I arrived in the main office building on Kopernica Street half an hour early. About sixty people, fifty percent of the company staff in Lvov, were already there and more were coming. At exactly 8:30, Director Serge called upon the comptroller to take the floor. The comptroller walked up to the rostrum, looked the crowd over and began to give an account of the company's progress during the three months of its existence in Lvov. "We started with nothing more than goodwill and 50,000 rubles worth of merchandise." He carefully avoided mentioning that the store had been taken over and that the 50,000 rubles, by right, belonged to the former native owner. "Then we imported from Russia another 50,000 rubles worth of merchandise, and today, I am proud to inform you, our assets are worth 200,000 rubles. This progress could not have been achieved without your help!"

He went on for about fifteen minutes and left the rostrum perspiring all over his pitted face.

Then it was the *miscom's* turn. He crossed his hands over his stomach, moved his protruding lower jaw to the left, then to the right, and started. "I agree with the comptroller that you have done well until now. But was it good enough? I want you to set yourself a goal. How about trying for a turnover of a million rubles to celebrate our company's first anniversary in Lvov?"

He extended his arms and, for some reason, I got the impression that he was looking in my direction; I was scared.

A red-haired, full-breasted girl sitting next to me shouted, "We can make it! We can make it!"

A few voices joined in.

"I am glad you want to try." The *miscom* moved his jaw from side to side. "Every effort you make will bring a reward. Under capitalism your efforts filled the gluttons' pockets. Now, *you* will sow the seeds and *you* will reap the harvest. Remember, we're all working for *ourselves* and we are the State. I want you to know that *each* of you is important, just as important as a scientist, a diplomat or a doctor. Once I saw a huge machine break down because a tiny screw was missing. So you can see that *everybody*"—he again extended both arms, "and I mean the porter, the cleaning woman, and the manager, is an equally important part of the State." He paused for a moment, studying the crowd, then raised his voice: "Long live the Soviet Union!"

The crowd picked up the cry. The hall resounded with his words.

The *miscom's* voice rose higher: "Long live our *Batko* Stalin!" The audience screamed, "Long live our *Batko* Stalin."

After announcing that the business part of the meeting was over, the *miscom* left the rostrum. Now the girl sitting next to me, her red hair twisted in a braid wound around her head, got up. She towered over me as she introduced herself.

"I am Xenia Lukov and I work in Store Number Four, on Boimov Street. In what store are you working?"

"In Store Number One."

"Oh. In the prestige store on Place Marjacki. I haven't seen you here before."

"I have to take care of my nephew," I said, and felt myself blushing while lying about my own child. "But from now on I may come more often. It was an interesting evening."

"I should say so." She put her callused hand on my wrist. "You know something? I like you. You're nice. Not like the cashier in your store. She's stuck-up and won't let anyone get near her."

"You mean Mira? She's just shy."

"Nonsense! She has to learn she's not the fancy lady she was in the past. Times have changed. It's *our* world now!"

Xenia's freckled face relaxed and she began to smile when she saw the *miscom* approaching.

"Are you girls enjoying yourselves?" he asked.

"I always have a wonderful time here." Xenia flashed a flirtatious smile at him.

"Xenia, if you don't mind, I would like to talk to *Tovarisz* Brand."

The *miscom* asked whether I had found the evening interesting, and said he would like to talk to me alone. Xenia darted a sharp look at me and walked away. Was she jealous?

"I haven't seen you at our meetings," the *miscom* said.

"I come as often as I can."

"You don't work evenings, do you?" He looked into my eyes.

"I don't."

"Then what keeps you from our gatherings?"

I was searching for an excuse that would not involve my child. I finally said, "Evenings, I study the Russian language."

"Well, I think you speak pretty well. Still, it never hurts to learn more. But the quickest way to learn a language is practice. Who can help you more than we, here?"

"I also go to the theater."

"You do? Excellent! Every *kulturna* person should go to the theater. Did you know that our employees can get tickets at reduced prices?"

"No," I lied.

"Come to the main office tomorrow." He smiled down at me benevolently, as his jaw moved from right to left, from left to right.

"Tomorrow? I am working tomorrow."

"Come here right after work. I'll wait for you."

"Tomorrow it is," I said, feeling like an obedient child.

From that day on, I scarcely missed a meeting. The gatherings took up so much time that I had little left for looking after Bruno and none to spend with old friends. However, my participation in company activities brought me some new friends. Grateful to Mira for having told to attend, I gave her some friendly advice.

"If I were you, I'd be a bit more sociable with other employees. Xenia in particular."

Mira wrinkled her nose. "The girl who smells of the stables?"

"What's wrong with the smell of stables?"

"I tried to be friendly once, believe me, but when she started to pick her nose, that was too much for me." Mira smiled. She seldom smiled. Could it be because her double chin trembled when she did?

Small and roundish, with a twinkle in her hazel eyes, Mira was attractive to men. The daughter of a poor piano teacher, she had taken up the same profession herself; in the course of her work she had met and married a wealthy man. They had a child. Mira enjoyed her wealth for only three years before the Soviets came. Under the Soviet occupation, she, among others, found that her wealth was now a stigma. After the Russians nationalized the family business, she still had enough cash and valuables hidden away to keep her family going for a long time. Yet she protested to anyone who would listen, "The war has bled us of all we owned."

To make her pretense of poverty more convincing, Mira had gotten the cashier's job through an old friend, the manager Tur. Now she was trying to join the Trade Union to better conceal her background. Both she and I were going to be considered for membership by our Russian bosses and local co-workers.

While most Ukrkultorg employees came from middle class families and would likely support our applications in order to win our support in return, there were several devout Communists among them from whom we expected difficulties. Mira and I were extremely nervous.

Chapter 7

On Monday, two hours before the meeting, Tur invited Mira and me to one of the most elegant restaurants in the city, in the Hotel Bristol. Mira raised a glass of sherry to her lips but had trouble swallowing. So much depended upon membership in the Trade Union. During security checks, anyone who could show a Trade Union membership card was automatically excluded from suspicion of being rich, a parasite, or a black marketeer. The owner of such a document would get coal in the winter and other necessities for low fixed prices.

Though nervous, I was in an exceptionally good mood. A letter from Mark was in my pocketbook. It had raised my hopes that he would join me in Lvov very soon. I even knew some of it by heart:

> Our separation has lasted too long. I am thinking of you and wondering what you are doing at this moment. I am desperate simply to be near you and our son.

"Please trust me."

Tur's words interrupted my pleasant thoughts. He was facing Mira.

Tur was thirty-six years old and looked like a movie star.

"I planned the meeting for this evening because I knew Serge would be out of town and I could preside. And I've arranged to present both your cases at the some meeting because Roma has a lot of friends among the staff."

"What makes you think Roma's friends will cast positive votes for me?" asked Mira.

"Please don't worry," Tur implored, as he kissed Mira's hand, nodded absent-mindedly in my direction, and left.

Tur was already at the rostrum when Mira and I entered the hall. It was not unusual for Tur to preside in Serge's absence, but it happened only when the two other Russians, the comptroller and the *miscom*, attended.

A smooth orator, Tur opened the meeting with a few words of explanation as to why it had been called. Mira squeezed my arm until it hurt.

In a basso voice, Tur spoke.

"Comrade Brand, please tell us your name, date of birth, your father's occupation, whether you have any relatives in foreign countries and your work history."

I gave my name, date of birth, said that I had no relatives in foreign countries, that my father was a coachman, and that I had held several jobs. With much stuttering and swallowing, and in a barely audible voice, I gave names and addresses for each of the three fictitious employers.

Tur's resonant bass dominated the hall.

"You have heard Comrade Brand. If anybody present thinks her qualified to enter this great Trade Union organization, *Profspilka*, let him raise his hand."

Many hands shot up.

Tur: "If anyone present believes she is not qualified, raise his hand."

One hand shot up. It was the *miscom's*.

My heart missed a beat.

"I am not disqualifying *Tovarisz* Brand but, as usual, I would like to suggest a more thorough examination of her background before we make a decision."

His square back was before me; I imagined his shifting jaw.

Now the comptroller took the floor.

"With all due respect to our *miscom*, I am opposed to any postponement. *Tovarisz* Brand began as an apprentice and has already received two promotions in a very short time. Her sales in the musical department are excellent, and since she began working in the sporting goods department, sales have increased there too. I suggest that we vote on the *miscom's* proposal and let the majority rule."

"Who's for postponement?" Tur asked.

One arm rose.

Tur quickly said, “Comrade Brand is unanimously recommended for membership in the *Profspilka*.”

And so I passed a difficult test with—to my surprise—with the help of a Russian.

The company would have to send its recommendation to the Trade Union. Another hearing would be arranged and my acceptance would then be confirmed unless the *miscom* filed an objection.

Tur then asked Mira the same questions. In a very low voice, she began to speak. No sooner had she given her full name, address and date of birth when a familiar-sounding female voice asked, “What’s your relationship to Hendler, the steel magnate?”

“There is none,“ Mira said.

I recalled her telling me that her rich uncle had cut himself off from her family years ago.

Mira’s double chin trembled. “I have always worked for a living. . . so did my mother. I worked as a cashier in many places.”

“Where did you work as a cashier? Tell us the names and addresses of your employers,” Xenia shouted.

Mira’s fingernails dug into my arm.

“Why did she stop?” a voice called out.

“What’s the matter with her!”

Remarks sprang from all sides. Tur’s handsome face was ashen. Mira was close to tears. She reached from behind for my hand and I pressed hers reassuringly. For several seconds she remained silent and I thought her case was lost.

Then, with a quick shake of her head, she began in a louder voice.

“My real profession is teaching music. Even at the conservatory I had to give lessons to pay for my tuition. The cashier’s job came much later and was not a permanent one.”

“Where did you work as a cashier?” Now Tur was asking questions. He had seemed to have lost control over the meeting.

“At my cousin’s business.”

“At your cousin’s business? Anybody can make up a story like that and his relative will back him up,” Xenia said.

“Are you implying that I am a liar?” Mira seemed to have regained her composure, and this changed the mood of the crowd.

Tur seized the opportunity and asked, "Who is in favor of recommending that Mira Hendler become a member of the *Profspilka*?"

Several hands were raised and Tur shouted, "Comrade Hendler is, by a majority of votes, recommended for a membership in the *Profspilka*." He quickly added, "The meeting is adjourned."

He had omitted the second question, "Who is opposed?" No one had the chance to ask for the floor because he had left the rostrum immediately.

The people remained seated. Could it be over? Some were expecting more heckling.

One of my co-workers asked if I knew why the *miscom* had chosen to be passive in Mira's case but had been aggressive in mine, implying that he was having an affair with Mira.

Mira, Tur and I went to Mira's apartment to celebrate.

Her husband welcomed us formally, but he soon relaxed when Mira told him the good news and how much Tur had helped in getting her admitted to the Trade Union.

"I'll be formally and legally proletarized." She laughed a real laugh and sipped some brandy. Then she took us to the music room, raised the lid of the grand piano and began to play Tchaikowski's "Sleeping Beauty Waltz." I noticed that both men watched her admiringly. Then she rose and said, "Be a darling and play a tango for us."

Her husband sat down and began, and she reached up for Tur's arm. "Movie Star" Tur had to bend down to dance cheek to cheek with roundish Mira. From time to time, she glanced in the direction of the piano, but her husband did not look up. She leaned closer to Tur and closed her eyes.

My sympathy went out to the man at the piano. By then, I was ready to overlook her affair with Tur because I thought it would keep the jaw-twisting Russian away.

Chapter 8

A quarrel broke out at my company's staff meeting after Tur had accused the buyer, Julius Fischer, of faulty purchasing and of being slow in the delivery of orders to the five stores in Lvov.

"I ordered a hundred records four days ago. If Comrade Fischer had done his job properly and delivered them in time, they would have been sold by now." Tur was making his accusations from the rostrum.

"I know nothing about this order. With whom did you place it?" came the response.

Fischer was about forty, almost bald, had a flat broken nose and two front teeth missing, but goodness emanated from his face. He was sitting at the table facing the gathered employees.

Tur looked around the hall and said, "With your secretary, by phone."

Intending to confront his secretary, Fischer looked around the hall through his thick spectacles. Not finding her, he mumbled something beneath his breath.

"And another thing," Tur continued in his low voice. "If Comrade Fischer made proper use of his staff, damaged merchandise would be eliminated in the warehouse before delivery to the stores."

Fischer began to say something. His voice was soft, his diction indistinct. Only those sitting in the first two rows could understand him. The people sitting below grew restless. Then Fischer got up and left the hall.

Something in his manner, perhaps his lack of assertiveness, aroused my sympathy. I asked my co-workers about him and learned that he was probably Jewish, had been educated in Germany, held a degree in chemical engineering, and had lost his job when war broke out. To make a living he had taken this one. He had been married to a German

Protestant and was the father of two teenagers who were raised in their mother's faith. For the last two years they had been separated. Rather withdrawn, he had few friends among the company staff, but was highly respected for being a hard worker. I also found out that, although Tur's complaints were justified, it had not been Fischer's fault. He was covering up for his shipping clerk, the father of three children.

A week later, Tur was reading aloud from a report in the crowded meeting hall. His handsome face glowed with indignation as he again lashed out at Fischer. Half his accusations could have supplied the *miscom* with sufficient pretexts to get Fischer a ten-year prison sentence for sabotage.

Serge looked on with lips clamped tight, eyelids half closed. The *miscom* looked like an animal waiting to pounce. His jaw moved from side to side. Fischer, facing his audience, swung a crossed leg back and forth; he didn't interrupt the man who was trying to destroy him.

Tur ended his tirade with a final suggestion: "It's high time that *miscom* took over and referred this matter to the labor court."

I tensely waited for Fischer to react, but all he did was swing his leg.

Suddenly, I heard my own voice. "Comrade Tur, you are on the wrong track. Most of the errors you attribute to Comrade Fischer are not his at all."

All heads turned. Serge opened his eyes wide and stared at me.

"Comrade Brand, do you know the guilty party?" Tur asked.

"No. . . I don't."

"You have made a statement. If you don't have the facts to support it, we will have to ignore what you've said." Tur's bass voice sounded polite.

"Have you supported your statement with facts?" I asked.

Serge's face was animated. He was enjoying our squabble. I could almost hear his chuckle.

"I have," Tur said. "My entire argument is based on facts."

For the moment I couldn't think of what to say. Then I said, "I don't believe in pressing charges against any co-worker without thoroughly investigating the matter first. I don't believe in transferring a case to the *miscom* before we know for sure that it *is* a case."

Tur's reply was drowned out by a hum of voices, among them a few sneers. Were the sneers aimed at me, at Tur, or at Fischer?

"Silence!" cut sharply through the muted noise. It was Serge. His brown eyes fixed on me and he said, "*Tovarisz* Brand, someone is evading his duties. Indeed, evasion is putting it mildly. It's right out sabotage, that's what it is. Director Tur is convinced that Fischer is the saboteur. But you don't believe it. Speak up, who is it?"

After hesitating for a split second, I said, "I say that Fischer is innocent, but I can say nothing more."

I expected Serge to attack me but, to my surprise, he said calmly, "We will shelve this case until we find out more about the discrepancies in the allegations of Tur and Brand. All in favor?"

Many arms were raised and the meeting adjourned.

I saw Mira and Tur walking to the exit; neither of them glanced in my direction.

Fischer approached me mumbling, "I'm afraid we haven't met. May I introduce myself?" His hand was very warm. "Thank you for defending me. No one has ever been able to overcome Tur's eloquence. It's a shame that a man with so many fine qualities is not immune to petty rivalries."

"Why does Tur hate you so?"

"It dates back to our university days in Berlin. He always had so much more than I, but still he tried to compete. . . ," and he mumbled the rest of the sentence, mentioning that now both were poor. Then he smiled and continued, "May I see you home?"

I was very close to fainting. "No," I said, and when I saw disappointment written on his unattractive face, I added, "Perhaps some other time."

A few days later I received a note from Fischer:

> You have taken on substance for me in my imagination from the first moment I unexpectedly heard your voice defending me, a total stranger, against the charges being hurled at me by a friend of yours. Among the many faces turned toward me, I looked for yours. How disappointed I was when I introduced myself and you refused to let me take you home. I hope that you will expand your generosity by accepting an invitation for a Sunday lunch with me. I will always remember your strict sense of justice.

I never answered the letter.

Chapter 9

From the day of that last meeting on, Tur took revenge by blaming me for most of the mishaps in the music and sporting departments. He manipulated my co-workers to discredit every move of mine. Furthermore, he spread gossip that a love affair with Fischer was my only reason for defending him. This slur, discrediting my motives, hurt me deeply.

Mira only addressed me about business matters during our eight hours in close proximity. It became sheer torture to be rejected each time I approached her.

Most of the time, I would come home exhausted and irritable. Only Bruno's arms, winding around my neck, rescued me from my thoughts of drudgery and loneliness, drawing me into his childish world, as yet unspoiled by competition and jealousy.

The boy rapidly outgrew his clothes, but I had no time to shop for him.

Mark, who had visited us once before, came again. Whenever I asked him when he would come to stay, his answer was, "Soon, very soon."

Factories, banks, and offices were closed on Sundays. The stores were open seven days a week, with the exception of national holidays. My request to have Sunday off was refused. Tuesday remained my holiday. I soon discovered that the weekends, without Tur's supervision and Mira's silences, were the only days free of anxiety and tension. Friends whom I had not seen for a long time could come in and chat on Sundays. In my isolation, it gave me something to look forward to.

Most of us in the stores bought as many shirts, sweaters and socks from the sporting goods department as we possibly could without calling attention to ourselves. Fischer was an exception. He never placed an order, although his sweater was moth-eaten and the collar and cuffs of his shirt were badly frayed.

From a shipment that had arrived a few days before, I hid a sweater for him. Thius I was glad to see him in the store one Sunday. When I thought nobody was watching, I took the sweater out of hiding and showed it to him.

He liked it but refused to buy it. Pressed, he admitted that he couldn't afford it; his salary barely covered his expenses for food and lodging.

It was an established fact that, in the New System, wages alone did not even cover the bare necessities. I didn't know what other people did to supplement their wages. For myself, I had come into a small fortune by following my brother Abner's advice. He had told me to sell my yard goods—the ones stored at Gina's—and to convert the money into thirty twenty dollar gold coins. Whenever I felt the sting of privation, I exchanged one gold coin on the black market for the currency of the time. To make ends meet, people would sell a piece of jewelry, a fur coat or a painting. There was no doubt in our minds that the Russian occupation would come to an end any day and that the English would liberate Poland. Therefore, people didn't mind parting with personal belongings because we were convinced that soon, once the Russians had retreated, we would be able to replace everything we had lost. But there were some who didn't have anything to spare to sell. Fischer was one of them.

I leaned over the counter and offered to lend him some money on the understanding that he'd pay me back after the war.

He refused to take it.

I looked at the frayed shirt sleeves and remembered the torn sweater he had worn to the Opera House. I said, "Why not? *I* know you'll be able to pay me back after the war; *you* know you'll be able to pay me back. What's the problem?"

Fischer was soon seen in new shirts, a new gray sweater and decently repaired shoes. With a tender smile, he asked me whether his appearance met with my approval. I nodded.

And then he told me how proud he was about the rumors linking us romantically. He blushed and his words ended in a mumble. I felt embarrassed, but an old friend of mine, a lawyer by the name of Brustinger, came into the store and saved me from further conversation with Fischer.

Brustinger gave me a warm smile, which made his pencil-thin mustache seem even narrower. His well-fitting gray pinstriped suit, the white shirt and the polka dot silk tie, all imports, gave him the impeccable appearance because of which he had earned the nickname *Arbiter Elegautiarum.* His mustache and gold-rimmed eyeglasses distracted attention from his full lips and short forehead. He wore a panama hat in the summer and a derby in the winter, always carrying a walking stick with a silver handle.

From time to time Brustinger came to the store to search for gramophone records. Now, finding one of Caruso's, he paid and came to talk to me. He was worried.

The new law allowed limited living space per person. His apartment consisted of five rooms. "I'm afraid the Renting Office will either evict me or send a family to share the apartment. I'd like to sublet four rooms—one I'd like to keep for myself—to a friend who is protected by having a job. I would like to rent to a man with a family whom I can trust to return the apartment to me once the Russian pests are gone. Are you interested?"

I was interested; very much so. The deal was made; after the war I was to return the apartment to my landlord. I moved in with Bruno. I enjoyed the space, the conveniences, the privacy, and informed Mark by letter of our good fortune. His excuse that the room Bruno and I shared with Gina had no accommodations for him was now no longer valid.

A Mrs. Kost, a refugee from Cracow who lived with her three children on the same floor, now agreed to take care of Bruno during my working hours.

To celebrate the new apartment, I gave a party. Gina and her boyfriend Paul, my cousins Klara and Sigi Tannen, Brustinger and Fischer were my guests. Mira and Tur declined.

Fischer embarrassed me in front of everybody by expressing his gratitude: In one of the Weekly Circulars he had been cleared by the *miscom* of sabotage.

Bruno was allowed to stay up to listen to Fischer playing the cello. Afterward, the child slipped out of my lap, shyly approached Fischer and timidly touched the strings of the huge instrument. Fischer took Bruno's small hand, placed his index finger on a string and helped him pluck it. Bruno's round eyes darted from the huge instrument to Fischer. The child was not sure whether it was the instrument, Fischer, or his finger that made the strange sound. When he plucked the string again, he became wild with excitement. Then, Fischer followed Bruno to his room and gave him his first music lesson.

Long after his bedtime, Bruno was still circling around Fischer and his cello, and not until he had been promised that he would soon have another music lesson did he consent to go to bed.

After this first gathering, it become customary for my new friends to visit me every Saturday evening. Sometimes an acquaintance from the old days attended these gatherings, such as Henryk Hescheles, the chief editor of the *Chwila*, the Jewish newspaper printed in Polish. He was about thirty-eight years old and his hair was graying already. A liberal, he was among the few in my circle who was happy about the Russian occupation. The witty, satirical political columns he had written daily attacked the German regime since 1933. Now that his newspaper had been shut down, he had a lot of time on his hands.

We drank tea, ate cookies and tea sandwiches, listened to the cello and discussed current events.

Fischer never missed a gathering. Often he came before the other guests, gave Bruno a "cello lesson" and then played the cello himself. Soon I began to listen for the two wailing tones that seemed to call up a soft, two-syllable name and usually preceded my favorite composition, Schubert's "*Serenade*."

I always clapped, and Fischer would respond with a quiet smile.

One Saturday, after Bruno had rubbed noses with Fischer—his expression of love—and I was putting him to bed, he asked, "When will Daddy come home?" As I looked down, I fixed my eyes on his temples, where the blue veins were showing through the white skin. "Soon, my baby," I crooned softly, continuing, "Soon, very soon, I hope. . . ." My voice had died down to a whisper.

"Soon, soon, you always say 'soon.' I want my daddy now," he complained, and buried his face in his pillow.

"Don't you want to say good night, dear?" For the first time he had omitted the ritual of giving me a bedtime kiss. Bruno turned his small face up again and said, "I want to kiss you, Mummy, but I also want to kiss my daddy." Then he sobbed into his blanket.

In the morning, before work, I wrote a letter describing. for Mark's benefit, our apartment and its convenient location on Kazimierza Street. I told him of Bruno's loneliness and of my own.

He promptly answered that, within a few days, we would be together again.

Chapter 10

Mark didn't keep his promise. I felt more bereft and alone than ever before. One rainy Sunday morning at the store, I put an *Ordonka* record on the phonograph. Her unique style, a combination of passionate recital and singing, brought tears to my eyes.

Later in the day, a customer came directly to the record department. His straight back and black curly hair seemed familiar. When he turned toward me and asked where he could find the latest hit, "*Tylko we Lwowie*)"Only in Lvov"), both of us were taken by surprise.

It was Robert, a boyfriend from high school whom I had not seen since I got married four years before. He was immaculately dressed, had a tan, and his narrow hands and long fingers were well groomed. All in all, Robert looked as if the war had changed nothing in his lifestyle. We made a date for lunch.

In the Bella restaurant he embarrassed me by asking me abruptly, even before we'd had a chance to order, whether I was happy. I didn't answer.

"You rejected me to marry Mark. Perhaps you regret it now?" He looked at me quizzically.

Although his question and his whole attitude implied that some rumors of my separation had reached him, I again didn't answer.

He moved closer and took my hand. The waitress wrote out the order. Robert's deep-set eyes expressed sympathy for me.

"Don't pity me because Mark is in Zlochov with his mother and sister. I have a child whom I adore, many new friends, and I enjoy my work."

"You mean to say that you like to work?" He laughed derisively.

"It gives me a feeling of accomplishment," I said rather primly.

"Selling instruments or sporting goods, you consider that an accomplishment? You, who wanted to be a writer or study journalism, a salesgirl?"

"What I wanted doesn't count. Dreams don't count. In reality, I have no qualifications for anything. Besides, I appreciate my freedom."

He looked at me incredulously.

"I mean my *personal* freedom. At eighteen I moved out from under my parents' wing into the protection of marriage. At least now I am making my own decisions; I am standing on my own feet and it exhilarates me. It may seem strange to you, but it's true. Incidentally, what are you doing these days?"

"Certainly not working for the Russians, dear. I do have a working card, but I'm paying the boss for the privilege of not working. I am reluctant to help the growth of Communism in my native land." He quickly looked over his shoulder to see whether he had been overheard.

"Perhaps if you had had the Germans breathing down your back, even for only three weeks, as we did in Niemirov, your opinion of the Russians would change."

"The Germans, the Communists, it's the same pest!"

I remained silent.

Then, after eating the cheese sandwiches, and while waiting for tea, he said, "I'll never forget a letter I got from you a long time ago."

"I wrote you many letters."

"I remember this one in particular. Listen: 'Love is the essence of my life. Without it I drift weightlessly in a vacuum. I cannot exist in such a vacuum.'"

"Maybe I've changed," I said. "I still think that the absorption with another human being is the most rewarding experience."

"You're still the girl I want to marry."

"But I *am* married."

"What kind of marriage is it, you here and he there." He put his arm around my shoulder.

I could smell the scent of his *eau de cologne*—4711 *Trojka.* I leaned back against his arm for a moment. Then, abruptly, I said, "Lunchtime is over."

He walked me back to the store. On the way I invited him to my

Saturday gathering and gave him my address. He gave me his.

Stirred-up emotions I had been keeping under tight leash prevented me from making any sales. After work I felt more tired than usual. I dragged myself along Kazimierza Street and went into my building, passing Mrs. Kost's door without fetching Bruno. In my apartment I lay down on the living room couch and let my thoughts drift back to my high school days in Lvov.

I was seventeen and Robert nineteen. He was my steady boyfriend. He had wit, good looks, a generous allowance from his wealthy parents and many friends. I remembered his long, narrow fingers.

Once, on a Sunday, he had phoned me that he couldn't keep our date; he had a cold. He asked me to visit him at home instead. I had never been there before.

After work, at 5 o'clock in the afternoon, he opened the door himself; his passion and embrace were unusual for the usually restrained Robert. Neither his parents nor the maid were home.

He led me to his room. I looked at the Louis XV furniture and at his paintings, two of which were by the famous artist Wojciech Kossak, who specialized in horses. On the floor lay a gold and rose Sarouk rug.

Robert sat down in a chair and pulled me on his lap. His hands began to explore me. Unaccountably, I found myself giving in to him, while at the same time I was saying, "Stop it, stop it!"

Robert let go of me, stood up at once and started to brush his curly hair. "You're right, Roma," he said, "Not with you. You're the girl I want to marry."

I looked at the ceiling. I would never forget his hesitation—at what seemed to me the wrong moment. I attributed it to a lack of masculinity.

After attending high school in Lvov, I left for Niemirov. Robert often wrote me long letters about how lonely he was and how he missed me. Sometimes, when the restrictions placed on me by my Hasidic parents became unbearable, I would think of Robert and his proposal. I would have second thoughts. We would live in Lvov. I could go to college and perhaps I would learn to love him. Then I met Mark, fell in love, and Robert was forgotten. Against my parents' wishes—they said that Mark, eighteen years older than I, was completely unsuitable—I had married him.

Now, many years later, we had met again. I decided to visit Robert that very evening after putting Bruno to bed, but I must have dozed off.

A key turned in the lock and awoke me. Mrs. Kost switched on the light and I sat up. Bruno, surprised to find me at home, leapt into my outstretched arms.

Mrs. Kost, a woman of forty, short and fat, sat down, breathing heavily. She crossed her slender legs, clasped her hands and cried, "Do I see right? Are those tears? I've never seen you give way like this before. But I'm not surprised. Whoever heard of a twenty-one year old taking care of everything herself? Now, don't you get up. Just sit back and relax. Tonight I'll put Bruno to bed."

Her incredible sweetness of character came through. She got up and took charge of Bruno. After she had washed him and helped him into his pajamas, she brought him back to me. He rubbed his nose against my cheek and said, "Mummy, when I grow up, I'm going to marry you."

I laughed through my tears at the second marriage proposal of the day. I stroked the flaxen hair that felt like silk and smiled at Mrs. Kost, who then left. I took Bruno to his room and tucked him in.

"I am happy as things are," I whispered. "I am happy. . . ."

"Mummy, you're talking to yourself again," said Bruno, and he promptly fell asleep.

It was only 9 o'clock, too early for me to go to bed. However, I quickly undressed simply to prevent myself from going to Robert. Naked, I stood before the mirror. I inhaled the smell of my body and realized it was pleasing. Perhaps I was too thin for Mark? Too small?

Suddenly there was the shrill noise of the doorbell.

Alarmed, I snatched my blue house robe, pulled it on, tied the sash and went to the door.

Fischer stood smiling before me.

I had forgotten that he was going to drop in at 8:30 to pick up his cello, which he had left behind on Saturday because it had been raining. I asked him into the living room.

While I went to the kitchen for glasses and brandy, I heard Fischer play. The two familiar, plaintive notes emerged, sounding like my name.

Upon my return to the living room, he began to play Schubert's "Serenade." I put the bottle and the glasses on the table and sat on the couch. Fischer ended the serenade with two more plaintive notes; I clapped my hands. Moving awkwardly, almost overturning the glasses, he sat on the couch beside me. I handed him a glass of brandy. Then I raised my own and we toasted one another.

"Ever since I met you I've been waiting for a moment like this, without other people around," Fischer said.

I poured more brandy and we drank again. Then he refilled the glasses. I downed my brandy in one swallow.

"Take it easy," Fischer said. But I was beginning to feel pleasantly high.

"For months I've been dreaming of taking you in my arms."

His arms wound around me, his eyes meeting my own. I felt safe and secure.

Fischer was tenderly spreading little kisses over my entire face; then he pressed his lips against mine in a long, extended kiss. I didn't stop him.

"I love you. I love you and I love Bruno," he whispered. His face, with its flat, broken nose, along with everything around me, was blurred. I was floating on a cloud. His embrace became tighter, his kisses more passionate, and I didn't stop him. Now, holding me with only one hand, he tried with the other to untie the sash of my house robe. The sensation of Fischer caressing my skin was heavenly.

Only when my robe fell to the floor did I suddenly become aware of the fact that I was somewhat dizzy, probably from the brandy.

"No! No!" I heard my own voice call out.

Fischer loosened his grip.

I felt empty, and heaven broke into pieces. A chill went through my body. I heard him say, softly, "I only want you if you want me. I would never exploit a moment of your weakness."

It was déjà vu. What kind of urgency did my voice convey that now made Fischer, as it had Robert a few years ago, give in to my pleas? I bent down to pick up my house robe and he even helped me slip my arms into the sleeves.

Was I not desirable enough?

Chapter 11

After a few sleepless nights, when I could only doze from time to time, dreaming of Fischer holding me tightly in his arms, I was now preparing breakfast for Bruno.

"Drink your milk," I said.

The doorbell was ringing. A messenger brought a bouquet of red carnations. A note was attached to the flowers. It read, "I love you."

I read the three words, re-read them and thought. It was not rejection the other evening after all. I was relieved.

I caressed the flowers before arranging them in a vase.

"Are these flowers from Daddy?"

"Yes," I lied, and my elation was gone: my humiliation and embarrassment cut me deeply.

Two days later, Fischer called on the telephone and asked me for a date. I refused. He asked me again and I refused again. On Saturday evening, he came to my open house party. My cousins Klara and Sigi Tannen, Gina and Paul, Brustinger, Hescheles and Robert were already assembled. Fischer's intense gaze made me nervous; I thought everybody noticed.

Fischer gave Bruno a "cello lesson." When Bruno's bedtime came, I went to his room and found Fischer there with him. While I slipped a nightshirt over Bruno's head, Fischer said quickly, "Let me stay after the guests leave."

"It's out of the question!"

"Mummy, are you mad at Mr. Fischer?"

"A little bit."

In unison, both of them asked, "Why?"

"We'll talk some other time," I said to Fischer.

"Oh oh, it's grown-up talk," said Bruno.

"Why, the other evening. . . ," Fischer's voice pleaded.

"I made a mistake. Anyway, we'll talk about it some other time."

"We'll talk, promise?" Fischer implored.

"Promise! And now please go back to the living room."

"Mummy, may Mr. Fischer stay with me a little longer?"

"It's all right, if Mr. Fischer wants to. I have to return to my guests."

At 11 o'clock the party broke up. Fischer, while leaving, slipped a note into my hand.

It read, "Since you allowed me to hold you in my arms I've entered a new world. I want you to have everything I have to give; please accept it.

During lunch in the Bella restaurant I said, "Gina, I have a confession to make."

"A confession? Go ahead. Why have you stopped?"

Today her eyes were green, reflecting the color of her shirt.

"I almost went to bed with Fischer."

"Who? *Who*? Did you say Fischer? I don't believe it! He's the ugliest man in the world."

"What do *you* know. He is exquisitely sensitive, gentle, tender and perceptive. I think he really loves me."

"You're crazy. You're surrounded by the sophisticated Brustinger, the intellectual Hescheles, the *bonvivant* Tur—and she picks Fischer! So why didn't you sleep with Fischer if he's so wonderful?"

"I don't know. . . maybe because Bruno was there?"

"Do you want to borrow my room for your rendezvous with Fischer?"

"I'm finished with Fischer."

"I can't believe my ears. Here you rave about his superb sensitivity, tenderness and gentleness and in the same breath you say you're finished with him."

"Have you forgotten that I'm married?"

"What kind of marriage is it, you here and he there"

"When Bruno asked me whether the flowers that Fischer had sent were from his father, I wanted to bury myself with shame. I am asking you to help me conquer my weakness for Fischer. I like to be with him and he's pursuing me with fantastic letters."

"Show me, show me!"

I showed her the notes.

She read them and was taken aback. "Fischer the mumbler has unexpected sides to him," she said. She considered for a moment and then started to tear up the notes.

"Are you out of your mind?" I reached over the table to grab the pieces of paper, but Gina pulled away and tore the rest into small pieces. "I am not going to let you keep the evidence of your crime! If you want to sleep with that ugly son of a gun, go ahead, but don't leave traces behind, because you still have something to lose if Mark were to find those letters."

"O.K., Gina. Perhaps it's best that you've destroyed the notes, so I won't keep reading them and dreaming of him. I want you to help me resist Fischer. He's after me and I may give in."

"So what?" she snapped.

"How many times do I have to say that I don't want a deeper involvement with Fischer. I am vulnerable right now and I don't know whether I can stand being alone any longer. How would you handle this?"

"Don't ask me what I would do. As far as I'm concerned, you're playing games." She pondered a while and her face became serious. "Give yourself a deadline. Let's say three months? If Mark hasn't come home by then, then go ahead with Fischer."

I felt as if Gina had taken a heavy weight from my shoulders. Why hadn't I not thought of that?

On Sunday, his day off, Fischer came to the store and asked me out for lunch. He dismissed my reluctance by reminding me of my promise to talk with him.

In the dining room of the Hotel Bristol, while cutting my *Wiener schnitzel*, I looked at the brocade draperies and thought of the check poor Fischer would have to pay.

"Why are you angry with me?" Fischer asked.

"I'm not angry with *you*. I'm angry with myself."

"Why?"

"Can't you guess?"

"I love you. You didn't do anything wrong."

"But I love my husband."

"Do you? And does he love you?"

"Of course he does."

"Why aren't you two together?"

"I told you, his sick mother needs him."

"If you love him, why don't you join him in Zloczov?"

Strange that this had never occurred to me, and that Mark had never suggested this solution. "What is this, the third degree?" I snapped.

Fischer smiled at me, showing the gap in his teeth. "Oh, no, my dear Roma. I just want you to search your own soul and discover what you really feel. I want to take care of you and little Bruno. Please, let me."

"O.K., Fischer. Let me think it over."

While reaching for my hand, his eyes caressed me; though his smile disclosed the gap in his teeth, it still gave his face a radiant look.

"I'll call you on Tuesday," he said.

"You can't ask me to make such an important decision in two days! I need three months," I said.

"Three months is a long time," Then he jerked his head and added, "Three months it is," and handed me another note.

At home I read,

> I feel that my love for you is a gift to me. I shall treasure it always.

Chapter 12

Ten days after my lunch with Fischer and his agreement to give me three months to give him an answer, Mark came to Lvov to stay. Thus Fischer, without knowing it yet, had lost.

Mark's sudden arrival took me by surprise. We embraced, we hugged, we kissed; Bruno jumped up and down in happy excitement. Overjoyed, he ran across the corridor to Mrs. Kost. He came back pulling the two smaller children along with him and saying, "You see, I also have a daddy. My daddy has a mustache."

Mrs. Kost came in to be introduced and then she left with her children.

Mark looked around the living room, smiling. Bruno tugged at him and he was lifted into his father's arms.

"Can you play the cello, Daddy?"

"No, why?" Mark asked.

"I can. Mr. Fischer taught me."

"Did you know that Daddy can play the piano?" I broke in. I added, "Some people think it's a nicer instrument than the cello."

"You can? Will you teach me, Daddy?"

"First we'll have to bring the piano from Niemirov," I said. "And I'm sure Daddy will gladly teach you."

"Will you, Daddy? Will you take me to the park like Mr. Fischer does?"

Mark put Bruno down. "Who is this Fischer?" he asked.

"A colleague, the buyer at my company."

"He seems to spend a lot of time with our child." He gave me a penetrating look, took his gold-rimmed glasses off and started to clean them.

"He sometimes attends my Saturday evenings," I said, and I felt myself blushing. "Remember how we used to have open house on Saturdays?"

Later Mark, sitting at the head of the dinner table, with Bruno at his left and me at his right, explained, unconvincingly as far as I was concerned, why he hadn't come home sooner, saying that his mother's heart condition had worsened lately. I was glad for Bruno's sake that he gave this excuse for his absence.

After dinner, Mark lit his pipe, Bruno babbled excitedly and I was thinking of how to get to Gina for advice.

In the morning I found her in the Europa Hotel.

"Mark is here," I said.

"Has he come for good?" She grinned. "Maybe his sister kicked him out after all?"

"Don't you think that Mark cares for me at all? What about Bruno?"

There was silence. Then she said, "So Mark it is. Too bad."

"Gina," I said, "last night when Mark kissed me I thought it was Fischer kissing me. I am obsessed by the fantasy of making love with Fischer."

"So what?"

"So, when Mark started to make love to me, I told him that I was tired and he left me alone. What excuse can I give tomorrow?"

"No excuse! Why do you have to complicate simple matters? Mark is your husband, sleep with him. You are childish. Nobody can read your thoughts. Roma. . . maybe you did sleep with Fischer and you're not telling me the truth?"

"That is preposterous; I will never confide in you again." I was genuinely offended. I got up, ready to leave. Gina pushed the table away, put her hands on my shoulders and said, "Forgive me, forgive me. But you make such a fuss over simple matters, and you exaggerate things that other people wouldn't even notice. Go on with your life. Perhaps with Mark here, you will have it easier now."

It was May, but my hands felt as cold as if it were December. Rubbing one against the other, I said, "Gina, I need a job for Mark. He would have his law office if times were normal, but what can he do now? Maybe you could find something for him in the Europa Hotel?"

"Here she goes again. She's prepared an apartment for him and now she's looking for a job for him, and what will his majesty do? Criticize! Let him find a job on his own! Don't look at me as if I'd said something terrible. He'll never be satisfied with any job unless President Moscicki comes back and makes him his personal aid."

"You did a lot of things for Paul."

"All right, all right, I'll ask my boss."

Chapter 13

One day the Russians issued an edict demanding that all citizens apply for passports. Until now we had only needed a passport when we wanted to travel abroad. This passport was to be issued by the Russian authorities; however, we would have to carry it with us at all times.

Every applicant had to bring a birth certificate, clearance from the police and a working card if he had one. The greatest problem was that everybody had to appear in person at his place of residence before the war. If we were stopped by the police on the street or in a restaurant, and were unable to show the passport, we could be arrested. Everybody was gripped by fear.

My friend and now landlord, Brustinger, had moved away from home so that he would not be identified in any way with his past. He had taken a furnished room in a nearby town where his background was unknown. By bribing the local authorities, he lived unobtrusively; he only came to Lvov once in a while, when he could no longer endure the loneliness. Many of his acquaintances—lawyers, college teachers, real estate owners, and industrialists—did the same, and thus avoided arrest and deportation. Now, all of them were forced to return and retie the threads, so fraught with danger. Most of those who had not been hiding had been arrested and many of them had been sent to labor camps in Russia.

To some extent the fate of a returning man depended upon the superintendent or janitor of the building where he had formerly resided. Most superintendents and janitors—if they wanted to keep their jobs—had to become spies for the Russians. One considered himself lucky if they were willing to accept bribes from the tenant.

My landlord Brustinger, a banker's son, having returned to Lvov to apply for a passport, now tipped his hat politely when he met the janitor on the stairway.

All those who had refused to help the New System, and who had therefore not taken a job, were now eager to find one. Although some of them did not need the income, they wanted to have working cards before applying for their passports. It was known by now that a passport marked "unemployed" could easily lead to the owner's being rounded up and accused of being a parasite or a black marketeer. Many, like Robert, instead of being paid, would pay a willing company for a statement affirming that he worked.

After Gina received her passport, she showed it to a Russian guest in the Europa Hotel. The Russian told her that the occupation of clerk would pass inspection, but that one of factory worker would be much more useful and would eventually lead to greater benefits. Factory workers and other such laborers found it much easier to obtain coupons for things like a pair of shoes, to be able to take Sundays off, or to schedule a nicer place for their vacations.

Through bribery, another acquaintance got "mechanic" stamped on his passport, becoming the envy of Brustinger, who was unable to achieve the same thing for lack of connections.

When my turn came, Gina advised me, "Just lie about your background and, if the clerk is a man," she laughed mischievously, "turn on your charm. That never fails."

Gina, now the passport expert, had mine checked over by another Russian guest in the Europa Hotel, who said it was all right.

Mira Hendler, the wealthy cashier of Store Number One, had a problem concerning her husband. She had been given a job by her old friend Tur immediately after the store had been nationalized by the Ukrkultorg. At the time it was easier to find work without being thoroughly investigated because the Russians desperately needed people to keep business running. Mira, in possession of a working card by now, and even a Union membership card, received her passport without being detected for what she really was, a wealthy women. But not her husband. In his passport, a Russian word, followed by a number had been printed. Later we simply called it "The Paragraph."

All those who had "The Paragraph." were evicted from Lvov. They went to some smaller city or town, where the local police usually refused to register them. Without such registration, they were liable to arrest. So, they kept moving from town to town. The hardships of these "wanderers," their continual hope of finding a place to settle down and their constant disillusionment, plus the inconvenience of being away from home and family, were unbearable. In addition to being publicly stigmatized for being rich, they were accused of having exploited the poor, thus it was impossible for them to find work.

Now that Mira's husband had to leave Lvov, his first choice was Brzuchovice, a resort near Lvov. The Brzuchovice police claimed there was no room in town for new inhabitants. He got the same answer in a few other villages.

Mira did not know what else they could do. From the time her husband began his forced wandering from place to place, Mira and I were in a similar situation, both alone, both shifting for ourselves. She also had a child, a three year old girl. She brought her along whenever she visited me.

I suggested that her husband try Niemirov. Through my father, and with the help of the shoemaker, he finally got permission to stay. Soon afterward, Mira managed to get her husband a job in Lvov and a revised passport without the "The Paragraph." She never revealed how she had managed this. Gossipers suggested that the *miscom* had had a hand in it, that she had paid by sleeping with him. I could not imagine the civilized, snobbish Mira Hendler in the arms of that vulgar *miscom*. She had bribed him with an exorbitant amount of money, perhaps, but certainly not with sex! I dismissed these rumors as idle gossip.

Brustinger, who had had to come back to Lvov for his passport, also got "The Paragraph." Now he was desperate; he did not want to leave Lvov again. Gina arranged for him to stay as an unregistered boarder at her stepmother's, where I used to share a room with her. The superintendent was given 50 rubles a month for keeping his mouth shut. The family took turns standing at the peephole. If a stranger appeared on the other side of the door Brustinger was signaled to leave through the back.

After a few weeks, he could no longer bear the situation. Despite warnings from colleagues and friends, he decided to conduct his own defense in a legal battle with the authorities. Claiming that his deceased banker father had disinherited him, leaving all his possessions to an orphanage, he maintained that whatever he himself had accumulated had been the product of his own labor. To my amazement, he won the case, and his passport was legally revised. Although he never admitted it, his friends were convinced that he had found ways to bribe the judge and those who had access to him. He still had plenty of money.

Brustinger moved back to the room in his apartment and, at my recommendation, got a job as a filing clerk in the main office of the Ukrkultorg.

Occasionally, after work, I had run some errands, then grabbed a snack at Finkelstein's Delicatessen before going to the company meeting afterward. Mrs. Kost wouldn't mind giving Bruno his dinner.

Now, every day after work, I rushed home for Mark's sake. I knew that Mark was accustomed to being adored and catered to by his mother and sister, and then by me and our maid. I did not want to deprive him of what he—and most men in our culture—regarded as his basic right. Although I was attracted to this disciplined way of life, sometimes Mark's behavior irritated me. Now, most of the time, I found Mark in the living room, slouching on the couch, smoking his pipe and reading. At my appearance, he would put down his book and pipe, and open his arms. I went to the couch and he pulled me down.

However, when this became a routine, I started to resent it. I came home tired from standing on my feet all day and wished he would welcome me by jumping to his feet.

I had started to worry, for Gina had no news about a job for Mark at the Europa Hotel, and Mark himself was not looking for anything. The gold coins I had bought on Abner's advice would keep us comfortable for a long time to come, but a professional was even more vulnerable than everybody else to arrest and deportation if he walked around without a card.

One evening I said, "Mark, I talked to Serge today, there's a good chance of you getting a job with my company."

"As what? As a buyer like that friend of yours, what's his name?"

I knew that despite his three diplomas, he would never start as a buyer. I thought he should be grateful to be hired to do filing like Brustinger, but I kept my thoughts to myself. Instead, I said congenially, "A working card will protect you from arrest and deportation. After a while, they might let you become a member of the Trade Union."

"I don't want to become a member of the Trade Union! What am I, a waiter, a barber? I hate them all!" He sat up, poked his pipe against the ashtray and continued, "The war will be over soon and I'll return to my law practice."

"Of course you will," I replied, "but look: Fischer is an engineer, and Tur is a journalist and they both adapted. Most of your colleagues had to change jobs for a little while. Take Brustinger, for instance: He's a lawyer, too, and he was dying to get any kind of job with my company. He became a filing clerk and is grateful for that."

"I am not Brustinger and I am not this friend of yours, what's-his-name?"

"Fischer! Fischer! Not Gold, not Silver, *Fischer*!"

"I would prefer not to work in your company."

"Wouldn't it be nice for us to work in the same place?" I pleaded.

"Definitely not! Have you forgotten that you registered under your maiden name and that we would find ourselves in an awkward situation?"

"For heaven's sake! Since you arrived you've reproached me for everything. We've quarreled a hundred times!" I opened the drawer and took out the table silver, making lots of noise.

"Don't exaggerate," he said.

"All right, so we've quarreled only fourteen times."

He banged his pipe against the ashtray. "You still exaggerate."

I went into the kitchen to prepare hamburgers for dinner. While the oil was sizzling under the patties, I admitted to myself that I actually resented the extra responsibilities Mark's arrival had brought. In this one week I had missed three company meetings, and I was afraid of the *miscom.*

Mark—eighteen years older than I—felt proud of his diplomas; he still seemed to be living in the old world, the world that had disappeared the day war broke out.

I came back to the living room to set the table. Then I smelled something burning and ran to the kitchen again to look at the hamburgers. Two were burned. I threw the scraps into the overflowing garbage can. The can had been full in the morning and it was still full.

Mark tasted his unburned hamburgers and said, "Not enough salt. Where is the saltshaker?"

The answer was on the tip of my tongue; "In the kitchen! Bring it in." Only Mrs. Kost, who had just brought Bruno home, kept me from saying it. She told me that Bruno had had his dinner in her house and left. The doorbell rang and a special messenger handed me a telegram from my father urging me to come at once to Niemirov.

I went to the kitchen for the saltshaker. Mark, shaking salt over his meat, asked, "Aren't you going to tell me what this telegram is all about?"

"Here, read it." I shoved it across the table.

He read it and to my surprise and relief, he said, "Your father may be sick. You'd better leave right away."

"Oh, Mark, thank you, I'd really like to!"

Bruno climbed up on a chair and joined in our embrace; he was always happy to see us happy. "Can I come too, Mummy? Can I come too?"

"No," Mark said. "You will stay here with Mrs. Kost."

"And with you, Daddy?"

"Of course, with me too."

Chapter 14

I left for Niemirov the following day, asking Gina beforehand to phone my supervisor, Tur, to say that I was "ill." The only problem would be verifying my excuse when I returned. I would need a doctor's certificate, which Tur would turn over to the main office. I could count on my friend, Dr. Febus Geisler, to help me. He would not be any trouble with a minor case like a cold, and that would keep me out of work for two or three days. His own security would not be endangered.

In Niemirov I found my father standing near the window, fat cat Tin-Tin resting on his feet. He stood there as if he were waiting. He didn't smile at me. He chased Tin-Tin away as his fingers brushed his red beard. He was pale and distracted looking. He greeted me with a few words of welcome and adjusted the velour hat he wore on top of his skullcap. The news that Mark was back with me brought a small smile to his troubled face. He called me into the room at the far end of the apartment where, in the past, all intimate, important conversations had taken place.

We sat down at a table in the center of the room. His round eyes focused on me. He said in a low voice, "Remember our shoemaker?"

"I remember him, he's the tinsmith's friend."

Father nodded. "He has given me confidential information that seven Jewish families have been selected by the Russians to be deported from Niemirov, probably to Siberia."

"Seven families! Any reason?"

"The usual. The Russians claim that those families are a menace to the New System."

We had been alerted to the threat of a knock at the door in the middle of the night. We knew of the many Jews and some Poles who had been deported to Russia without any explanation to their relatives. Through the windows looking out on Kazimierza Street, I myself had seen fine, decent-looking people with parcels queueing up in front of the Brigidki Prison, each trying to leave a parcel for an arrested relative. We knew that the vast majority of the Brigidki Prison inmates consisted of priests, lawyers, teachers, industrialists and black marketeers.

I had successfully blocked this terror out of my mind, perhaps because, until now, it hadn't touched a relative or a close friend.

"Did the shoemaker say why the seven families are a menace to the New System?"

"Because they're wealthy," he said.

"There are only five rich families in Niemirov. Others might not have to struggle so hard as the rest of the Jewish population, but there are quite a few rich non-Jewish families. What about them?"

Father sighed and nervously began to roll one of his black side locks. "The Jews are always the scapegoats," he said.

It was disappointing to hear Father say it. I wanted to believe the Communist's slogan, "Wsio rowno," but I could not believe "All were equal" when we spoke about the ethnic groups. I wanted to believe that they would treat the Jew and non-Jew alike, even if it turned out that both were maltreated.

"Their system teaches equality, " I said.

"Words are one thing and deeds another. But let's stop philosophizing. Roma, I am one of the seven. . . ."

I stared at him.

He took off his hat and wiped perspiration from his forehead. Suddenly I noticed that Father's eyelids were reddish. His thick black hair, now covered only partially by the velvet skullcap, was thinning. The once strikingly handsome man was getting old.

Something occurred to me. "Did you say the shoemaker warned you? He's your enemy. He and that tinsmith. They stopped you from selling your lumber and they informed on you to have it nationalized. The shoemaker despised you as he did everyone who made enough money to provide comfortably for his family. He probably made the whole thing up to frighten you."

"At first I thought so myself," Father sighed. "Now, I know it's true. The shoemaker has changed a lot. I think he must be disappointed. He thought that once the Communists took over, they'd take from the rich and give to the poor. I know he informed in detail about our property in the hope of having it transferred to him. He had an eye on the sawmill. You know what's really happening?"

Father lowered his voice to a whisper

"They take everything away from the rich to make them poor, while the poor become poorer. They gave the shoemaker an office job and he's very proud of it. But his friend, that sickly tinsmith. . . ."

I nodded.

"They arrested him, and even his parents don't know where he is. Now the shoemaker is frightened that it may happen to him as well."

"How come they arrested him? He was such an avowed Communist. He decorated the arch with red flags."

"I don't know what makes those Communists tick. I can't understand them. But it's an undeniable fact that the shoemaker, who had informed on me, was later sorry. He told me so. He atoned by helping your friend Handler register with the police in Niemirov. And now he has warned me, and he's also promised to inform me about the details of our arrest as soon as he gets them. But I asked the Belzer Rebbe what to do and he told me not to wait until this shoemaker tells me more details. So, I want to do something right now."

The Belzer Rebbe, a spiritual leader for many, including my father, was famous in and out of the country for his wisdom and holy way of life. Even some Christians came to him for advice. This unusual man, who inherited his position from his father before him, was trained and molded from childhood to devote every aspect of his being to God. He filled his days with prayer, studying the Torah and servicing his people. It seemed only right that he serve in the same capacity as his father had before him, pouring an extraordinary love for the study of the Torah into his Hasidim. They, in turn, adored the Book of Books. They danced around it. They quoted passages from the contents. They sang and kissed the gold and silver hand-embroidered encasement.

Thousands of his followers came to Belz for the Jewish holidays, and the Polish Public Transportation Department scheduled extra trains to accommodate them because it was good business for them to do so.

Rich and poor arrived to spend time with their illustrious leader, and to pray in unison with him. The praying, singing and dancing, but mostly the proximity of this visionary man, exalted them.

Each received a blessing. The rich left donations, the poor received help, and anyone with a problem was given advice. The Hasidim not only hoped, but believed and expected, that their personal problems would be solved by the Belzer Rebbe.

The Rebbe was more efficient than a well-trained clinical psychologist and gave his services for free. The Hasidim believed that supernatural powers were vested in him so that he acted as an intermediary between them and God. They came to him for his blessing on a forthcoming wedding; in need of an operation, they came for him for the name of a surgeon. They requested his approval of a business deal before signing the contract. In most cases he was right in his assessments. In the presence of the Belzer Rebbe, a petitioner might feel like a mere speck on the firmament, but when the wise man turned his shining, deep-set eyes on the visitor, he felt at once that he had been transformed into a shining star. He was now the only concern of this holy man. And naturally, there was blind adherence to the most outlandish sounding suggestions.

I knew that once the Belzer Rebbe had given advice to my father, Father would not summon me to Niemirov to ask for advice. Why, then, was I here? The answer came soon enough.

"When will this action take place?" I asked.

"Next month."

"That means in July. There are only two weeks left."

"There is something else." He paused, and then he said in a dead voice, "Perele has decided to leave me. She wants to join her relatives in Rava-Ruska. They have always lived in poverty and this, as you know, is an asset today. At least she would not be threatened with deportation." He lowered his eyelids.

I had never seen him cry, not even when his fourteen-year-old son had died, not when my mother had died. He had said, “God gave and God took.” Now two tears rolled down into his beard.

“What are you going to do, Father?”

“The shoemaker said that if the NKVD man* doesn’t find who he’s looking for at home, he doesn’t bother searching for him in other places. If I had a place to go, I’d leave Niemirov secretly and maybe Perele would go with me. Blume can remain here with Abner.”

“Do you want to go to your sister in Zolkiev or to Przemysl? I think the best place might be Rava-Ruska.”

I said this because a sister of my father’s lived in Rava-Ruska, as did my oldest sister Anna, of whom he was very fond.

“I want to go to Lvov. Lvov, the Belzer Rebbe said, because it is a big city, and it is the best place to hide.”

“Lvov. . . ? It’s officially considered overcrowded and the police refuse to register newcomers.” I weakly opposed his idea because I knew that the Rebbe’s advice was going to prevail.

“I know all that. But you overcame those difficulties; I thought you could overcome them for me, too.” Father’s voice and intonation sounded as if the expected difficulties had already disappeared.

I sadly recalled the clashes between Mark and Father, both past and present, and I remembered how I had tried desperately to cement my relationship with my husband. I knew my father’s presence could destroy the precarious balance between my husband and me, so I clung to my argument that Father go to Rava-Ruska, Przemysl or Zolkiev. I began to explain how I happened to be registered in Lvov long before the war started.

“I went to school there, remember? And never checked out with the police. And there is another problem: It’s difficult to get an apartment.”

“You have a big apartment.”

“I was lucky,” I said.

“So look for another apartment and you may be lucky again.”

Relieved that he did not intend to move in with me, I said gingerly, “I’ll try my best. But there are other difficulties for a Hasid in a big city.”

“No matter how bad you paint it, it doesn’t sound half as bad as Siberia.”

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* Man working for the National Commissariet of Internal Affairs.

"You're right, Father. It's settled."

All at once he relaxed, as if the problem had already been solved. He smiled into my face. "You know, you could ask cousin Ada to help you; she's been a Communist since she was a teenager. When she was jailed by the Poles before the war, I paid the lawyer to get her out. I heard she's a big shot now."

"Ada? Don't count on her goodwill. When I needed help to become a member of the Union, she refused any involvement. In fact, I regretted having asked her because, from her behavior, I was afraid she would inform on me."

"A cousin? It's hard to believe."

"She's working in a Russian government office in some executive capacity and she told me that she could not intervene on behalf of a *bourgeoise.*"

Beneath his bushy black eyebrows, Father's deep-blue eyes expressed disbelief.

"The war has changed people; everybody is looking out for himself," I said.

"It's not all that bad. One has changed for the worse, another for the better," Father said. "You know Trusievicz, the Ukrainian? He warned me to hide during the three weeks of the German occupation. Who would have expected it from an anti-Semite? If not for him, I would be dead. The Germans, as he had warned, came for me, but I was already hidden in Radroz. The shoemaker, the poor man, hated me, and now he's trying to help me."

I promised to do my utmost. I left him fully trusting that his God, through the Belzer Rebbe's blessing and me—being only the instrument—would change his fate.

For nine days the hunt for an apartment in Lvov was unsuccessful. All of my acquaintances, commissioned by me to be on the lookout, had nothing but bad news. Only Fischer came up with something. He found a large furnished room with kitchen privileges. I told him that I would rent it after work.

It was a spacious room, and there was a pleasant landlady, but, although Jewish, she kept no dietary laws and I knew that my father would never agree to live against his religious principles. Crestfallen, I left. In the vestibule, I heard Fischer's droning voice. He came out from behind a column, and, approaching me, he said, "I can see you didn't like it."

"There are other reasons."

"I'll take you home. . . may I?"

"Mark would have come with me, but I didn't ask him. I'll take the tramway," I said.

He linked his arm into mine and led me through the desolate streets. "Roma, please, let's walk."

"O.K."

He snuggled closer.

For a while we walked in silence. Then he said, "The three months will be over soon. Can't you give me a hint as to the answer?"

It hadn't occurred to me that Fischer was still waiting for a decision as to whether I would share my life with him. Oblivious of the three-month deadline I had set for Mark, Fischer couldn't know that, when my husband arrived, I had made up my mind to stay with him.

"You shouldn't ask," I said, and stopped short of a discussion to avoid a confrontation. "Please, don't press me. At the agreed upon date we will talk."

At home I found my cousin Sigi Tannen waiting for me. He told me about his uncle's vacant store on Place Teodora, which could be converted into living quarters.

The following day he went with me to look at it. Both of us agreed that it was hardly fit for human habitation. But the landlord promised to install a kitchen stove and said that the large loft could be partitioned. A water pump was just a few steps from the front entrance.

Since time was running out, I left a deposit and blessed Sigi. The only thing that appealed to me was the location. Place Teodora 1 was the center of a Jewish district populated mainly by orthodox Jews. A synagogue was close by. Here Father would feel at home. The only drawback: Until the stove was installed I had to resign myself, rather apprehensively, to having my parents live with me.

Chapter 15

The biggest problem was police registration. But, just as Father had said, that problem was solved sooner than I could have anticipated.

Agron, a Russian lieutenant who was a steady customer at the Ukrkultorg store took me to the city administration. He knocked at the door of a Russian commissioner. The commissioner asked why I wanted to bring my parents to Lvov. I told him that they were elderly people and needed my care and financial support, that it would be much cheaper to have one household and that my stepmother would keep house, freeing me to work more.

He asked me to bring a letter of recommendation from my boss.

After I submitted the required letter, signed by Director Serge, the Commissioner wrote a few words in red on my application form and my parents got permission to register in the police precinct of Kazimierza Street.

Father, Perele, and Tin-Tin fled Niemirov during the night and moved in with me for the time being.

When I showed Father his future quarters, he sighed. He looked at his wife and pleaded, “It’s not so bad, is it? Did you see, Perele? The water pump is only a few steps away.”

Perele swallowed and said nothing.

“It will work out fine.” Father tried to keep his voice steady.

They bought a bedroom set and were only waiting for the kitchen stove to be installed.

So far, everything had gone smoothly in our household. Mark spent most of the time lying on the couch, reading and smoking his pipe. Father studied the Talmud, taught Bruno the Hebrew alphabet, and occasionally played with the child, and of course he went to the synagogue every day. Perele cooked delicious dinners and kept the house immaculately clean. Tin-Tin became Bruno's playmate.

Afraid of repercussions from the *miscom* because of my failure to attend three company meetings in a row, I made sure to be early at the fourth. Milling around among my co-workers, I tried to make the three Russians aware of my presence; I made it my business to say a special "Hello" to Xenia and other sympathizers of the New System.

There was one person I wanted to avoid. I had nothing to say to Fischer any more. However, he came up to me and offered to take me home after the meeting.

"Mark will pick me up," I lied. "Right now I have to see Serge before he goes to the rostrum." I went directly to approach the director. I now thanked Serge for the letter of recommendation, a great help in bringing my parents to Lvov.

"I'm glad you're united," he said. "By the way, I've seen your latest window displays and they're beautiful. You have talent. Did you ever study commercial art?"

"No."

"Would you like to? We could send you to school in Russia."

I looked at him.

"I know your heart's desire. It's journalism, isn't it?"

How did he know? How did he know that I still nurtured that dream?

"I can arrange a scholarship for you in journalism at a college in Moscow."

Every Russian VIP had the right to select a specified number of employees whom he considered talented, and to send them to Russia for further training. The purpose of this, I realized, was the indoctrination in Communism that went with it.

"You know that I have parents to take care of," I said.

"Don't worry, we'll arrange it so they'll be all right."

"I'm also taking care of a little nephew."

"How old?"

"Three and a half."

"You can take him along. You may have fewer worries in Moscow than you're having here," he said.

"Why me?"

"You asked me that before. We want other nations to understand the advantages of our social structure and you are a suitable representative of your nation, don't you agree?" He threw his cigarette butt on the floor, stepped on it and said, "Your world is dead. Ours belongs to the future."

"Why talk of the past or the future? Why not talk of the present?" I asked.

Serge replied, "What you see today is a chrysallis. Its past was a caterpillar; its future, a butterfly. Meanwhile we must make sacrifices. . . ."

I broke in, "Why should we give up today for tomorrow? Why so few consumer goods? When a few sweaters were available in the sporting goods department, people queued up in front of the store."

I should have stopped right there, but I went on, "Poland was so much poorer, so much smaller than Russia; yet we had plenty of everything."

"Your markets were crammed with gadgets, all right." His voice took on a scolding sound. "But when the chips were down, when Germany attacked Poland, your Poland was wiped off the map within twenty-six days. The Soviet Union cannot afford luxuries for its citizens. Not yet, anyway. But we have tanks to defend ourselves with. No one could bring Russia down in twenty-six days or twenty-six years. Not today, not ever! In fact, we have so many wonderful tanks that we were able to liberate the Ukrainians and, if necessary, ten other nations crying for help, and we did it without having to shoot it out. You see, *Tovarisz* Brand, you can keep your luxuries; we will keep our tanks. Why are you so quiet, *Tovarisz* Brand?"

"I am wondering why you're telling me these things."

He looked at me wistfully. "I thought if I concentrated on you, you could be an influence."

"Me? Do you think you succeeded?"

"No."

"Do you think you will?"

"What hasn't happened may still happen, you never can tell."

He smiled at me. "Perhaps I've planted seeds in your mind. They may lay dormant for a long time, but suddenly you may see the light! I have to go now," he said.

It may work the other way around, Comrade Serge, I thought. He didn't think that perhaps I had planted seeds too. . . in him!

Serge went to the rostrum and I sat down between Xenia and Mira, hardly listening to Serge or to the comptroller's monotonous reports. I was thinking of how to phrase my negative answer to Fischer without humiliating him.

Suddenly Mira pinched my arm. Her face was white. She whispered in my ear, "You are not listening, Roma; you have to listen to this."

The comptroller was in the midst of describing a five-year plan for our company. We had heard about five-year plans in Russia, but here in Lvov, where we expected them to leave any day, a five-year plan? Although, in their speeches, they had used the slogan, "Whatever ground we step on, we stay there forever," we hadn't taken it seriously. And here we were, listening to a business plan for five years!

Within five years most of us would be arrested, deported or dying in labor camps.

My heart sank. Mira's double chin trembled. Xenia's face radiated happiness. With her close to us, neither Mira nor I dared to make any remarks. In mutual understanding, Mira's left arm and my right arm pressed against each other.

After the business part of the meeting, the *miscom* announced that Mira Hendler would play for us. Mira went to the piano. I said "Good night" to Xenia and headed for the exit.

At the door, Fischer stopped me to say "Good night" and while shaking my hand, left a note in it. It burned my skin. I dropped it inconspicuously into my pocketbook.

The right thing would be to destroy the note without reading it. But temptation was too strong. On the way down the stairs, I stopped at the first landing and, under the light fixture, read,

> Soon the three months are up. Why are you avoiding me? The time away from you is intolerable because I can only think of you in abstraction. The time I see you with other people around is also intolerable. You are everything that means anything to me. I love you.

Outside, I decided to walk home to collect my thoughts. Why hadn't I torn the note into pieces before reading it if my decision to remain with Mark was irrevocable? What game was I playing?

"No game, dear Fischer, no game!" I murmured. "I have a husband who is the father of my dear child and that's how it has to be." A passerby looked at me as if I were crazy.

Remembering Gina's advice, I tore the note into shreds, but I could not bring myself to throw the shreds away. I kneaded them into a ball; then, near my house, I frantically searched for a hiding place and could find nothing better than my knitted glove.

It was Wednesday, the day of Mark's interview with Gina's Russian boss in the Europa Hotel. The appointment was of the utmost importance, because this was his only chance. Serge had informed me that our comptroller had no job available in his department for "my friend."

I was eager to go straight home from work to find out how Mark had made out, but I was out of rubles and had to stop off at Haskiel's, where they changed my gold dollars for rubles.

An hour later, opening the door, I smelled the parsley that Perele always sprinkled on the boiled potatoes, and I realized I was hungry. Mark, lying on the couch with a book, did not acknowledge my homecoming.

"Where is Bruno?" I asked.

"Still with Mrs. Kost," replied Perele's pleasant voice from the kitchen. She appeared in the door. "I'll fetch him," she volunteered. Going through the living room to the foyer, she glanced furtively in

Mark's direction and repeated, "I'll fetch him so you three can eat."

"What about you?" I asked.

"I'll wait till Father comes home from the prayer house."

I knew immediately there had been words between Mark and the harmless Perele.

Sitting at the table, I asked Mark how the interview had gone.

"I think I got the job."

"Great!"

"There's nothing great about a clerk's job," he said.

"Let's hope you'll be promoted soon. They'll recognize your abilities."

"You're beginning to talk like one of *them*," Mark observed cryptically.

They recognized Paul's abilities," I said. "You know, Gina's boyfriend. You won't believe it but he was assigned to design the scenery for "Carmen" in the Opera House. So you have to admit that, in the New System, *some* people do get a chance."

Mark took off his glasses, wiped them, and looked at me in silence. After putting his glasses back on his nose, he said, "You've become one of them. That's what's happened."

Was he right, I asked myself? It was true that I no longer dismissed Serge's arguments as easily as I used to. Were the seeds he had planted in me bearing fruit already? I used to attend the company meetings for fear of repercussions from the *miscom*. Now, I was beginning to enjoy them. I welcomed Fischer's furtive admiration, talking to Mira, and the conversations with Serge. I had even gotten to like Xenia and her blunt way of saying things.

"Have I insulted you?" Mark's question interrupted my thoughts.

"You're entitled to your opinion. But I think your appraisal of me is wrong. When do you start?"

"On Monday."

I felt relieved. "Gina will give you some pointers. Let's take a walk after dinner," I suggested, smiling for the first time that evening.

At the corner of Brayerovska Street, a Russian coming toward us stopped suddenly, leaned over and blew his nose through his fingers. When he passed, Mark exploded, "They make me sick! And to think they are our masters."

"Mark, dear, not all Russians are primitive, any more than all Poles are dirty peasants. My Russian boss, for instance, is a very intelligent man who has a sense of justice."

"You sound as if you were in love with him."

I looked at him, but he was not smiling.

He took my arm. "Roma, it's hard for me to tell you this. I received an anonymous letter in Zlochov saying that you had a lover. Is it true?" He stopped and looked into my eyes.

"Who would do such a thing? It must have been Tur when he was angry with me."

"Never mind. Is it true?"

"That letter is an outrageous lie! I never had a lover."

He threw his arms around me and, in my guilt, I made a silent resolution that one day I would confess fully to my romance with Fischer, culminating in passionate embraces, and me with only my house coat on at the time.

It was late Saturday afternoon. Perele was rummaging in one of her suitcases. Mark was sitting on the couch with Bruno in his lap. Nearsighted, he had moved close to the lamp on the table and was reading a fable about a clever fox. Bruno's flaxen hair had a sheen in the light. The child's large eyes were shining with facsination. His father's arm wrapped around Bruno's slender body; his other hand held the book. I left my bills, which I had taken home to straighten out, and went to embrace them both. It was great having Mark back home.

The doorbell rang. Perele, expecting Father's return from the prayer house, went to the foyer. She came back with Gina and Paul.

"I thought you had already moved," Gina said to Perele.

"We planned to move a day before yesterday, but the plasterer didn't show up. Tuesday's the day. Tuesday is a lucky day."

"For me too. I'm getting married," Gina said.

"Congratulations!" I cried and embraced her and Paul.

"Oh, we're just going to City Hall," Paul said, as if embarrassed by the commotion.

"We have to celebrate," I insisted. "We have a bottle of champagne we've kept for a special occasion. Mark, please bring it in."

The doorbell rang again. Mira and Fischer entered.

"Only for a short while," Fischer said.

And Brustinger, having heard familiar voices through the connecting wall, came in, followed by Hescheles.

"Did you hear what happened?" Gina paused for greater effect. "About those Russian women wearing long nightgowns to the Opera House?"

"Nightgowns?" Perele asked.

"There was this meeting to set up a puppet government under Russian supervision. Anyway, those Russians had their wives come all the way from home for the event. The women went on a shopping spree and thought the nighties were evening gowns." Gina's mischievous laughter echoed her enjoyment of the anecdote.

Although everyone except Perele had heard this one several times before, they all laughed.

"They're ignorant peasants, what can you expect?" Mark said.

Mira nodded in agreement. "I have one, too, the very latest: Two Jews met in a Russian labor camp. One asked the other, 'How many years did you get?' 'Five,' the other man said. 'What did you get it for?' the first asked again. 'For nothing!' The first shook his head and said, 'That's impossible. For nothing you get ten years.'"

Everyone, including me, roared with laughter.

Father returned from the prayer house, and Mira was glad to repeat the joke.

Hescheles, curious about meeting a Hasid socially for the first time, started to tease Father with heretic statements. Mark added little blasphemous remarks and the atmosphere became tense.

Bruno had slipped out of his father's embrace.

"I understand," Mark said, "that a Hasid claims to be pleasing God by pleasing himself. Tell me, does he please God by sleeping with a prostitute?"

The silence that followed was deadly. Gina's happy face became serious. Brustinger cleared his throat. I felt Fischer looking at me imploringly.

Perele, who had been sitting near the kitchen, got up and placed herself behind father's chair, where she remained for the rest of the evening. My pleading eyes were glued to my father's. Father smoothed his red beard. I wished, I hoped he would ignore Mark's remark.

He did not. He said in a soft, even voice, the voice I had heard since childhood when he chanted passages out of the Bible, "You're almost right, Mark. When I told you that you please God by pleasing yourself, I meant it. Only I explained it a little differently from how you like to interpret it. I told you God appreciates the smallest deed by men who are incapable of doing greater things. I believe this because I learned it from the Belzer Rebbe. For instance, when a shoemaker bursts into song after he has finished a beautiful pair of shoes; when an *Oyrech*, eating in a stranger's home, stops his begging and stays in town for the Sabbath, or when the host enjoys serving the meal to the *Oyrech*. And our wise men also pay a lot of attention to the body functions, for the body is—according to them—the temple of the soul. So when you indulge in the pleasure you mentioned with your wife, you certainly please God. With your wife it is a *mitzvah*, a sublime act in propagating the human race."

"Rubbish," Mark exclaimed. He stuttered, always a sign that he was nervous. He took off his glasses and wiped them.

"This God of yours has a lot to keep track of!" Hescheles said with a grin on his face. Father pretended not to hear the sarcasm in the remark. He said seriously, "There is nothing too big and nothing too small for Him. Nobody who seeks Him is excluded from His attention."

Hescheles' mocking smile did not leave his face. I knew that assimilated Jews did not like the Orthodox. But later, when I walked Hescheles to the door, he said, "I have to admit that I envy your father his trust in the Belzer Rebbe, who is obviously his spiritual backbone. Your father seems to be a unique person. That Hasidic business. . . pretty unusual stuff. It might be interesting to do a column in depth about it. If only those Russian bastards hadn't confiscated my beloved newspaper!"

Chapter 16

Store Number One had received an allotment of phonograph needles, an item sought primarily by the Russians. We were instructed to sell only one package to a customer. A queue had formed in front of the entrance.

Within half an hour the whole allotment was sold out. Disappointed customers dispersed. Only one Russian, a major, lingered on. He talked to Schwartz, to Mira, then to me. He tried to wheedle a package of needles, but none of us could help him. He implied that we had hidden phonograph needles for resale on the black market.

"You should be ashamed of yourself, accusing us of dishonest management," I said.

Startled, he turned to the cashier and said, "Give me 'The Book.' "

"The Book," hanging in its specified place on the wall behind the cashier, was a reminder that the customer was always right. Most customers used "The Book" only as a threat. To a salesperson, the words, "I'll write out a complaint," were enough to make him bend over backwards to please.

The major, however, stepped up to the cash register, asked Mira for my name and began to write.

"We should have our own book for scribbling down complaints about our customers," I said to Schwartz.

The major gave me a venomous look, slammed "The Book" shut and shouted, "Whore!" Then he ran out of the store.

Everybody stood stock-still, as if paralyzed. Schwartz ran after him, but the major was already driving away.

It was now my duty to report the incident to my superior, Tur. Tur, who was still angry with me on account of Fischer, would have to send

"The Book" to the main office, where it would land on Director Serge's desk. Serge would refer the matter to the *miscom*, who would start an investigation, and my lies about my background would be discovered.

I was devastated with worry. My worries grew even greater when I received a summons to appear in the main office for a hearing. Was it about "The Book?"

In his office, Serge motioned from behind a paper laden desk for me to take a seat; then he went back to his notes. He finally pushed his papers aside and stretched out his arm to shake my hand. His grip was firm. "Why didn't you come last week. Were you afraid?" he asked.

"Last week? The summons reached me yesterday." I felt my lower lip tremble as I replied to his question.

"A little," I said.

"Is that why we had to phone you twice and then issue a special summons?"

I stared at him.

"Hasn't Tur given you my messages?" he asked.

Neither Tur nor anyone else had relayed any messages to me from the main office. Was Tur that vindictive?

Since Mira had been friendlier toward me lately, I liked to believe that the incident between Tur, Fischer and me was forgotten by now. Evidently, Tur still hold a grudge against me. First the anonymous letter to Mark, and now he willfully withheld messages from the main office.

I could get even with Tur by telling Serge what was going on, but I had never before taken revenge on anyone. While I considered it a flaw in my character, I could not change—until now.

I would try to adopt a new attitude this time.

"Oh, your messages, " I began, "yes, your messages." Against my will I continued to stutter: "Yes. . . Comrade Tur. . . forgot to give them to me. . . but he apologized."

Now Serge stared at me and said nothing.

Finally he came out with it. "Tell me everything about the incident with the major."

I told him the story, without omission. At the point where I had made the remark about introducing another "Book" for complaints against customers, he laughed out loud.

"It's a splendid idea. We'll suggest it at our next meeting and maybe on a nation wide basis. Anyway, we will soon have enough consumer goods and all quarrels in the stores will belong to the past."

There was a silence.

He went on, "First we have to be in a position to withstand attacks from our enemies. As long as we are surrounded by them we will have to be patient, *Tovarisz* Brand."

"To the extent of being called a Whore?" I asked softly.

"You mustn't forget that our people were trained for centuries by a few aristocrats. And you very well know that they were purposely kept in darkness under the Czars. After all, it's only over twenty years since the revolution. Some of our people still remain in darkness, like this major." He stopped and looked at me as if waiting for me to say something.

"But the major is educated," I said hesitantly.

"*Niekonieczno* (Not necessarily)," he replied. "Maybe he was promoted on account of heroic deeds." He grinned at me. "You meet me in twenty years, my girl, and I will remind you of our present conversation. Illiteracy will have been eradicated by then. Believe me, our next generation will be the intellectual elite of the world."

He sighed. "It is a long way, I know, but we will get there! The New Russia is in its infancy and, like an infant, it needs affection, special understanding and, above all, forbearance! But one day the whole world will marvel at our greatness. One day!"

He looked like a visionary. He stared silently above my head, perhaps at the ceiling.

After a few moments, I cleared my throat. He lowered his gaze and buzzed for the secretary. He asked her to call the *miscom.* As if waiting on the other side of the door, the *miscom* entered immediately.

"*Tovarisz* Brand is here for questioning," Serge said.

Once more I repeated the incident with the major.

When I was through, the *miscom* said, "If you, *Tovarisz* Brand, cannot control your temper while waiting on customers, you should not have chosen this occupation." He gestured me out of the room. "You'll hear from us," I heard him say as I reached the door.

I left the main office wondering if I'd been fired. Would they transfer this ridiculous case to the labor court? I could get a sentence that would confine me for at least five years in a labor camp. I shuddered.

On my way back to the store, at the corner of Kopernica and Legionov, where a huge poster bearing a hammer and sickle was inscribed, "Proletarians of the world, unite!" I ran into Fischer. "What are you doing outdoors in the middle of the day?" he asked.

"I committed a 'crime' and was summoned to the main office to give my version of the incident," I said humorously.

"You, a crime?"

I told my story for the third time.

Fischer laughed and said that no injustice in any shape or form would take place as long as a man of Serge's caliber was involved.

More relaxed, I continued back to work. Soon new doubts entered my mind. Even if Serge was on my side, as the comptroller had been at the Trade Union meeting, would he be able to withstand the *miscom's* pressure? I could never make out the exact division between the responsibilities of the two Russians. Serge was the director and should therefore be the superior. But the *miscom* represented the political cell; therefore he probably had the last word in this kind of case. Would Serge stick his neck out for me? He was always objective enough in his dealings with other employees.

Tur was waiting. He greeted me nervously. I knew he was anxious to find out whether I had given him away. I reassured him by telling him I had told Serge he had forgotten to give me the messages and that he had apologized to me. Tur, the worldly man, blushed.

A few days later, I was late for work. Tur had warned me that he would report me if I was late again, so he was not pleased by my action. I felt tense as I worked and thought it best to quit.

On my day off, I filled out a questionnaire in the main office. I found it difficult to answer the question, "For what reason do you wish to leave?" I realized that I could never say anything against Tur to the

Russians, just as I hadn't let him say anything against Fischer in the meeting hall. Tur was vindictive; I was not. I wrote, "Failing health compels me to seek easier work."

The same secretary who had hired me took the application and asked me to wait. She went into Serge's office and I grew nervous. I couldn't understand why I had to fill out an application form to quit a job. I couldn't understand why Serge appeared and invited me into his office.

"Why do you want to quit?" he asked.

"The reason is on the application," I said.

"I mean the real reason."

"That's the real reason."

"You say you're sick. All right. Bring a doctor's certificate. Do you think you can get one?"

"Of course I can," I said with an assurance I didn't feel.

"We don't have the time to consider the mood of every worker." Each word was spoken with razor sharpness.

My own voice wavered. "If you won't discharge me, may I please be transferred to another store?"

"Why?"

"The other stores are much smaller; my work might be less trying."

"Don't you think we can judge where to place our people? Your place is in Store Number One. You'd better get back to work."

"It's my day off."

He returned to his notes without taking further notice of me.

Being compelled to stay on the job was something new and bewildering. I told Gina that I planned to be less diligent so as to be of little use to the company and then perhaps they would fire me. She advised me not to fool around, that I could be accused of sabotage.

"You'd better increase your sales instead."

"Tur is a vicious man. He tried to destroy Fischer; now he has it in for me."

"Roma, try to get along with him."

A few days later the Weekly Circular brought an unexpected turn of events. “Manager Tur has been transferred to Store Number Four, where Xenia worked.”

All of us were surprised and wondered what could have prompted Serge to make such a decision. Though Tur was going to be in the same position, it was a demotion nevertheless. This should have given me a feeling of relief and satisfaction, but it did not. I felt miserably guilty, as if my secret wishes had somehow found their way to Serge.

Tur was crushed. He said he would never go to Store Number Four, that he would rather resign. Mira said she would too. Neither of them knew that it was easier to get a job than to leave one. It was unbearable, almost repulsive, to look at how the proud manager, Tur, suddenly became servile.

Five minutes before closing time, Mira invited me to a coffee shop. We were hardly seated when she attacked me. “It is all your fault. You asked Serge to transfer him. Serge transferred Tur to please you.”

“Why should he do anything for me? Maybe he wants to end all the bickering that goes on in the store. And what are you implying? For heaven’s sake, can’t you think of anyone without suspicion?” I cried out the last sentence.

Mira mitigated our hostile words by saying, “You know, Roma, we were good friends until you started that defense action concerning Fischer. You made a fool out of Tur in front of all the Ukrkultorg employees. You’d better try to make it up to Tur somehow if we’re going to be as close as we were.”

“What can I do? You flatter me; as if I had any power. I don’t. I’m fighting for my own survival in the Ukrkultorg. And as a matter of fact, I did help him. Tur did not give me Serge’s messages in order to harm me, and I, dumb as I am sometimes, lied to cover up for him. I said that he forgot and had apologized to me.”

“How do you know he did it on purpose, maybe he really forgot?”

“I have been a victim of Tur’s deception for so many months that I think he should make it up to *me*!

“It was you who started the feud. You were conspiring against Tur on Fischer’s behalf.”

"I was never against Tur, I only wanted justice to prevail and time has proved me right."

"Roma, I am begging you, let's all become friends again. Help him."

"How can I, a saleslady, help the manager?"

"You know how to talk; ask Serge to reconsider," she said. "Will you please?"

"Tur was very nasty to me, but I must admit that he is the most qualified manager for Store Number One. I really think it is an injustice to have him work in another store."

"So? Will you talk to Serge?"

"I will. . . ."

After this, I spent a sleepless night. Why did I have to promise to help when I really should have been content to be free, finally, of Tur's viciousness? Why should I turn the other cheek? It was, again, my own weakness of character that I had fallen prey to. Perhaps I shouldn't go to see Serge. . . .

But the first thing in the morning, I did go.

"Still not satisfied, *Tovarisz* Brand?" Serge remarked.

Still annoyed, he asked, "What is it this time?"

"The item in the Weekly Circular about Manager Tur's transfer distresses me and my co-workers. Tur is indispensable to Store Number One."

"I was under the impression that you didn't care too much for your manager and that you had good reasons for feeling that way."

How did he know?

"Tur is the right man for a prestigious store," I said. "He's very hurt and I feel uncomfortable about the whole thing. Why don't you transfer me instead?"

"Please, let me decide what to do! Don't interfere! For your information, *Tovarisz* Brand, I know everything that's going on in the store." His razor sharp voice sounded almost threatening.

Though at the door, I tried once moreagain

"Tur intends to quit."

"We'll see about that. That'll be all now, *Tovarisz* Brand."

I found out later that, immediately after I had left his office, Serge picked up the telephone and leaked information to Tur regarding the purpose of my visit. A few days later, we read in the Weekly Circular that Tur's transfer had been canceled.

After that, there were never any problems with Tur again. In time he became a good friend and my greatest champion. As for Serge, I became the champion of his fastidious sense of justice.

Chapter 17

One Tuesday I went with Bruno to my parents' so-called apartment. On the way I saw Father pumping water on Place Teodora. Bruno rushed to "help" and I reached for one of the two filled buckets, intending to carry it to the apartment.

"I carry both buckets for the balance," Father said, smiling at me.

How could a man who had lived half his life in ease and comfort, who was called upon to arbitrate feuds among his townspeople, and who had often had the last word on important matters affecting the whole community. . . how could such a man, in only a short time, adjust to living in obscurity and primitive conditions and still keep his good disposition?

Perele, her black Spanish hair soft and shiny under a white kerchief, was waiting in the doorway. When she saw us, her dark, almond shaped eyes lit up. She hurried down the seven steps, grabbed one bucket and, annoyed, said to Father, "I told you ten times. All I need is water for tea." She turned to me. "Your father is a stubborn man. In the evening I can get help from a neighbor, but he has to do everything himself."

Inside, Father poured the water into the water barrel. Tin-Tin came running and rubbed her head against his foot. She screeched when Father turned and accidentally stepped on her tail. He bent down, stroked her fur, and immediately washed his hands.

Perele had taken Bruno on her lap and was talking child's talk to him.

I looked around, scarcely believing what I saw. The place young Sigi Tannen had recommended, and that I had thought was not fit for a dog, was completely transformed. The dilapidated empty store I had rented was now worthy of being called a home, and a very cozy home at that.

Areas divided by pieces of furniture formed a bedroom, a living room, and a kitchen.

"You really think it looks all right?" Perele asked, her face flushed.

"I think you did the impossible," I said. "Wait till Sigi sees it."

"When we moved in, your father promised that this would be only temporary, that he would find something better, but I think we'll remain here until we can go back home to Niemirov. We won't look for anything else, except for Blume's sake. . . ."

"For Blume's sake?"

Wiping his hands, Father said casually, "Now it's time to bring your sister over."

"You told me distinctly that you wanted her to remain with Abner in Niemirov," I said. To Father, the procedure of getting him and Perele to Lvov must have seemed very easy. I tried to swallow my resentment.

"I changed my mind," Father said. "Blume is a young girl and her place is with her parents. Besides, I already miss her."

"But I don't know how; I wouldn't know how to go about it."

"Why not talk to Lieutenant Agron? He helped us, maybe he can also help Blume."

Father didn't know that Blume had wanted to go to Lvov with me long before he had been compelled to flee Niemirov. I had always wanted to give my younger sister a chance to break out of provincial life, a chance to grow and to improve herself. Now, Father's remark stripped me of my initiative. It became his. And he seemed to have no concern about the effort involved.

"As a matter of fact," I said, "I have already spoken to Agron about getting Blume registered by the police in Lvov, but he refused. He said he could only do it once and that he had used up that privilege."

"Speak to him again. What is there to lose?"

The next time Agron came to the store, I let him know that Store Number One had been allocated twelve bicycles, which would be sold the following day.

He arrived at 8 o'clock sharp, just as the store opened and before the line had formed. He looked over the bicycles and picked what seemed the best of the lot. When I wanted to pay his bill, he objected, claiming that I had done enough for him by letting him know about the sale.

This was a good opportunity occasion to approach Agron again but, as always when I was about to ask a favor, something inside me froze. However, the thought of little Blume, always cheerful and, unlike myself, always obeying our parents, made me run after him. I caught up with him as he reached the exit.

Spontaneously, I raced through my request. "I've made inquiries about my sister's possibilities. The last time you were in the store, I told you how much my parents missed her, and so do I. She's only sixteen; she needs parental supervision. I was told that police registration in Lvov is granted only when the petitioner is a job holder. She could get a job at a friend's business, but with one condition: She must first be registered with the police. It's a vicious circle. She can only be registered if she has a job, and she can only get a job if she's registered. I don't know what to do. Perhaps you would reconsider and help me once again?"

"I told you, it's impossible," Agron said sharply. "Don't bother me anymore."

I shrank, and was about to turn, when he looked around suspiciously and added in a lower voice, "Try to find someone, preferably a Russian, who will be willing to give your sister an affidavit saying he needs her services. She can take this to the police. It will work."

"Thank you, thank you."

"One more thing. Don't let her go to the same precinct where your parents just registered."

"But she intends to live with our parents."

"Silly child, the important thing is to get her legally into Lvov. Once she is police-registered, she can move to any precinct she wants. Then it's a mere formality."

The only Russian I knew who was in a position to give me the necessary statement for Blume was Serge. According to the advice Agron had given me, he was not to be approached again on the same matter. Perhaps I could ask Tur or Mira if they knew some Russian who had connections, I thought.

A Russian customer who occasionally purchased sporting equipment came in, saw the bicycles, asked if they were on sale, and then repeated his question.

Absentminded as I had been, I was now alert and afraid of his reaction. My politeness bordered on that of a well-trained slave. Only too distinctly did I remember the incident with the major, the record needles, and "The Book."

Without checking the quality of the bicycles, he bought one. Ecstatically, he stepped up to the cash register to pay the 120 rubles. To his dismay, however, he found only 70 rubles in his wallet.

"Please hold it for me until I bring the balance. I wasn't prepared for such a lucky event. I saw the queue forming on my way to work. . . ," he said, looking at me hopefully.

"I'm sorry, but we're not allowed to hold merchandise. Our policy is "First come, first served."

His freckled face took on a pinkish glow. He stood staring at the bicycle, like a person who is unable to part from a lover. Since the line was now two blocks long, he knew that the allotted 12 bicycles would be sold long before he returned with the money.

I felt sorry for him. From behind the counter, I offered to lend him the balance. He looked at me with an expression of eager disbelief.

On the way to the stockroom to fetch my pocketbook, I caught Mira's disapproving glance.

I handed him 50 rubles.

"I'll leave the velociped as collateral and I'll be back soon to pick it up and pay you back," the freckled customer said.

We were not allowed to hold merchandise. In anticipation of quarrels over the bicycle, as had occurred over the record needles and other scarce articles, I said, "Better take it with you, and bring the money later."

Holding onto the handles, he said, "I don't know how to thank you, *grazdanin.* In any case, my name is Chodorowski and my office is on Legionov, corner of Jagiellonska Street." He smiled happily and left the store.

"You're a fool, Roma. You'll never see him again," Mira said. "Don't you know them? They are cheats and thieves."

"Perhaps, but he's bought things here before," I replied.

"Why should he come back; you made it so easy for him. I wouldn't give him the time of day."

One hour, then two hours passed and Chodorowski did not return. Perhaps Mira was right to call me a fool. I was probably too gullible.

Chodorowski showed up at 12:30. "I waited for lunchtime to pay my debt because I wanted to take you out to a nice restaurant," he said.

"I've already had my lunch," I lied. We refrained from socializing with Russians unless it was a business necessity.

He returned my 50 rubles and I looked triumphantly at Mira. He told me that the bicycle was already packed in a crate, ready to be shipped to his son in Kiev.

How strange: a Russian buying a bicycle in Poland that was manufactured in Russia, and then shipping it back to his son in Russia.

"Why didn't you bring your family to Poland?" I asked.

"My wife and I decided against it because the family felt more secure remaining in our homeland. I'd rather be there myself."

I didn't believe him. Another wave of Russian "Volunteers" had recently crossed the Polish border.

As if Chodorowski could read my thoughts, he continued, "I am not here by choice. I was sent to do a job. My heart and interests remain at home. I wish you could see my apartment. It is just as nice as any I've seen here. My wife is a physician. She works in a state hospital. I'd never ruin such a good life to fish in strange waters."

I asked Schwartz to have someone else take care of the customers and said to Chodorowski, "I thought most of your countrymen welcomed the opportunity to travel. Isn't this your only chance to see what's going on in other countries?"

"There, you're wrong. Only people who have nothing to lose, adventurers and people who want to run away from themselves, look for opportunities in new lands. Myself and others like me live only for the time when we can return to our homeland."

I moved with Chodorowski to the end of the counter, near the exit. How well he was trained to say the right things at the right time, I thought. He was like the first soldiers who entered Poland; they served as public relations persons and received extra large allowances that worked, in many cases, against the temptation to steal from the local population.

"Were you really that happy in Russia?" I asked; I hoped that now, with no one around to overhear us, he would tell me the truth.

"Of course. Take me for example: My parents were so poor that they and all six children were hungry most of the time. I was twelve when I became an apprentice in a bakery. My employer beat me up every time he had a quarrel with his wife. I never complained to my parents because I was afraid they would tear up the contract and I would be hungry again. After the revolution, at sixteen, I got a white collar job through the New System, and I was sent to night school. Look at me now."

He paused for greater effect and straightened his posture. "Now I am the director of a bank. Could this happen under capitalism?"

I stared at his freckled face. If he was a bank director, he was in a position to give Blume the affidavit she needed.

Me, ask a favor? I froze. The words to ask him formed in my head but they wouldn't come out of my mouth. Perspiring, I remained silent.

Then he helped me himself. He had taken my right hand in both of his and held it while looking straight into my eyes.

"How will I ever repay you for your trust in me, and for giving my ten-year-old son so much joy?" He seemed very sincere.

I took a deep breath and, stuttering, told him of my sister's predicament. I ended with a direct request: "Perhaps you can help me?"

"Nothing easier. Let her come to my office. Let her ask for me personally. It just happens that we need a few good people right now."

I was stunned and happy. But now I was also worried, because Blume had never worked before. She had led a sheltered life and had been pampered by all of us. She was the youngest. Would she perform her duties adequately in an office?

Soon Blume came to Lvov. She registered in Gina's police precinct, but lived with my parents on Place Teodora. After her initial interview, she worked in one of Chodorowski's bank branches. After a few more weeks, Chodorowski told me that, rather than my being grateful to him, he was grateful to me for recommending such an excellent worker.

To avoid explanations, and perhaps quarrels with my father because Blume was now working on the Sabbath, she slept in my house every weekend.

With all my family "settled," I found myself thinking about the scholarship Serge had offered me. Two young men from our company had taken advantage of Serge's offer and left for Moscow, while another had left for Kiev. One of them was newly married. His young wife, though dreading the separation, encouraged him to grab the opportunity. Why shouldn't I do the same? A few years and the profession I was seeking would be mine. What difference did it make whether I studied in Vienna, New York, or Moscow?

I knew I would have another battle with Mark. A few years ago, after Mark had opened his law office, I wanted to learn to type. He was strongly against it, even claiming that I might ruin the typewriter. I begged him to let me work in his office, and then I quarreled with him, but to no avail. I became furious. I said that the claim that I might ruin the typewriter was a blind to hide the real reason. "Chinese men bind their women's feet to keep them from growing, and you're binding my mind for the same reason." But he won. I never learned to type.

However, circumstances had changed: I was no longer financially dependent. And his long absences freed me somewhat psychologically. I felt I could win this time.

The only real obstacle was Bruno. In Moscow he would become indoctrinated with Communism. Here he was happy. Blume took him to his grandparents, Mark spent his free time with him, I went with him to the Wysoki Zamek Park for fresh air, Mrs. Kost took care of his physical needs, her children played with him, and lately Benny's mother often babysat.

Bennie's mother, a native of Niemirov, came to Lvov and stayed without ever registering with the local police. She had no permanent place to live and no money. She barely survived. Since her son had been drafted into the Polish Army in 1939, and the Polish Army had started to retreat eight days later, something in her mind had snapped because her son had not come back.

After she had been told that, in the capital cities, the authorities could often locate missing persons, she hitchhiked to Lvov and wandered the streets, carrying a large cotton shopping bag with her belongings. She spent most of the weekends at my parents' house, sleeping in Blume's bed. Finally, Perele put up an extra cot which she never removed in order to give the poor woman some sense of permanence, but it did little to help.

Bennie's mother could not stay long in one place. Wherever she went, she took along her shopping bag, which she rummaged in continually, looking for something she could not find. Whenever she saw a man in uniform, she held out Benny's worn photograph and asked if he happened to know him.

Besides babysitting in the evening, she sometimes came to my house and helped me with my chores. Once, when Mark got annoyed by her presence, I introduced her to Mrs. Kost. There she found a second home.

Bruno liked Benny's mother. He listened open-mouthed to her stories about her son. Soon, the absent Benny became the child's hero.

"My Benny is so strong, he can tear a book apart," his mother would say. Bruno tried to tear a book apart.

"My Benny would never attack anyone, but if attacked, he would fight like a tiger." Bruno became bolder with the neighborhood children.

"My Benny had a heart of gold, and teeth to match." Bruno asked when he would get gold caps.

"My Benny was such a good son that when he went to war he wouldn't let me buy him a sweater because he wanted to leave all the money for me." Bruno resisted wearing his new sweater.

"Sell it," he said, "and keep the money for yourself, Mummy."

He no longer spoke about becoming a dentist and spent much of his time talking about a way to pull teeth without hurting the patient. When his dream turned to bookbinding, the great Benny's mother promised, "My Bennele will teach you."

All this loving attention made me wonder how my child would feel in a totally new environment, like a Moscow kindergarten where even the language would be strange.

Chapter 18

On his last visit to Lvov, my brother Abner told me to be prepared for sudden changes. He warned me that I might have to hide, to run away, and that I should keep my cash and jewelry handy in case of such an emergency. He also advised me as to how to take care of my gold dollar coins.

Mark was at work and Bruno had been taken by Mrs. Kost's oldest son, Baruch, to the park. I was alone in the apartment. I ripped off a long strip of cotton from a sheet, folded it and double-sewed vertical seams into the strip, creating little pockets, each designed to hold a single coin. The separation of the coins would prevent them from clattering.

The end result was a belt studded with my little fortune. With the belt I lined the inside of the wiring of an old, rusty cooker. It had to be old so as not to be a temptation, because an electric appliance was seldom available in stores. I screwed the bottom on tight and placed it in a large brown leather pocketbook, custom made to my specifications. Alongside this, I placed a little tin pot and a paper bag full of rice.

If anyone searched my bag or accidentally looked inside it, I would say I had an ulcer and was on a special diet. I would have explanations for the size of the pocketbook and the accessories inside: to be able to plug the cooker in wherever I might be, and to cook my own health food.

In the midst of this important activity, I heard the doorbell ringing. I quickly buried everything in the sheet, pushed it under the living room couch and went to open the door. It was a special messenger with a letter from Fischer.

> The three months you asked me to wait for your decision were sheer torture. Never have I been so in love and so completely

> lost interest in anyone else. Until now, I existed as if on the periphery of life, but through your acceptance of me I find myself in the mainstream, happily surging ahead and ready to overcome all the obstacles preventing me from joining you forever. I am waiting for your "yes."

I thought that by now Fischer would know where my loyalty lay. The day Mark had arrived to stay, I had made my decision and I was sure that Fischer had sensed it. Throughout the three months I had silently repeated, "Poor, poor, darling Fischer. If we had only met a few years ago."

I suppressed my desire to reread the letter and quickly tore it into tiny pieces.

Chapter 19

It was my turn to sweep the sidewalk in front of our building, an assignment from the house committee that had to be obeyed. Although, for a few rubles, a hired person would do it instead of me, I never liked to shirk such responsibilities.

Today was an exception. Since my duties as a homemaker had increased, I had so little time to spare that I had reduced the Saturday social gatherings in my apartment to once a month. This was the Saturday.

I stopped off at Mrs. Kost's after work, and her oldest son Baruch agreed to sweep the sidewalk for me.

In spite of the heat, everyone came to my house, even my father. To my surprise, Fischer, who had been informed by letter of my negative decision, arrived with his cello.

Mark watched Fischer. Fischer's eyes darted from Mark to me. Gina watched the three of us.

Bruno climbed on Fischer's lap and asked him for a music lesson.

"Bruno, it's your bedtime," said Mark.

"I don't want to go to sleep, Daddy. Please?"

"Let him stay up a little longer," my father interjected.

"Bruno, it's your bedtime," Mark repeated.

Bruno rubbed Fischer's flat, broken nose with his own, slid from Fischer's lap and started to cry.

My father got up and ran his fingers gently through Bruno's silky hair. "Let the child stay up a little longer this one time," he pleaded with Mark.

"Keep out of this," Mark shouted.

Father let go of Bruno at once, went back to his seat on the couch, took some snuff and sneezed into his large plaid handkerchief.

Bruno laughed through his tears. He liked the dwarf Sneezy and he liked Father sneezing. I reached for Bruno's hand, led him into his room, dried his tears and undressed him. Taking him in my arms, I felt his ribs. How thin he was, I thought. I kissed the mole on his left shoulder—my small ceremony—before putting on his pajamas, and tucked him in.

"Bruno, promise to drink lots of milk."

"I don't like milk. Mummy, I love you."

"I love *you* more than anybody in the world!"

Mark came in to tell me that there was a late arrival; Brustinger had come, and he had come with bad news.

I did not respond.

"Why don't you say something?"

"What do you want me to say? That you are determined to dominate me, the child, and my father? Why can't you at least leave my father alone?"

"Oh, that's what's eating you, that I insulted His Majesty. By the way, why did you invite Fischer?"

"I remember that, not long ag,o you asked why he had stopped coming here. Now you're annoyed because he is here. No matter what I do, it's sure to displease you."

I switched the light off and returned to the living room. There I found out that the editor Hescheles had been arrested and taken to Russia.

A day later, on Sunday, Fischer came to the store and slipped a note to me.

At the first opportunity I went to the stockroom and read:

> My traditional values tell me to leave you alone. You've made your decision. But I am lonely as never before. I am restless, unable to think of anything but you. I crave hearing you talk to me alone. I crave holding you. I want to protect you. Please, let me continue visiting you on Saturdays. I promise to remain unobtrusive. I love Bruno; I love you.

Protect me from what? Did he sense that Mark and I had more than superficial disagreements? Did anyone else notice it despite my efforts to cover it up? The quarrel between Mark and Father the night before revealed nothing of my own feelings because I had refrained from taking sides. Did he want to protect me from Mark?

I read the note and had to admit to myself that it pleased me, that it comforted me.

Chapter 20

The National Commissariat of Internal Affairs was now patrolling Lvov. These NKVD men looked more foreign than those who had been stationed in the city for some time. Rumors of impending trouble were beginning to spread. Everybody was afraid. As suspected, a mass deportation took place on July 28th, 1940.

In September 1939, on the day the Germans had attacked Poland, most Jewish males, and some entire families, began a mass exodus from the western part of Poland, where the German Army was expected to enter, to the eastern part of Poland, which the Soviets occupied a few days later.

The line of demarcation between the two occupying forces had been established by an agreement between Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin, and guarded by the Russians on one side and the Germans on the other. Later, the Russians issued a decree ordering the refugees from the west to declare their intentions: either to remain with the Communists or return to their original residences, now under the control of the Germans.

Unaware of what the Germans had in store for the Jews, separated from their relatives, and detesting the now familiar New System, with its hardships and lack of customary convieniences, many refugees registered in good faith for repatriation.

It turned out to have been a ploy. The Soviets immediately labeled everyone who registered to leave as a future spy for Germany.

The refugees who had registered heard a midnight knock on their doors. Opening them, they found themselves face to face with four NKVD men, who ordered them to pack their belongings. If the men had families that included children, the intruders usually offered a helping hand. Most refugees were given three to five hours to pack their belongings and prepare for departure. The exact destination was not disclosed. But they found out it wasn't Poland; it was in the opposite direction, Russia. Their heavy luggage was taken away; they never expected to see it again.

Mrs. Kost, a refugee, wrung her hands and cried, "Why did I have to register to go back? My whole family is here; why did I have to listen to my husband? He was the one who missed his *meshpuche.* Now we'll both have relatives to miss! What will I do with him and three children when we are in Siberia?"

Remembering what the shoemaker had once told Father, that if the Russian police could not find him at home, they would not look anywhere else, I urged Mrs. Kost to hide out. After her husband and Baruch went to stay with another friend, she locked herself and the two children in Bruno's room.

The doomed refugees were assembled at public places. From my front windows, I could see a part of the Brigidki Prison yard, which served temporarily as one of the assembly places.

The sun was bright and the sky stretched out in one uninterrupted blue-gray expanse. Men, women and children crowded the yard. They were made a noise that came through the open window like the wailing voice of doom.

At one moment, I felt guilty for not being among them, the next, I had a sense of satisfaction for being a native of Lvov, and thus safe. I closed the window, but I couldn't make myself leave.

I watched a woman sitting on a valise, holding a bundle with such concern that I decided at once it must be a baby. A short, skinny man stood beside her, busying himself with a cardboard box by trying to unknot the string around it. The woman looked on for a while, than freed an arm and reached for the box. Her movement probably woke the baby because she instantly began to rock back and forth. Apparently unsuccessful at quieting the baby, she handed it to the man. He pushed the quilt away from the tiny face while the mother unbuttoned the front of her blouse. Then she took the baby to her breast.

An NKVD man over six feet tall circulated among the crowd. Now he headed directly toward this group of three. He stopped, took a knife out of his pocket and opened the blade. It glinted in the sun. As he bent over the group, I screamed.

Mrs. Kost stuck her head out of Bruno's room. "Stay where you are, stay where you are!" I cried and looked back outside.

The NKVD man had cut the string around the cardboard box and a short man opened it and rummaged among the things inside.

Mrs. Kost was standing beside me. "Go back to your hiding place!" I said breathlessly. "Don't get caught!"

"Look, look, isn't that Benny's mother?" Mrs. Kost pointed her finger.

"Impossible. She's not from the other side, she couldn't have registered."

But when I looked again in the direction Mrs. Kost had pointed to, I saw Bennie's mother carrying her shopping bag.

"The poor woman is completely out of her mind," I said. "Whenever she comes across a uniform or a crowd she asks whether anyone has seen her Benny."

"Where is Bruno?" Mrs. Kost asked in a strange voice, and I saw her face paling.

"I just saw him in the corridor with little. . . ." I didn't finish the sentence because it was my child holding onto Bennie's mother's worn skirt in the assembly place. I grabbed the pocketbook containing my documents, ran down the stairs two at a time, crossed Kazimierza Street, and in three minutes was talking to the NKVD guard at the Brigidki Prison entrance. "It's a mistake, a terrible mistake. My child was taken. He was born in Lvov and raised right here. Let me get him out."

"Nobody is being let out," the man said sternly.

"So let me in," I said.

"Nobody is being let in. We have our quota. Enough! *Chwatit*!

"I'll point to the child and you get him out," I said.

"Nothing doing. *Chwatit*!"

I knew their blind adherence to the rules, and my increasing anguish made me speechless. But only for a moment. I repeated what I had said before.

"He's my child! You can't separate us! Look at my police registration." I held it up for him to see. "I am not from Cracow; I am not from Rzeszov." With a trembling finger, I pointed to the date of my first police registration in Lvov, in 1934.

A thousand thoughts raced through my mind. Serge might help me. Perhaps the *miscom.* Mira, who, according to Xenia, was his lover, could charm him. Maybe Xenia could flirt with the guard so that I could sneak in.

If only there was enough time!

The guard had said "*chwatit.*" They had the number of people they had been assigned to round up in the Brigidki Prison yard; any minute those people might be taken to the waiting railway cars.

Suddenly I realized that, according to my documents, there was no proof that Bruno was my child. Hadn't the secretary of my company, out of charity, registered me under my maiden name? I was Miss Brand and I had no child. God help me!

The two guards stood unperturbed. They told me to go away. I was about to faint with fear. I held on to the railing of the gate and, like a raging torrent, words suddenly spilled from my mouth. "Listen, Comrades, listen carefully. Either you let me in or let my child out! If you don't, if you don't, I'll hold both of you responsible for the mistake. Here! Look at my working card, look at my *Profspilka* card. You've already seen my police registration; I am all right. My child is all right. And nobody is going to separate us! Nobody! If you do, I won't rest until I get to the great *Batko* Stalin himself. . . ." All the while I was waving documents without really showing them.

Taken aback by my verbal attack, the guards conferred in whispers and then looked back at me. They let me in. They let me out. And Bruno with me.

Chapter 21

Until the mass deportation, we could talk about nothing else at the Saturday evening gatherings but Hescheles's arrest—why he was picked up, where he was taken, and whether we would ever see him again. Brustinger, who was his closest friend, told us how courageously his wife was taking it and how she immersed herself in bringing up their little daughter.

The conversation consisted of rumors that about 100,000 people had been deported to Russia. Each of us had a troubling story to tell.

Fischer's neighbor, a young English–Polish translator, had gone voluntarily into exile, together with her older sister and her children. Robert knew a man who had been hiding, but after he was told that his wife had been taken to one of the internment places, he went to join her and was refused, just as I had been when I wanted to join Bruno in the Brigidki Prison yard. The husband pleaded with the guard but, unlike me, he was unsuccessful. "*Chwatit,*" the guard had said. They had their quota and would not let him in. He waited until the assembled people were taken to the train, saw her looking out the window, ran after it but never caught up. The wife had been deported; the desperate husband remained in Lvov.

We heard so many heartbreaking stories; many were never told. I knew no one who was not deeply affected by this mass deportation. We mourned as if after lost relatives. The futility of our struggle to swim with the current became more and more evident. Today it was them, tomorrow it would be us. Such fear gripped us that we lived in terror that someone would denounce us. We confided less and less in people, speaking only to close family members and always looking over our shoulders to make sure no stranger was close enough to hear.

Mark and I went to work, came home, ate dinner and played with Bruno. Then I put Bruno to bed and Mark smoked his pipe and read law books. However, he had finally stopped griping and had even offered to do some errands for me.

Now every Russian I saw brought to my mind's eye the horrible deportation scenes: people collected against their will, squeezed into trains, and taken to unfamiliar places where they would have to withstand hunger, temperatures below zero, and unbearable working conditions.

I saw before me the husband pleading to be united with his wife; I heard the guard say "*chwatit*," a word that would henceforth make me choke each time I heard it.

My child, my small son, could have been on one of those trains with a caretaker that was half crazed.

In the meeting hall at Kopernica Street, I stayed out of Serge's way for weeks. His image of a "just Communist," an image that Fischer had many times enforced, was tarnished forever, although he personally had not participated in the mass deportation.

I couldn't avoid facing him during his inspections at the store, and then I answered his greetings with a cold silence.

Poor Bennie's mother had been deported. Mrs. Kost's husband had been deported. Three people from Store Number One alone had disappeared during the grand deportation. Serge acted as if nothing extraordinary had happened.

Once I took courage and spilled out my grief. "How could such a thing happen? People registered in good faith to go home to their families and they were betrayed."

"They were allowed to take their belongings. They could take the tools of their trade," he said.

"Why were they taken at all?"

"We are afraid of spies."

"What spies?"

"Working for the Germans."

"Surely you cannot believe that Jews would spy for Germans?"

"You don't have to worry too much about them. Believe me, they'll be all right. They have it a little harder than you do here, but they'll get used to it."

"Used to what?"

"To the environment. To the new conditions."

"Why weren't they told that they had registered for 'emigration?' "

"We have to enforce disciplinary regulations even if it's sometimes devious. We're striving toward a great destiny and on the way we're sometimes forced to be more severe than we'd like to be."

Because there was real conviction in his voice, I wondered whether he was brainwashed, naive, dumb, or plainly ignorant.

He went on, his voice swelling, "If you knew half of what we went through in 1917, and the years after. Most of us considered ourselves lucky to eat potato peelings. And you think you have reason to complain? Just remember, someday you may envy the fate of those who were sent away."

"But. . . ," I began, and swallowed. It was no use, no use at all.

It took several weeks before the first letters from the exiles arrived. Mrs. Kost's husband wrote from Siberia. Other people received letters from Kazakhstan, Ural, and other remote places. Some letters were written in a prearranged code; others slipped through the censorship prevailing in Russia. We in Lvov shared every bit of news concerning the deportees with each other. The deportees told of living in shacks and mud huts. Many walked several kilometers to and from work. But most of the luggage they never expected arrived. This, to them, was a blessing in an atmosphere of general desperation.

The native villagers had never seen dresses and sweaters of such fine make. To them it was a Paris fashion collection. No price was too high in exchange for those desirable articles. They gave butter, meat, bread and eggs for a blouse, a skirt, or a bath towel that a newcomer was willing to spare. Each item unpacked became a treasure. When sold, it kept the wolf from the door, at least for a time. In letters, the deportees begged their relatives to ship parcels, emphasizing that, regardless of what they contained, they would be lifesavers. Committees formed, everybody gave something, and parcels were sent to those remote places.

Other problems developed that no relative or friend back in Poland was able to eliminate. An unmarried woman was often molested by the village men. In order not to fall victim to unwanted attentions, the exiled women often felt compelled to quickly marry an exiled bachelor, if available,

or to take one lover who would protect her from the many.

After a few months of "good behavior," the exile was allowed to apply for permission to enter a large city. Equipped with appropriate documents from the local authorities and employers, he could begin. However, there were problems that had to be overcome: finding an apartment in the city and getting registered by the police. They were the same problems my parents had had when they wanted to move from Niemirov to Lvov.

Only those whose spirits had not been broken strove for a new beginning. Often a whole family pooled its combined moral strength into one member and sent him off as a pioneer. If he was successful, the rest followed later. If unsuccessful, he came back to his family.

All in all, it was a fight for bare survival. The exiles got little consolation from the fact that the local Russian population had to struggle for a livelihood under the same unfavorable conditions. These newcomers were mostly city dwellers and could not withstand the cold, the lack of proper nutrition, the outhouses, the homesickness, and the hopelessness. Many died.

With bad news coming from all sides, we in Lvov could only wonder when, if ever, we would be rid of this burden. Now our hearts grew even heavier as rumors circulated that Italy had joined Germany, and that Mussolini had set out to conquer Egypt.

Once Fischer brought good news: General O'Connor had taken about 200,000 Italian prisoners. We rejoiced because we didn't know that, shortly after, many British soldiers and General O'Connor himself were taken prisoner by the enemy.

Basically, we considered all news to be rumors spread by the Russians for ulterior motives. We never knew how much of it was true. We yearned for liberation. We yearned to be free of arrest, deportation, and unemployment. We dreamed of returning to our homes, to our old familiar surroundings and the luxury of an uninterrupted night's sleep.

Now, another edict was issued: For one time only, every adult was permitted to exchange 200 zlotys for rubles. Leftover zlotys became worthless; henceforth, rubles were the only legal currency.

The decree shocked everyone, particularly those who had saved cash in zlotys. Business people whom the Communists called black marketeers had indulged in activities that, time after time, had brought them to the brink of arrest. They had taken those risks in the hope that, within a given period, they would be in such a financial position as to never have to work for the Communists.

After all their hustling and anxiety, the decree made them as poor as everybody else, and often even worse. Employed workers, at least, received wages in rubles at the end of the month, but the unemployed were stuck with the few rubles they'd received in the exchange. They had no source of further income, and soon they would have to spend their remaining money for food.

Thanks to my brother Abner's advice, I was not harmed by the decree. I had the gold coins, and their value rose daily.

Mark had been in Zloczov when I sold the textiles. Afterward, when I told him, he was very annoyed because I hadn't asked his opinion before selling them and buying the gold coins. Since what I had done turned out so well for both of us, I wondered why he was so upset with me, but no logical explanation came to mind. Bruno had burst in on us while we were quarreling about this; he immediately broke into a fit of sobbing. Afterward, when Mark was about to leave for work, Bruno clung to him and wouldn't let go. He asked over and over, "Daddy, when are you coming back? When are you coming back?" He continued to cry inconsolably after the door had closed behind Mark.

I was glad I didn't have to work because it was Tuesday, my day off. I was glad I could spend time with my unhappy child. I took Bruno on my lap; though unable to repress my anger against my husband, I felt I should say something to calm my son. I smiled and said, "Daddy is coming home at 5 o'clock."

Shortly after, Gina came in. She immediately took in the situation and suggested, "Let's take Bruno to Mrs. Kost and we can go shopping in the black market on Solski Square."

Nowadays, we usually bought most of what we wanted from a Polish countess who had started her business by selling her own things on Solski Square. Once she had learned the trade, she remained in business, selling the belongings of her aristocratic friends. We would tell her what we wanted and, a few days later, she would have it in stock.

The decline of the countess's fortune was easy to measure by what she brought to Solski Square to sell. She had started with her own antiques, then sold her jewelry, and now she was selling personal belongings. Like Robert, she had expressed her opposition to the New System by saying that anyone working under Russian direction served the enemy. I had secretly admired the firmness of her convictions. Now, after the new decree, her olive skin a shade paler, she admitted, "I'm wiped out. All my zlotys are worthless. Can you imagine, the only breadwinner of a family of four getting a few hundred rubles? All my hard work down the drain!" And, forgetting her noble upbringing, she cursed the Russians. "*Niech ich szlag trafi* (Damnation to them)" she swore.

Thrown over her arm, among other pieces of clothing, was something made of a shiny, transparent red material I had never seen before.

"What is it?" I asked.

"A raincoat," the countess said.

"A raincoat? What is it made of?"

"Fish bladders."

"Fish bladders? Wouldn't it take a thousand fish bladders to make one coat?"

"She's kidding you," Gina laughed.

"I am not! It is made of fish bladders; that is what I was told."

"How much for the raincoat?" I asked.

"Sixty rubles."

"I can buy two raincoats for that kind of money."

"Not like this one. Have you ever seen one like it? You won't come across this sort of thing in a million years. It's from America."

"It couldn't be," Gina asserted. "We have no connections with America."

"That's where it's from," the countess said. "It was brought from America to Switzerland and from Switzerland to Poland."

I tried the fantastic garment on for size, noticing with amazement that the blue of my dress showed through as purple. Then I noticed that a button was missing.

"This is not a new coat," I said.

"I never claimed that it was."

The fact that another woman had worn it, far away in America, a woman who was free to travel to Switzerland, gave the coat an additional value. I had to have it. "I'll give you 55 rubles," I said.

Gina pinched my arm. "You're crazy," she whispered. "She'd take 40 or 45 rubles."

The warning came too late.

"Sold," said the countess, and wrapped the raincoat in newspaper.

I paid and she handed me the parcel. "Don't go yet, I want to talk to you." The countess looked concerned. After she stuffed most of her remaining merchandise into a large shopping bag, she took me aside. "You once told me that you would help me get a job. Did you mean it?"

"But you said you would never work for the Russians."

"What can I do? I'm broke."

I promised to try in Ukrkultorg but I knew I wouldn't succeed. By now, "volunteers" from Russia had flocked into Poland, making it virtually impossible for the natives to find jobs. Whereas, in the beginning, the Russians held only key positions in Poland, they were now working as clerks in offices, as salesgirls in stores, and as foremen in factories. When I had originally offered to help the countess, there had been an opening for a salesgirl in Store Number One. That position had been filled by a Russian "volunteer" whose former occupation had been driving a tractor.

Now, only the highly skilled native could get employment, and the *miscom* scrutinized the applicant's background more thoroughly than before. The countess had no choice but to keep selling her wares on Solski Square.

Suddenly, in the midst of our conversation, the countess screamed, "Run! Run! It's a raid." Lifting a clock and a teddy bear from the ground, she hurried away.

People ran in all directions. Within three minutes, most of the shoppers and merchants had disappeared.

Gina tugged my sleeve. "Wake up," she urged. "There will be plenty of time to sleep in jail."

Hugging the raincoat under my arm, I began to run.

People knew that Solski Square was kept under Russian surveillance, and that raids were frequent, but they couldn't resist the temptation. Even Russians in uniform frequented the black market. Where else could we buy something as extraordinary as my red raincoat?

"Stop running," Gina said. "We're surrounded. Let's walk slowly to make it look as if we had no reason to be worried."

Several NKVD men stood at the corner where we were heading. They stopped people to examine their documents and their shopping bags or packages. When one of them asked to see my papers, my heart pounded. I handed him my working card and my Trade Union membership card.

"What do you have in your package?" another NKVD man asked.

"It's her raincoat," Gina said, looking directly at him.

"A raincoat in this beautiful weather?"

"You can't be too careful," said Gina, with an ambitious grin. "You want my papers too?" She pushed herself between us and offered him her working card, dangling her Trade Union membership card nonchalantly before him. "I work in the Europa Hotel."

The Trade Union cards made an obvious impression on the NKVD man. "*Charaszo, charaszo* (All right, all right)," he said. "They're both working," he said to his mate.

Happily hugging my raincoat, I moved past the guards.

About sixteen people, lined up in twos and guarded by four NKVD men, came from another direction. A statuesque woman towered above the others. It was the countess, without the large shopping bag, without the teddy bear, and without the clock. I stopped and stood watching her solemn face as the group approached. Her eyes darted from me to Gina as she passed, but she spoke not a word. I was grateful to her.

"Let's get going," said Gina. "This is no time for sentiment. Come on!" She bent and fiddled with her stocking, then straightened up and pushed ahead, pulling me forward.

I turned around once more to look for countess.

"Do you think I have no sympathy?" I heard Gina say.

"We might at least have taken a message from her for her family," I said.

"We have."

"What do you mean, we have?"

"The countess dropped a note of paper and I picked it up."

"Impossible! I was with you all the time and I didn't see you do that."

"That's good. What use would it be if anyone had noticed? I have it inside the top of my stocking. We'll read it later."

At home, when Gina removed the paper from her stocking, we found an address scrawled in red lipstick; the mark on it had been made by the countess's lips. The address proved to be hers. We delivered the message to her mother. When we saw her two children, we were very sad.

Chapter 22

The doorbell woke me at midnight.

So now it was us.

Shaking Mark's shoulder, I said, "Get up, quickly, they've come for us."

Mark, rubbing his eyes, sat on the edge of the bed. "What happened? What happened?"

"Don't you hear the doorbell? Make it fast! Here are your glasses. Get up and leave through the kitchen door. Stay at Mrs. Kost's until the coast is clear."

With one swift movement, he reached for his meticulously laid out clothes as the bell rang repeatedly.

I slipped into my house robe, made sure that Mark was near the kitchen exit, and then went to the foyer to look through the peephole.

A lone man stood there. It was my brother, Abner. I opened the door and embraced him. "For heaven's sake, what are you doing in Lvov at this hour?"

"Let me have a drink of water," he said breathlessly.

"Come to the kitchen and keep quiet. I don't want to wake Bruno. No, not water; better a glass of milk."

He followed and, while I was pouring milk into a cup, he said, "Father was arrested."

"What?"

He sat down at the kitchen table and gulped down the milk. "I came to Lvov a few hours ago," he said, putting the empty cup on the table. "I went straight to Place Teodora to warn Father to run away. . . ."

"Why?"

"Just as the shoemaker predicted, they deported Lefkowicz, Weniger, and other Jews from Niemirov."

"None of the Poles?"

"None of the Poles from Niemirov and none of the Ukrainians, only the Jews. And they were looking for Father."

"Did you tell them where he was?"

"Are you out of your mind? Of course not! But I was afraid someone might. That's why I immediately hired a horse and wagon and left for Lvov to warn Father. As I was making suggestions about where he should hide out, Berek came in. . . ."

"Who's Berek?"

"A cousin, a distant cousin. You don't know him. He used to live with his parents in Lubaczov, now he's in Lvov. Berek was all excited because he'd made a profitable deal on Solski Square. Then, after the merchandise changed hands, a Russian police officer arrested them both. Since the police found no black market material on Berek, he was free to go."

"What's this got to do with Father?"

"You didn't let me finish. Perele invited Berek to stay for dinner and, as he complimented Perele on the home baked bread, four Russian police officers burst in. Perele had forgotten to lock the door. Two of them began to question Father about his relationship to Berek and the other two searched the house and found the textiles between the double doors, under the beds, and in the closets."

"Oh, my God!"

"I can't understand why Father didn't sell them as you did. Dollars can be hidden much more easily."

"That's beside the point now," I urged. "Go on! Go on!"

"Perele and I were able to sneak out while the commotion was going on."

"Where is she now?"

"She went to stay at a friend's. She even managed to take the family jewelry along. . . ."

"How like Perele," I noted.

"And I came to warn you because the police may make a surprise appearance here. Someone mentioned you and they asked for your address. If you have something compromising, hide it at a neighbor's place."

"Should I go to Place Teodora?"

"Maybe you should. Maybe you can do something before it's too late," Abner replied hopefully.

My mind raced ahead of Abner's.

"All right. Now listen, here is Gina's address." I quickly scribbled it on a piece of paper. "Stay there overnight. Tomorrow morning, go home to Niemirov. Don't hang around. I'll let you know what happens."

Abner left.

I went to the bedroom and busied myself by scattering new slips, shirts, nightgowns and sweaters among my used lingerie, hoping to make them less conspicuous in case of a house search.

The precaution of having hidden my gold coins in that rusty old cooker was now paying off. I took the cooker out of the large pigskin pocketbook and placed it in the garbage can. In my own pocketbook remained only the loose diamond that a jeweler had taken from its platinum setting, which I had pressed into a tube of lipstick. I tiptoed into Bruno's room and picked him up. I hugged him and felt his comforting warmth through my robe. Then I knocked at Mrs. Kost's door in our agreed-upon manner: two long knocks, a pause, three short ones, and two long ones.

Mrs. Kost took my Bruno, who remained asleep. I didn't have to explain anything. She knew immediately that I was in trouble, or perhaps she had learned from Mark that something was wrong. I asked her to let Mark remain in her house until he went to work. Then I returned to my apartment, dressed, put on a khaki raincoat and hurried in the dark to Place Teodora.

The light was on in Father's flat.

Apprehensively, I climbed the seven steps, wet from the rain. I knocked, but the entrance door was open. Inside, a Russian in uniform stood guard. Father was fully dressed and lying on his bed. Tin-Tin was curled up at Father's feet. Blume lay on her own bed. Berek, who had brought all this trouble to my family, sat in the kitchen area at the dining table, his head buried in his hands. Yard goods were piled up against the wall of the living room area.

"Who are you?" the Russian asked.

"I am Roma Brand. . . ."

"Why did you come?" Father broke in. "Now you'll be arrested too and there'll be no one left to look for the Belzer Rebbe. We need his advice and we need his blessing."

"Shut up! And you, show your papers," the Russian shouted.

I took out my passport and handed it to him.

He leafed through the pages, kept it and said, "I must detain you until my superior comes back."

All of a sudden I felt warm. I unbuttoned my raincoat and asked, "What time do you expect him?"

The Russian shrugged. "My superiors went for transportation." He pointed with a broad gesture to the fabrics, taking in the three "criminals."

Father was right. I shouldn't have come. I shouldn't have listened to Abner. Now I would have to get out of here before the other three Russians came back! It would be much more difficult to persuade, convince, or bribe four than one. What had Gina said when I was supposed to go to the passport office? "Flirt. That works most of the time." It did not work this time.

"*Tovarisz*, why don't you pick a few coupons of French silk for your wife," I said.

"I don't have a wife."

I thought how furious Mark would be if the Russian superior detained me too. He never stopped warning me against getting involved with my relatives. I thought of my frail child. How would he survive without my care? The thought of Bruno reminded me of how I had bluffed and browbeaten the Brigidki Prison guard into letting me take Bruno away from the assembly place. I collected all the energy I could muster and said in a determined voice, "Look, *Tovarisz*, it's getting very late. If you keep me here any longer, I won't be able to get up for work in time. And I'll hold you responsible. Here, look. Look at my working card, take my home address and the address of my company, so that if your boss wants me he can find me easily in one of two places. . . ." I handed him a piece of paper on which I had scribbled the two addresses. I took a breath and finished with, "Get out of my way." I passed him and walked out.

Outside, I ran down the steps two at a time and then ran all the way to Kazimierza Street.

After four hours in bed I sneaked out before Mark woke up Mrs. Kost's and rushed to Place Teodora One. Tin-Tin was lying on the landing meowing. It sounded as if she were calling for help. I walked up the seven steps, saw a padlock on the entrance door, picked up Tin-Tin, and went to the janitor. He informed me that Father, Blume, Berek and a "mountain" of yard goods had been taken away by the Russians at dawn.

Through Mrs. Hescheles and others whose relatives had been arrested, I knew that the Russian police never divulged where the "culprit" had been taken, or where he was being held. On the way home I finally thought of a scheme that might help me locate my family: I would take a food parcel to a neighborhood police precinct. If they accepted it, I would know that my people were there.

At home, I hastily filled a dish with warm milk for Tin-Tin, made a few sandwiches, wrapped them and went to the nearest precinct. I asked the NKVD man sitting in the vestibule for permission to leave a food package for the three members of the Brand family. The NKVD man looked at a list of names in front of him and told me that no people of that name were in his jail.

It worked!

I called Tur and told him that I would have to miss work for a few days because of a cold. Then, I canvassed one precinct after another. Exhausted from waiting, fear and frustration, I went home without having found my family.

An anxious Mark was waiting for me. He begged me to stop my search and leave them all to fate.

The following morning, after Mark left for work, I started making the rounds again. On the third day of my search, in the Legionov precinct, the NKVD man looked over his list and asked me to sit down.

I was sure I had finally found them.

After two hours of waiting, however, I began to worry. I fell victim to my own scheme. The fear of being detained grew in me to such an extent that I began to plan to remove myself from what I now believed was a trap. Quietly, I started toward the exit.

The NKVD man, who seemed to have been preoccupied with petitioners and paperwork, called, "Where are you going?"

I returned to my seat.

He called in a subordinate and continued to make some notes. The subordinate took away my pocketbook and emptied it on the desk. My lipstick containing the diamond rolled off the desk and fell with a clack on the floor.

The NKVD man glanced up from his papers and seeing my belongings spread out, shouted, "*Job Twoja Matj!*" The obscenity seemed to be directed at me, but soon it became clear that he was reprimanding his subordinate. "You should know better by now! We search personal belongings only when there is a warrant for arrest."

The NKVD man was a nice guy after all!

He now had me follow him into an office and, in a high pitched voice, threw questions at me: "When did you start to work? Where are you working now? What kind of job do you have? What organizations did you belong to before 1939? Do you have any relatives in a foreign country?"

A typist recorded my answers.

I had the feeling that my negative answers to the two last questions had some positive results. I showed him my passport, my working card, and the Trade Union membership card and I noticed that he mellowed somewhat.

But then he said, "It would be best if you told the truth."

"I spoke nothing but the truth."

"Your father has already confessed to his activities in the black market."

"How could he confess to something he didn't do? He hasn't done a thing to make money since the war started. My sister works for the bank, I work for Ukrkultorg, and between us we give him enough to live on."

The NKVD man knew very well that even two salaries were not enough for four people. However, it was an excuse that would hold up at any hearing, in any court.

"How come he had all those fabrics in his house?"

"When my mother was alive, she had a textile store. She's dead now. The store closed and that's where the fabrics came from. You know what? Take it, distribute it to the poor and let my father go."

"Leave your parcel here and you can go," he said. His stern face broke into a smile and his high pitched voice had changed from that of an angry sergeant to that of a man making small talk at a cocktail party.

I was dumbfounded and remained seated.

"Now you don't seem to want to go. You were very anxious to leave a moment ago," he said jokingly.

Still not sure whether he meant it, I got up slowly. "What about my father?" I asked softly.

"That's a different matter. You will hear from us."

I left. And, although I didn't know what to do next, I felt a thrilling sense of achievement. Through my tactics I had found out where my relatives were being held, an absolute prerequisite for taking the necessary steps to have them released.

Briskly I walked to the tramway station. My elation soon began to ebb as I realized that someone was following me. "So this is how they work," I thought to myself. Hadn't they let Berek go free, only to trail him to Father's flat?

Too frightened to look back, I began to walk more quickly and was almost at the tramway station when a voice called my name. I turned my head and saw Blume running towards me.

Overwhelmed, I started to run in her direction. My sister and I collided in an embrace.

Chapter 23

"It was terrible in there," Blume said as we walked arm in arm to my apartment.

"I can imagine. Thieves and other hardened criminals. . . ."

"You'd be surprised; they were in the minority. Mostly honest people like myself were in there, accused of black marketeering, of having said something derogatory about Communism, or accused of being bourgeois."

I looked over my shoulder. "Thank God you're out! The food, the filth and, worst of all, the hearing this morning! I thought I'd never get out of there."

"Why the hearing?" Blume asked.

"I felt as if he were squeezing me like a lemon."

"Was it a man with a wart on his nose?" I knew now that we had encountered the same man.

"Yes, how did you know?"

"He interrogated me too," Blume replied.

"He told me to confess to Father's black marketeering and he said that you had confessed already. That worried me, because I thought you'd been arrested too. Then I cried. You have no idea how much I cried. I was sorry for you; I was sorry for myself. I wondered who on earth would help us out of this mess. Oh, I'm so happy, Roma." She embraced me and tears welled up in my eyes.

"You know how I answered the man with the wart on his nose? I asked. "My sister and I are working and both of us contribute to our parents' upkeep."

Her answers had corresponded to my own and that probably convinced the NKVD man that she was telling the truth. He checked her passport, her Trade Union membership, he called her freckled boss, who verified that Blume was employed in his bank, and she was released.

"Did you see Father?" I asked.

Blume started crying again. "Not since we were taken to the police. They separated us. Father and Berek were taken to another wing of the building. What are we going to do?"

"Right now, I'm confused. We have to get him out. But how, I don't know."

"What about Berek?"

"I could strangle Berek. He brought the whole thing upon us."

We decided that, for the time being, Blume would be living with me, and that both of us should return to work immediately.

Two weeks passed. Blume and I were subpoenaed to appear at the police precinct on Legionov Street as witnesses to Father's "crime."

We registered in the vestibule and went up to room 113. A captain about fifty years old, with a high forehead and thick black eyebrows that almost met above a sharply pointed nose, questioned us separately, then together. He smiled amiably, showing a set of dentures. At the end of the hearing I jokingly invited him for tea.

In a light-hearted way he accepted. We agreed on a Wednesday at 5:30 in the afternoon.

Mark was furious about the invitation, but Brustinger, the lawyer, said that because the captain had accepted the invitation he probably expected a deal. He advised me to have 5,000 rubles ready in cash for the extraordinary opportunity of handing it to him in private.

Mark called it illegal, an outright bribe. He said that Blume and I might land in jail and that he wanted no part of it. On Wednesday he would go straight from work to the Warszawski coffeehouse. His warning didn't scare me because I didn't believe the captain would show up.

My friends knew only that my father was in jail. Everything we did about it we kept secret, except from Brustinger, who was living next door.

Still, each of them, as if by mutual agreement, came to offer financial help. Everybody believed that, when in trouble with the Soviets, one had to be prepared to bribe. Tur, my former enemy and now my friend, Gina, Robert, my old boyfriend, Sigi, who had helped once before in getting the flat for my parents, and even Fischer, who himself had so little, came to offer their help.

I didn't accept the money they brought. Robert thought I was too proud to take a loan from them. He was the richest of them all. He approached Blume during my absence, persuading her to accept a loan from him, and promised that none of the others would ever know. Brustinger did the same.

Thank heaven, we didn't need financial help.

I sold a few 20 dollar gold coins, took 5,000 rubles out of the proceeds, wrapped them in a Russian newspaper and, though not really believing that the captain would show, I waited anxiously. Mark had left, as he had said he would.

At 5:30 sharp the Captain arrived.

To the tune of Tchaikovsky's "Sleeping Beauty Waltz," I poured vodka, and Blume held out a tray with tea sandwiches. The captain toasted us and emptied the glass in one gulp. Blume and I also downed our drinks.

The captain put his hand on Blume's shoulder and said, "Perhaps I can help."

"I believe you can," she said.

I refilled the glasses. After taking another sip, my head began to swim. I saw Blume clinking her glass against the captain's; I saw him smile broadly; I saw his snow-white dentures, his grayish hair; I saw his vodka spilling and the glasses refilled again.

All three of us drank and laughed. I took a napkin and wiped the spilled vodka from the table. Then I laughed again without reason. My thoughts were fuzzy.

Blume nudged me. I stared at her for a moment. Behind the captain's back she made a gesture of counting money.

Oh yes. I remembered the money in the newspaper. I got up and brought back the package. I had ripped off a piece of the newspaper, creating a little window in the bundle, and placed it, very visibly, on an extra chair without saying a word.

The captain's eyes narrowed; his two thick eyebrows now actually met in the center and formed a single, curved line over his eyes.

Please, God, let him accept it. Please, God, don't let him arrest me for committing an illegal act, I prayed silently.

The captain took the bundle and turned full face to Blume. "I will see what I can do," he said. "Come to my office tomorrow."

There was so much promise in the tone of his words that I already pictured Father in my living room, sniffing tobacco, sneezing, and telling us about his past experiences in jail.

Blume, with tears in her eyes, pressed the captain's right hand and did the same with his left.

He laughed, and then he looked at his wristwatch. "It's time for me to go," he said. "Don't forget, Blume, I'll be waiting for you at 5:30."

When the door closed behind him, I grabbed Blume and danced her around the table. This visit had turned out to be a success. We'd have our father released in no time. Didn't he accept the large sum of money? At home he would count the rubles. Five thousand rubles was no joke. So what did he want with Blume tomorrow at a time when the offices closed and she'd be alone with him? I stopped swirling around and said, "You're not going tomorrow. . . ?"

"Why?"

"Because. . . ."

"Oh, Roma, you're so suspicious! He's just a good natured old man who believes that Father hasn't done anything wrong and wants to correct the mistake."

I swept the crumbs from the table onto a tray and kept sweeping when there were no more crumbs. Then I walked to the kitchen and threw the crumbs into the garbage can. All at once I was sober.

Back in the living room, where Blume was folding the napkins, I said in a voice that barred contradiction, "You're not going to the captain tomorrow."

"The captain wants to help us," Blume said in a small voice.

"You're not going!"

Three days later, only I was handed a subpoena.

In room 113 the captain's beady eyes looked straight at me as he hammered out questions.

"What kind of work did you do before the war? Where are you working now? What organizations did you belong to before 1939? Do you have any relatives in foreign countries? What organizations did your father belong to? Isn't it true that your father was head of the Jewish community in Niemirov? Isn't it true that your father was counsel to the Polish town administration in Niemirov? Do you deny that your father was the organizer and president of the Gemilath Chesseth Kassa Bank in Niemirov?"

Not a word about Blume. I was prepared to give a phony excuse if he asked me why Blume had not kept her appointment, but his stern and formal behavior belied the amiability he had displayed so generously on his visit to my apartment. Not once did he smile, not once did I see his snow-white dentures. It was as if he had never drunk vodka with me and my sister, and as if he had never accepted 5,000 rubles.

"We need your stepmother for a hearing. The information she might supply us with may help me to release your father."

"She disappeared. I don't know where she is."

He frowned and his eyebrows met. "Suit yourself. I only want to help."

Was Blume right? Was this captain just a good-natured old man who believed in the innocence of my father?

At home Mark listened to what had transpired. He begged me not to take Perele to the captain. He thought it was a trap. He implored me to stop interfering. "Don't you see what you're doing to Perele and to yourself? Not to mention me and our child?"

"Don't worry about me."

"I am worried. Every time you go to meet them, I'm afraid I'm never going to see you again. And how can you take such a responsibility on yourself—to have Perele walk into the lion's mouth?"

"He took the money; he'll give something in exchange."

"You'll never get wise to them."

"I can't bear the thought of Father being in jail and probably the butt of jokes on account of his way of life."

"Don't stretch your luck, Roma. You told me yourself that, in the police precinct where you had to wait, you thought they'd arrest you too. Enough is enough! You neglect us, yourself, and your job. Will you feel better when they take you in the end? They will! They will! And without any reason, because they're the scum of the earth."

Perele listened to me quietly; her eyes filled with tears.

"You are a courageous girl, Roma."

She said it softly, but the reprimand was there.

"Do you really believe the captain will keep his word? Have you forgotten he's a Communist?" And she made her usual gesture of adjusting a loosened strand of hair although it was, as usual, perfectly smooth and pulled back in a knot.

She reached beneath her blouse, took out a cotton drawstring bag filled with the family jewelry she had salvaged the night of the raid on her apartment, and handed it to me. Then she asked me if I would mind stopping at her Place Teodora home. There she packed an overnight bag.

How totally resigned she was; and still, she didn't refuse to go to the hearing.

I was no longer sure I had the right to take this responsibility upon myself. But I was so engrossed with my image of Father suffering in jail that I blocked out all other considerations.

The moment Perele disappeared into room 113 to be interrogated by the captain, a thought crossed my mind: "*Would I make my real mother come here? But I love Perele, and I myself am here!*" I wanted to call her back. The door had closed behind her and I was left alone in the corridor with the nagging feeling that my real mother would not have been here.

The waiting seemed endless. What if they keep her? I decided that convincing Perele to come to this hearing would be my last effort on behalf of my father. I had worn down her resistance; I had closed my ears to Mark's warning that it might be a trap, and I had escorted her to the police.

At last the door opened and I jumped to my feet. The gentle Perele, looking exhausted, her face flushed, came out. “Thank God it’s over,” she said, linking her arm in mine. We walked down the stairs supporting each other.

All I could get out of her was that the captain had questioned her over and over again about who had sold us the yard goods and he told her that she would be hearing from him.

On the way out, she told me that she was very happy for having given in to my pressure.

Thus, when the captain told me a few days later that the only reason for keeping Father in jail was the lack of additional information only Abner could supply, I went to Niemirov to fetch Abner.

His wife Sara begged him not to listen to me, not to go to Lvov.

However, Abner felt that what our stepmother had done for our father he, too, should do.

Now I was sitting in the same corridor I had been in a few days ago, only this time I was waiting for Abner. I made a silent resolution not to interfere any more. This was the last time. From now on, Mark and Bruno would be my only concern.

Finally, the door to the captain’s office opened. I jumped to my feet. But instead of Abner, a Russian I hadn’t seen before came out and said, “You can go home.”

“I am waiting for my brother.”

“Your brother remains here.”

My heart was pounding; my chest was hurting. “I’d like to see the captain,” I cried out.

“The captain is very busy. I’ve been ordered to send you home. Or would you rather stay here with your brother?”

He shoved me to the stairway. I was invaded by such a powerful feeling of self-recrimination for failing in my cause that my heart was pounding and my hands were shaking. Suddenly my eyes began to swim and I felt nothing.

Chapter 24

When I awoke, I didn't know how much time had passed. My body felt like a ton of bricks. I opened my eyes but closed them again, for even my eyelids felt heavy. I couldn't form a thought without effort. How long had I been asleep? I wondered.

A woman in a white bonnet bent over me and straightened the pillow under me. "We picked you up unconscious the day before yesterday." It was the voice of a stranger.

The day before yesterday. . . two days? I thought, and everything became hazy again. I tried to open my eyes at least halfway and saw the upper part of a young woman against the window. Could it be Blume? She was whispering to someone beyond my vision. It was all confusing.

I heard a man's voice say, "I think she's awake." It must have been Mark's. Everything was blurred.

The next moment—or was it hour?—I felt a warm palm brushing my forehead, as my father used to do when I had my fainting spells as a child.

"She's cold; she's absolutely cold." It was Blume's concerned voice and probably her palm stroking my forehead.

A man's reassuring voice came from far away. It was definitely familiar. "She'll be all right. I spoke to the doctor. It's only shock."

That wasn't Mark's voice. Whose was it? I wished it were Mark's. I drifted off again.

The following morning I was fully awake. The doctor told me not to worry; I was not seriously ill. He planned to keep me in the hospital three more days in order to do some tests.

Blume, Perele, Gina, and now her husband Paul, as well as Robert and Fischer, came to visit me every day. Brustiger came twice. Mrs. Hescheles, Tur, and Mira came once. Even Xenia Lukov came to visit.

Only Mark did not show up. Was he so busy with Bruno? Or was he afraid? I asked Blume and Gina to tell Mark that I missed him and that I expected him the following day. I hoped they would volunteer to explain his absence. They did not.

I waited impatiently for the next day and, when he didn't show up, I got worried. He must have been arrested too, I thought, and they don't want to tell me.

When I was alone with Gina, I motioned for her to come closer. She sat on the edge of my bed, looking at me with compassion. Of course they took Mark, I thought. Or why wouldn't Gina or Blume tell me why he wasn't here.

"Gina, I want the truth about Mark. You're not doing me any favors by hiding it. I'm worried sick. Tell me!"

In her flippant manner, which didn't correspond with the compassionate expression on her face, she said: "Don't you know your husband? He got panicky when neither you nor Abner returned. Soooo he doesn't want to get involved."

Not until I got home from the hospital did I find out that Mark had taken Bruno and gone to Zloczov. I felt my heart sink.

"He was out of his mind," Gina explained. "He thought that both you and Abner had been arrested and he was afraid that they would pick him up too. He came with Bruno to hide in my place, stayed overnight and quit his job in the morning."

"Nobody can quit!"

As it turned out, he had learned that from me. He used the same excuse I had used to bring my parents to Lvov. He told his Russian boss that he was the only son of a sick mother and the only source of support for her and his sister. He said that they lived in Zloczov and that it would benefit all concerned if they shared a single household.

Unfortunately for me, his boss had received a request for experienced hotel help from their branch in Zloczov. So he transferred Mark to that hotel!

"How did Bruno take it?" I asked Gina.

"He cried, of course, but when he was promised that he would be with you again in a few days, he went with Mark like a good boy. Do you know that the the *smarkacz* (the little brat) likes traveling?"

With all my might I held my tears back. I would not cry in front of Gina. She had never had a kind word for Mark, and now she seemed to be starting on my son.

Later, the hospital had called Ukrkultorg and told them that a Roma Brand had fainted on the street and was now their patient. Mira went to the Europa Hotel and asked Gina to convey the message to Mark. But by the time Mark found out that I had *not* been detained in the police precinct, it was too late. All the telephone calls between his boss and the Zloczov hotel, and all the paperwork, had been concluded.

Mira was now singing a different tune.

"Look, Roma, you know what I think of the man. This time, though, I can't blame him. He begged you not to get involved. He warned you, and when he thought you had been arrested, he got scared. All of us thought you had been arrested. It's a miracle you got out of this mess. Perhaps the 5,000 rubles weren't thrown out the window after all."

"When he found out I hadn't been arrested, and that I was in the hospital, couldn't he at least have come to say good-bye?" I couldn't hold back the tears any longer.

"Don't cry, Roma. He's not worth a single one of your tears."

"It's not Mark who's unworthy, it's me. I neglected him, I neglected our child and, on top of everything, I delivered my own brother to the hangman." I sobbed in Gina's arms.

"You did it in good faith."

"How dumb can a person be?" I sobbed.

"None of us is smart enough to outmanoeuver them."

"Why did he have to take Bruno away?" That was the worst blow of all.

"The truth of the matter is, Roma"—Gina disengaged herself from me—"The truth is, I didn't oppose him. I thought it would be better for Bruno to have constant care in his grandma's house; it would be more convenient for you, too, if you intended to go on trying to do something for your father."

"And Abner. . . . ," I added. Was Abner my first concern now? I asked myself.

"And Berek," Gina said.

"We'll see about Berek! He's the one who brought this all on us," I retorted sharply.

My oldest sister Anna came from Rava-Ruska to see whether she could be of any help. She impressed upon me the importance of not involving Blume in any of this. Blume, only seventeen, was already holding a full-time job. And that, Anna felt, was plenty for a youngster. I wholeheartedly agreed with her.

I asked Anna how we could fulfill my father's wish that I contact the Belzer Rebbe on his behalf. Anna would know because her father-in-law, Shaje Halbertal, better known as Shaje Raver, had served the Belzer Rebbe in the capacity of voluntary "minister for local and foreign affairs."

"My father-in-law used to come home whenever he missed his family, but since the Communists entered Poland, he hasn't been home at all. He knows that the holy man is much more exposed to the danger of getting arrested and deported than other Jews. So he, together with a few other Hasidim, has remained with their God-given leader to protect him." She sighed heavily. "My father-in-law is prepared for the supreme sacrifice: to lose his freedom, even his life," she added.

"Doesn't your mother-in-law resent her husband's absence?"

"No. Not at all! She's proud of her husband and so are their two sons."

These feelings were typical of the small towns. In each town it became a status symbol to strive on the path of the 613 Jewish rules. Men like Shaje Raver and my father were considered to be the elite; only the assimilated, who lived, for the most part, in the larger cities, thought differently.

Anna's mother-in-law, a physically fragile little woman, had managed a lucrative textile store for many years. Now, her two sons and their wives helped her run the business. She deeply believed that the prosperity her family enjoyed came as a reward for their strict adherence to religious rules, and, of course, it was the result of their Rebbe's blessing.

A kind of envy crept up in me because this family, my parents, and those believing like them, had spiritually grown to the extent of being able to put themselves in second place. They knew their way.

Anna and myself, together and separately, made the rounds to find a *macher,* a person with contacts to influential people. Through one of them we found out that my father, brother and cousin had been transferred from the Legionov precinct jail to the Brigidki Prison on Kazimierz Street, across from my house.

At 7 o'clock in the morning, Anna and I went to the main entrance of the prison with a food package for each of them. A long line of people carrying parcels had already formed. Starting at 8 o'clock, they would be permitted to go into the waiting room, where each would deposit the parcels for their relatives.

My heart missed a beat when I saw tall Xenia walking down the street toward the line. I looked the other way, hoping she wouldn't notice me. Until now, no one in the Ukrkultorg knew about my predicament except for Fischer, Mira and Tur, friends I could trust. Xenia, a party member, would have no use for the daughter of a "criminal." Perhaps she would tell Serge that she had seen me with a package in front of the Brigidki Prison, and he would ask me questions and fire me. I needed the working card now more than ever.

Xenia came straight toward me and, as if it were the most natural thing to find me there, asked, "How are you, Roma?"

"Fine," I said boastfully. Then, disgusted by my own hypocrisy, I added, "I'm in trouble, Xenia. It's a mess. My father is in prison."

"As long as you are not in prison it's not such a mess. How long has he been there?"

"A few weeks."

"What is he there for?"

"I don't know. The usual; what I mean is, I. . . really don't know. Anyway, don't tell anybody in the Ukrkultorg about my predicament. Not even that you saw me here. O.K.?"

"O.K., I promise," she said.

"Thanks, Xenia, I know I can count on your word," I said, wondering whether I could.

Her face, without any makeup, suddenly brightened. "You know what, Roma, one hand washes the other. You can do me a favor too. Will you?"

"Certainly."

"Tell your friend to stop fooling around with the *miscom.*"

"What friend?"

She pulled her wide shoulders up, pursed her unpainted lips and said, "Mira."

"Mira? You're joking."

"Are you pretending you don't know anything?"

"What do you mean?"

"Everybody else knows she's having an affair. . . ."

"I know she's having an affair with Tur."

"Don't be so naive. She acts as if she has a sweet tooth for Tur, but meanwhile she's sleeping with the *miscom.*"

"Impossible! Why whould she do such a thing? Any woman would prefer Tur to the *miscom,* wouldn't you?"

"No! Definitely not!" she said, and I reminded myself that most women would have preferred handsome Robert to Fischer. I left the three packages with Anna and stepped out of the line so that our conversation wouldn't be overheard.

"Ever since I was fifteen," Xenia was saying, "I've wanted to be raped. It never happened because I never said no in the first place!" She laughed proudly. "And these Russian men, they seem shy at first, but ooh, brother. . . !"

The sensation that had always crept over me whenever Xenia was around had taken hold of me again. Was it the odor Xenia's body exuded, so strong it penetrated her jacket? The odor Mira had labeled "stable duty?" Or was it her bold talk about sex?

"Don't you agree?" Xenia asked. She laughed again.

"I like tenderness."

"Eh, that's mashed potatoes. You don't know what's good, that's clear. Mira does."

"How do you know about Mira?"

"I clean the *miscom's* room," she said. "He seemed so alone in a strange country that I decided, as a favor, to make him feel more at home, to clean it once a week. Last Monday I found Mira's lace-edged handkerchief between the bed and the wall."

"There are many women with lace handkerchiefs."

"I knew you'd say that," Xenia snapped. "This one was hers. I swear by the Holy Mother, it was hers. It had an "M" embroidered on it. And the room was in a bigger mess than usual. Mira is off on Sundays, isn't she? There were two dirty glasses. One was stained the colour of her lipstick, and the bottle of cognac was half empty. You know that Mira doesn't like vodka, it's not grand enough for her ladyship. And last but not least, the handkerchief and the whole damn place smelled of that French perfume she's uses, Ap. . . Apelege. . . ."

"Arpège?"

"That's it, that's the one. Could you write it down for me?"

Suspecting that she was plotting against Mira, I said, "Not now, some other time."

"Please!"

"What do you need it for?"

"What a dumb question," she said, and pulled at a loose strand of her strawberry hair. "I want to buy some. I want to use it. It may help me get my boyfriend back."

"I still can't believe it," I said, looking at Xenia's full, unpainted lips.

"Do you think for a moment that such a millionairess could get into the Trade Union without someone pulling strings? Never! She knows what she's doing. She's not a sucker like you, who, for some crazy reason, decided to sleep with a poor church mouse like Fischer."

I blushed. So people gossiped about my private life. I looked over my shoulder to estimate whether Anna could hear anything from the small distance dividing us. As if from far away, I heard Xenia scheming on. "I don't want to hurt your feelings, Roma, but you have to try a Russian to find out what's really good." Again she laughed loudly, showing her large front teeth. Then she asked for the time. "I have to go," she gasped and, pulling up her wide shoulders, she started to run. After a few steps she turned around and cried, "Tell the bitch to lay off or I'll knock her teeth out!"

Chapter 25

A *macher* of whom Gina had heard lived with his family on the third floor of an apartment house on Kopernika Street. His wife, Mrs. Grien, a stout woman of forty, opened the door, listened to my request and refused to let me see her husband. He was in bed, sick, she said.

This was the fourteenth address Anna and I had obtained through friends and acquaintances. None of the thirteen seemed to have direct connections with the Police. One had said that his friend had a friend who knew a judge; another said that his contact was out of order at the moment because of sickness. In conclusion, we felt that none of them were in a position to help us.

This Mr. Grien had been highly recommended. He was my last hope. I didn't know where to go from here.

I walked slowly down the stairs and, at the second-floor landing, I passed a man coming up with a doctor's bag. Then it was true that Mr. Grien was sick! Somehow I had the feeling that this sick Mr. Grien whom I hadn't seen was different from the other *machers*, that he was the one who could really do something for my relatives.

Without realizing it, I had turned around and was walking back upstairs. I stared at Grien's doorbell and froze. My hand would not rise to push the button. I slumped down on the stairway leading to the fourth floor, leaned against the cold wrought iron banister and pleaded with myself to take courage from Fischer's belief in me. I took out his latest note and read:

> My heart breaks for you because you are all alone. But I know your courage will overcome all obstacles, and you will achieve anything you set out for. I wish you would let me help you. The

> hours spent with you were always racing away. Without you, they are dragging as if time stood still. Remember, I love you.

Ring the doorbell once more, I thought. All Mrs. Grien can do is say "no." But she had already said "no." So, holding my fur lined coat tightly around me, I remained hunched over in the gloom and the semi-darkness.

Two teenaged girls carrying school books came up the stairs, glanced in my direction and disappeared into Grien's apartment. Every time the door opened, a beam of light fell on me. The man with the doctor's bag left and, shortly after, Mrs. Grien came out with an empty shopping bag. She, too, glanced in my direction and I hoped that perhaps, after recognizing me as the petitioner of two hours ago, she would invite me inside. She didn't.

After half an hour she came back with her shopping bag full. I thought, "Now or never," and said softly, "Mrs. Grien, I am waiting for a moment when your husband will feel well enough to receive me."

"*Dziewczyno,*" girl: go home. He's a very sick man; he can see nobody!"

I didn't move. Where would I go? To the empty house, without Bruno? Even Mark's grumbling and reproaches were more bearable than the void he had left. Ghosts were haunting me, telling me that I deserved to have been abandoned for not having given him the attention he seemed to need. Other ghosts were judging me for what I had done to my brother. What was wrong with me, anyway? Why did the responsibility for so many fall on my shoulders? I felt weak, and my chest was hurting.

Once again a beam of light descended upon me. This time I didn't look up because my eyes were filled with tears.

"My father wants to speak with you," someone said.

I blinked, looked up, and made out one of the teenaged girls. Holding onto the bannister, I straightened up, tried to smile and followed the girl through the door into the kitchen and to her father's bedroom.

A skeleton, propped up by four pillows, lay on the bed. A long, painfully fragile hand stretched in my direction. I reached out but was afraid to press it in the usual handshake.

The skeleton motioned for me to sit down. I was deeply ashamed for having forced myself on him. I had no right to be here. This man was going to die, I thought, and the tears that I had tried to conceal were now running down my face. All I could do was to apologize for my intrusion. Then I told him my story.

"Who is supporting you?" Grien asked.

"I am, myself. I have a job. I also have some savings and jewelry. My father has money too. We have enough to pay anybody anything. Please, Mr. Grien, help us!"

Grien made a gesture that appeared to convey disdain, but perhaps I didn't understand him.

"You misunderstood my question. I thought your father was *your* breadwinner, and that was why you were so determined"—his voice was so weak that I had to move close and carefully follow the movements of his violet lips—"to get him out. You are a good daughter. Wipe your tears, my child."

"You would understand my desperation if you knew my father. He can take a great deal of misfortune without complaining. But as an ardent Hasid, he will become the butt of mischief because of his behavior. And my brother is the victim of my own stupidity. Please, Mr. Grien, help me!"

Hovering over him, I heard him say, "I am sorry. I can promise no miracles. I do promise that, as soon as I can find the strength, I will meet the prosecutor. You see, I am his tailor and we've become friends. I will tell him the Brands are my relatives and that they were mistakenly arrested." After a coughing spell, he continued, "All I can tell you is that the prosecutor has helped me in similar cases. Now stop crying, my child, and come back in a few days."

I believed Mr. Grien was the man. He, or no one, would do something for us. I told my sister Anna that I'd found the right contact, so she should stop running around looking for other *machers*.

Anna left for Rava-Ruska.

A week later, Mr. Grien still looked like a corpse. He was leaning on his four pillows like the first time, almost in a sitting position. His skin was yellow and his eyes in the shadowed sockets seemed like two empty holes. Only his smile showed that the man was alive.

"How are you today?" I tried to sound cheerful.

"Better, much better. As a matter of fact, I'm ready to go on an errand for you."

"Really?"

"I am waiting for my brother, who will take me there. If you like, my child, you can wait here till I return."

His brother arrived, picked him up as if he were a child, and carried him down the stairs to a waiting *dorozka.* I was afraid he might die on the way.

I waited an hour in Mrs. Grien's company for her husband's return. He came back with encouraging news. The prosecutor had promised him that my relatives would not be sent to a prison in Russia, at least not in the near future. That alone was an achievement.

"My advice to you," Mr. Grien said as soon as he was propped up on his pillows, "is to wait patiently."

But patience was a virtue I had not been endowed with. Since I knew through Mr. Grien that the prosecutor's office was located on Brayerovska Street, I stopped off there on my way from work. I hoped that, by mingling with people in the waiting rooms some lucky accident would furnish me with extra information that, if I told Grien, would hasten my father's and brother's release.

I did find out that the name of the judge assigned to investigate our case was Savrucki. I was tempted to see him. When ten days had passed without having heard from Mr. Grien, I knocked at Savrucki's door.

A short man, about thirty, asked with surprise, "Did you say your name was Roma Brand? What a coincidence. I was just about to mail a subpoena to you and your sister. Is she here too? No? Too bad. We could go on with the hearing right now. We will fix another date. Is next week all right?" He was very polite.

"Next Tuesday is fine. It's my day off." I wanted him to know right away that I was working. To let him know that my sister was also employed, I added that it was easier for her to adjust to my day off because her work consisted of rent collecting in a bank and it was now the middle of the month.

A few days later, Blume and I answered questions and the investigating judge made notes in his papers. His whole manner seemed open and sincere. It was probably the first time he had been on this kind of job alone in a foreign country. Eager to do his best, and not yet spoiled by his influential position, he wanted to remain within his code of ethics. After assessing him, I took courage and complained, "Is a man guilty of black marketeering because he doesn't throw away what was in his possession long before the war started?"

Blume understood. She picked up the thread, "My mother had a textile store. She died and the yard goods remained," she said.

"These yard goods were found in his flat and the police used them as evidence against him," I added. "Is this justice? There is no evidence. There can be no evidence because my father is no black marketeer."

The expression on Savrucki's face was serious. He looked from Blume to me according to who was talking at the moment. To me, it was obvious that he believed us and that, furthermore, he was even embarrassed by the mistake the police had made.

Encouraged, I said, "To lure my brother, who had nothing to do with the whole matter, to a hearing, and then to betray my trust and arrest him, is more than I can understand."

"If it is true that the police have made a mistake—and in this case it's possible they did—I will rectify it," Savrucki said. "That's what the investigative judges are for. To see that the guilty are put to trial by the prosecutor and then punished, and to set the innocent free. I promise nothing for your cousin. He was caught red-handed. We are going to start with the old man. Tomorrow morning, bring me an application for a temporary—I say, *temporary*—release for your father until the court hearing. Use your father's old age as the reason. Isn't he over sixty?"

"No. . . ." I didn't finish because Blume, quicker to catch the cue, lied, "Sure. He's over sixty."

"Just do as I tell you. Leave the rest to me. I will do everything I can for you. Make sure you bring the application tomorrow. I will have the prosecutor sign it" (the same prosecutor who had used Mr. Grien's services, I realized), "and the day after tomorrow I will be on Place Marjacki. I'll pass your store at lunchtime and let you know the outcome."

Jubilant, Blume and I left. The next morning I submitted an application, and on Thursday Blume and I spent our lunch hour together waiting in front of Store Number One for Savrucki's appearance.

He was punctual. He told us that the release papers for Lajzor Brand had already been signed by the prosecutor and we would see Father sometime on Monday.

When Monday came and passed, Mira bet me 100 rubles that Savrucki had been pulling my leg. Brustiger didn't completely share Mira's distrust but had some doubts about Savrucki's sincerity anyway. Gina shook her head and the seed of doubt was planted.

Aside from wanting with all my heart to have Father released, I was equally eager not to be disappointed by this Russian who I had believed to be uncorrupted and unspoiled by the turmoil of political change, a "good Communist" in the category of Chodorovski, or even Serge.

Tuesday came and went, then Wednesday and Thursday. I paid Mira 100 rubles. The loss of the money hurt me less than the triumphant grin on her face.

On Friday, Father was home.

Gone was the red beard. The black hair and side locks were shaven off and gone was the blue of his round eyes. They were now a watery gray. He had lost 20 pounds. To keep with the dietary laws he had been eating only dry bread and drinking only tea. His black caftan hung loosely on his body. Despite it all, he seemed in excellent spirits. He said he had been convinced that, with the blessing of the Belzer Rebbe he would be out sooner or later. He even asked me to bring him Tin-Tin.

Two weeks later, Abner was free and, somewhat later, Berek. It was then that Mr. Grien explained his arrangements with the prosecutor. "As you know, I am his tailor. We meet from time to time for fittings. I never accepted payment for my services. He told me what he was looking for and was unable to get in stores. Sometimes he needed a piece of furniture, a toy for his child, a piece of French silk for his wife, or some gadget. I bought them all at exorbitant prices on the black market. While I was fitting him for a suit, I'd casually mention the name of an arrested person. I never went into details. At a later meeting I'd mention the name again. If the prosecutor smiled at me, it meant he'd be able to do something positive about the case. If he shrugged, I knew he'd do nothing to incriminate himself. Only when the "criminal" was back home did I know what the prosecutor had done." He paused. And as he went on, his yellow face betrayed embarrassment. "I have no wish for any payment whatsoever for my services. But my wife wanted good private doctors for me, and therefore I am compelled to set aside my principles in order to pay my bills. Tell me frankly, my child, how much can your father afford to spend without seriously reducing his means?"

Grien received 5,000 rubles. Had he asked for twice as much, we would gladly have given it to him. The bribe between the judge and Grien—which could be considered a sign of moral decay—had turned out to be a blessing in disguise.

The release of my family from jail was, for the Jewish community in Lvov, an earthshaking event. Jumek Gruss, a member of one of the most respected families in Niemirov and Lvov and a close friend of Abner's, called me. He reminded me of their—and our—longstanding friendship, and asked me to reveal the ways and means of getting his father, Mechel Gruss, out of the Russians' clutches. I gave him Grien's address and told him confidentially how much we paid him. I wrote Mark about this happy ending. He promised to bring Bruno back. Two weeks later, Bruno came with Mark's sister Suzan. She explained that Mark's job in Zloczov had turned out to be much better than the one he had held in Lvov in the Europa Hotel. He had already been promoted and, under the present circumstances, it would be foolish of him to give it up.

When acquaintances now asked me about Mark's plans, I had no answer. To my child I repeated over and over again that his daddy would soon be with us again. Soon; very soon.

Chapter 26

It had been snowing for the last few days and it was my turn to shovel in front of our building. It was bitterly cold, the snow frozen on the surface. I had to dig in with all my strength. I perspired a lot and started to sneeze and cough. Exhausted, I went up to the apartment and Bruno.

It was Saturday and I expected my friends. Because I was having guests, I filled the glazed tile stove in the living room with a generous load of coal on top of a few shavings of kindling wood. I poured a little petroleum on the heap and, with the help of a match, fire engulfed the kindling and then the coal. Now sparks flew up into the chimney.

Dry coal, good quality. Only people holding working cards received allotments of heating material, and a tip to the salesman helped to get a better quality. The allotment would not last throughout the winter season, but I could supplement my needs by selling gold dollar coins. The unemployed had to buy wood and coal on the black market—if they had money. I felt lucky.

There were other reasons for me to be happy: Father, Abner and Berek, all reunited with their families; Blume and I back at our jobs; open house reinstated.

My guests were eating apricot preserves imported from Russia—a small token in exchange for the heavy machinery and tons of wheat the occupier nationalized and dispatched to his homeland.

We were now talking about the delegation of four who were to be selected from among the 120 employees of the Ukrkultorg in Lvov, and who would represent the Polish branches at the convention that was going to be held in Russia.

"Fischer is making too much of this trip," Mira said. "Kiev is only the capital of the Ukraine, it's not Moscow."

"Still, it's part of Russia, ruled by the same system for many years; it must be a very interesting place to visit," said Fischer.

"I can't understand why they're doing it. Aren't they afraid that the members of the delegations from Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia will tell tales of what they've seen in Russia after their return?"

"If they come back at all," said Mira. "Roma, tell them the story about the Russian woman who wanted to buy three gloves in your department, so she could hold one extra in her hand."

"*You* tell them," I said.

"Well," she started out, laughing, "this Russian woman thought the extra glove was supposed to be held in one of the already gloved hands."

Everyone roared.

"Perhaps she was from a village," I said.

"No, Roma, she was the wife of a dignitary and you know it," Mira said.

Robert, his tan gone, and no longer as dashing as he used to be, said in an agitated manner, "And what about those soldiers relieving themselves in the bathtub and washing their hands and faces in the toilet bowls? I saw it with my own eyes."

"How could you?" I asked.

"They came to evict us from our apartment."

"You never told me."

"At the time you had enough of your own problems."

"Tell me now."

"They claimed they needed our six rooms for some office. What a lie! A Russian executive moved in all alone; even his wife had remained in Russia. But, when the requisition took place, they told us the six room apartment was a waste for the three of us."

"Where do you live now?"

"On Sloneczna Street, near the Jewish theater. Two rooms, no privacy at all." He sounded bitter.

Sloneczna Street, populated mostly by Jews, was a far cry from

Academicka, and two rooms for a family of three used to six rooms, explained his resentment.

I thought of that one visit to his house and how I had admired the brass bed, the Sarouk rugs, the paintings by Kossak in his room, the French furniture and the Swiss lace curtains in the *salon.*

While thinking of this, I must have missed some of the conversation. Now I heard him saying, "They consider splashing water in the toilet bowl some foreign game. They splash it just for the fun of it. And what about blowing their noses through their fingers? All of you *must* have seen it! And, Roma, don't tell me that only peasants do it; some officers do it too."

Father came to the rescue by abruptly changing the subject. "What do you think of Roosevelt's being elected for another term?"

"What's the difference," Mira sighed. "Nobody gives a damn about us. The Americans are so far away. . . ."

"I disagree with you," Father broke in. "Perhaps the time has not yet come, but you'll see. . . . You'll see what the Americans will do. They're our only hope!

"Does that mean that the election of Roosevelt in America is good for us here?" Blume asked.

"Roosevelt is a great man," Father said. "It's certainly good for the American people and it's also good for the whole world."

"Let's get back to our immediate concern," Fischer said.

"I think this whole business of sending a delegation to Russia is a hoax," Mira said. "They need a few skilled workers, so they're luring our people under the pretext of conventions and excursions. Once they're there, they'll keep them for good. So my advice, Tur, is not to accept the honor. Take it from me, my dear, you may never come back."

"I only toyed with the idea of going," Tur said. "Besides, one has to be elected by our staff, and I'm not that popular."

"You're getting carried away, Mira," said Fischer, and he swallowed the piece of yellow apricot that had been visible through the gap of his missing teeth. "You're absolutely wrong in your assumption that this is a trick. I was ordered to make round trip train reservations for five people, Serge included."

"Even so, I wouldn't go for a million dollars," Mira said.

"How about you, Roma?" Tur asked.

"Me? I was on sick leave for weeks; if one has to be elected, I'm not eligible. There are many employees who are more popular and better workers than myself."

"Your sales record is sky high again; you run the two departments smoothly," Tur said.

"If you could, would you go?" Fischer asked.

"I am terribly curious about the Russians," I said. "What I hear about them conflicts in many ways with what I've personally experienced."

I caught an exchange of glances between Fischer and Tur.

Mira took another cookie, bit into it, slowly chewed with her mouth closed, and then said, "Her sympathy for the Russians increased considerably after they let her father go free. She doesn't care about the thousands rotting in jails, in labor camps, here and in Russia. Do I have to remind you of Hescheles, Roma? Where is he? Why was he taken in the first place? Do you know? Does his wife know where he is? For all I know, he may be dead! They probably shot him. An innocent man! She looked around at my friends and concluded jokingly, "Perhaps we should be more careful in her presence."

There was something disconcerting in her voice. But I had never succumbed to the lure of popular opinion. For me, self-approval was more important than peer approval.

The importance of the meeting at Kopernica Street, where four delegates were to be elected, was underlined by the presence of all three Russians, and especially by Serge's presiding over it. He had made it clear that the votes were to go to exceptionally capable members of our company because it was a great privilege to go to Russia, to participate in an event at which Ukrkultorg members from all of Russia would assemble. Then he had yielded the floor to Tur.

Tur had taken this opportunity to announce, in his baritone voice, a new piece of news not yet printed in the Weekly Circular: Roma Brand was proclaimed *Stachanoviec*, a worker who achieved production above the set maximum. "I'm sure I speak for all of you when I say that she deserves this honor. Congratulations!" He bowed in my direction.

Xenia was the first to applaud, and several others shouted their approval. The clapping died down, but my embarrassment lingered as I faced all those well-wishers.

Tur, an excellent speaker, came to my rescue when he turned his attention to the voting procedure. Three male delegates were selected. At that point he suggested Comrade Brand as the fourth. Before anyone had a chance to react, Serge began to applaud and the rest obediently followed his example.

I was elected. Serge seemed pleased by the choice.

When I left, I found Fischer waiting for me in the vestibule and he walked me home. He saw my election as a terrific opportunity to see the world.

Robert thought that I was crazy to leave my home, even if it was only for two weeks. Mira cautioned me once more that I might never come back.

I disregarded all the warnings and prepared for the journey.

When I got home I took Bruno on my lap and said, "*Brunusiu*, Mummy is taking a short trip. Where would you like to spend a vacation? With your grandparents on Place Teodora or with Daddy in Zloczov?"

A little wrinkle formed in the center of his smooth forehead. His round eyes, above his pale cheeks, looked at me sadly. "Can I go with you, Mummy?"

I stroked his silken hair and said, "Perhaps some other time. This time I'm going by myself to find out whether you would like it there."

"Do you have to go, Mummy?"

"Yes, Bruno, I have to. You can stay here if you want to. But wouldn't it be nice for you to take a trip also?"

"O.K. I will travel to Zloczov. Will *you* take me to Zloczov?"

"Of course I will."

He left my embrace and ran out to Mrs. Kost's across the corridor. I came after him and heard him bragging, "I am also taking a trip, just like Mummy. I am going to Zloczov and I am going to stay with Daddy!"

After the welcoming embraces of Mark and Suzan, Suzan took Bruno by his hand and led him to her mother's bedroom. Mark and I remained alone. "I'm so happy to see you," he said. I rejected his attempt to embrace me again.

"Listen, Mark, I came here to leave Bruno with you for two weeks." And I told him about my forthcoming excursion.

"To Russia? Don't go!"

"My mind is made up."

"Please, Roma, reconsider. You may never come back!"

Mira had said the same thing. Perhaps I was too gullible. Certainly I had been fooled twice before. I had given a Russian captain 5,000 rubles and he had done nothing for me; in good faith I had brought my brother for a hearing and he had gone to prison. And what about the 100,000 refugees who had registered to go home and were instead deported to Siberia? I started to waver. But what about Fischer, who truly wanted the best for me and who had encouraged me to take the trip? He preferred that I remain in Lvov, where we could see each other, but he was convinced this trip was the chance of a lifetime, and that he himself would gladly have gone if he had been elected.

I explained to Mark that this was a convention that was being held in Kiev, that I had gotten a round-trip ticket and pocket money from the company, and that I was not the only one: about a hundred of our people, all from the occupied territories, were taking the same chance.

"What if war breaks out and you're cut off from Poland?"

This had been my one gnawing concern while planning. We prayed, we hoped that liberation from the Communist police state would come, the sooner the better. People who thought like Mira, Robert, and Mark woke up every day with a curse on their lips, and most of us awoke every day with the expectation of a Russian defeat. Mira heard the most fantastic rumors. She knew from "important" sources that a joint English and American decision to overrun Poland had been made. According to her sources, it might happen "tomorrow."

So many tomorrows had already passed, and still we saw how the Russians settled more and more of their own people in occupied Poland. These rumors seemed to be the result of our wishful thinking. If anything, the Russians' behavior proved that they were preparing to stay much longer than we had ever anticipated. At any rate, it was too late for me to back out without expecting repercussions from my superiors.

"It's too late to back out. Don't worry, I'll be back!" I said.

Meanwhile, Suzan had joined us. I didn't know how much she had overheard, but Mark briefed her on reasons for keeping the child.

"She's an irresponsible adventuress," was all she said.

Her insult made me more determined to do what I wanted to do. However, when she turned to me and said, with that composed, cold tone of voice, "We'll never let you have Bruno again," I felt my heart sinking. What if she meant it? "You're unfit to be a mother!" Suzan added.

It was not the first time she had said this. Since Bruno's birth, she'd kept nagging Mark to take the child and leave me. Now I reconsidered my plans.

"Mark, I've changed my mind. Bruno is going back with me to Lvov."

"Why?"

"Because here he can only learn to hate." Despite myself, my voice became high-pitched.

Mark took my hands in his. "Please, leave him here. I missed him so. I promise to personally bring him back to you. I swear! After two weeks, you said? I'll bring him to Lvov after two weeks."

Chapter 27

The train to Kiev was six hours behind schedule. Of my three traveling companions, I knew Schwartz best. But, even about him, all I knew was that he worked to the best of his ability and was honest. I never heard him express personal convictions on political matters. All his life he had had financial problems. He was not overly ambitious; he seemed satisfied with his job at Ukrkultorg, which gave him a small but steady income. To be selected as a representative by his company was beyond his expectations.

My two other companions had more or less the same background and were submissive to the New System. I wondered whether it was an accident or deliberate planning by the Russian management to send this type of delegate to Russia. The "seed" Serge had planted might bear fruit after I had been given a trip for nothing. Perhaps he felt that as the supervisor of the trip, he could plant more seeds.

He traveled in a separate compartment reserved for the VIPs, but came to visit me, inquiring if everything was all right. His usual commanding tone had disappeared. He apologized for the timetable mix-up and promised that the luxurious accommodations in Kiev would make up for the discomforts.

In my mind's eye I could still see Brustiger, Gina, Paul and Blume waving their white handkerchiefs. Fischer had stood behind Blume. Through his thick glasses I saw his moist eyes. As the train moved, all of them became smaller, until they turned into specks.

As so many times before, Fischer had squeezed a note into my hand. I hid it in my pocketbook, where it still was, delaying the pleasure of reading it.

After a while I took the paper out, unfolded it and read:

> You have become the constant inmate of my fantasies. I've never known such intensity of emotion. The memory of your eyes, your hair, what you say, the way you look at me, will sustain me throughout the two weeks of your absence. My wish to hold you, to protect you, will live in me for a long time to come. You are vulnerable because you are so straight forward; because you lack diplomatic manoeuvers to avoid friction with other people. I will be lonely, restless, unable to think of anything but you, so far away. I'll want to hear your voice, to watch the gamut of expressions on your face while you talk. But I also want *your* enrichment and growth. Nothing offers this more than traveling to distant places, where one meets new people in new settings. That's why I encouraged you to take this trip. I will be waiting for you impatiently. I will be thinking of you, and will be dreaming up situations for both of us.

We arrived on a very cold day in Kiev. Because of some error in the booking, Serge explained, we had been given rooms in a building that housed law students, a far cry from the luxurious accommodations he had promised on the train.

Many more delegates than anticipated had come to Kiev for the convention. Unfortunately, they had gotten there ahead of us and had the pick of the rooms. Serge was embarrassed and promised to see to it that our rooms were changed.

The whole building smelled of cooking and the room I was taken to was very badly ventilated. I was told that it belonged to someone called Marsza, and that she had agreed to share it with me because her roommate was in the hospital. In another wing of the building, a single room was assigned to my three colleagues.

I hung up my clothes in the only wooden closet, which, incidentally, was empty except for a skirt, a blouse, and a short quilted coat. Tired and disappointed, I slipped under the blanket but could not warm up. Since there was no other blanket available, I spread my fur-lined coat on top of the blanket. As I was dozing off, Marsza came in. I pretended to be asleep and observed her from under my eyelashes.

She must have been prepared for my arrival because she opened the door softly, glanced at my bed, and tiptoed to the closet to hang up her coat. She stared for quite a while at my clothes inside. Then she took off a black skirt, a gray sweater and a brown pullover, got into a faded flannel nightgown, and switched off the light.

Next morning, I made Marsza's acquaintance. She had come from a village to study law in Kiev. She talked slowly in Russian so that I would understand as I sat on my bed dressing. She pointed to my sheer stockings and remarked that I would freeze in them. When I told her that I had boots, she said, "That's not enough. It's real cold outside." She opened a drawer and handed me a pair of woolen stockings, probably the only extra pair she had.

"I can't take them unless we make an exchange."

She smiled at me. "Never mind the exchange. I'd like you to have a souvenir from me."

"I'd like you to have a souvenir from me," I said, smiling back at her. I got a burgundy cashmere sweater out of my suitcase and said, "Try it on."

Holding the sweater up to her body, she went to the yellowed mirror and probably liked what she saw. "We don't have luxurious things like this sweater or pure silk nightgowns, but we will soon." With a sudden jerking movement she turned her back to the mirror, facing me. "I can't accept such an expensive gift. I wouldn't know where to wear it. *My* friends have nothing like it. I'd feel out of place."

"Then take my nightgown."

She accepted it and urged me again to put on the woolen stockings.

"Later, after I take my bath."

"You'd better make it fast or you'll miss the hot water. Hot water is available from 6 till 8 in the morning, and from 8 till 10 in the evening."

The thought of going to the bathroom gave me the shivers. I had seen it the night before. Since it was at the end of a long corridor, I had to dress completely just to go there. The seatless toilet, practically a hole in the wooden floor, forced you to stand or squat over it.

Heading back to my room, I noticed the reason for the stale kitchen odor: There was a large community kitchen for the use of the students, and milk was boiling over the edge of a pot while the gas flame was on.

I found my roommate sitting on her bed, my pearl gray felt hat in her lap. She was staring at it with unabashed admiration. "It's beautiful," she said.

"You can have it," I said.

"Oh, no! But, for the fun of it, may I try it on?"

With the hat on her head she walked up to the mirror.

It was a joy to watch her pleased expression. But at the sound of a knock at the door, her expression changed to fear. She yanked the hat off her head, threw it on the bed and called, "Come in."

It was Serge, who asked with fatherly concern how I had spent the night.

The disappointment my face couldn't help showing belied my casual response that everything was fine.

He then offered me his room at his hotel, but my old suspicion that he had an ulterior motive revived. How convenient. Here, away from his wife, away from my people—here, I would be an easy target.

"I'd rather not separate myself from the rest of the Polish delegation," I said. In any case, I felt that having a native Russian roommate was interesting enough to make up for the unheated room and the distant, awkward toilet.

"As you please. I am going to see how the boys are doing. We will come back to pick you up for breakfast. Be ready."

Soon my three colleagues and I followed Serge to a neighborhood restaurant. The warmth, the white tablecloth, the aroma of frying bacon contributed to a feeling of coziness. It was odd hearing the Russians order meat for breakfast and seeing some of them down two or three vodkas.

After breakfast, Serge excused himself and we remained without even a Russian guide. Later, as we strolled through the streets, all four of us agreed that Kiev was a beautiful city. Long lines of people waited patiently at the bus stops. They boarded the vehicles as soon as the doors opened. When every seat and every bit of standing room were taken, the conductor called out, "*Chwatit*," the same word that brought to mind that terrible scene of my child about to be shipped with Benny's mother to Siberia.

The overflow waited for the next bus, due half an hour later. The numbness on their faces as they waited made them all look much alike to us. Even their clothing had little individuality. Some women had thrown fringed woolen shawls the size of blankets over their coats. Some wore fur coats, fur hats and *valenkies*, boots made from heavy felt.

Other women covered their heads with *babushkas*. Since most of them were plumpish, and twenty years behind our fashions, they seemed like shapeless bundles.

As we strolled along, leisurely people gave us special glances. Obviously, they knew that we were foreigners. Schwartz fell about 20 feet behind. When I turned, I saw him talking to an elderly native. When he caught up with us, he had an incredulous expression on his face and told us that a man had wanted to buy the buttons off his coat. Schwartz said he'd thought it was a joke, but the stranger had offered a good price. He had taken his wallet out of his pocket, then a penknife, ready to cut the buttons off, but when a countryman came out of a doorway, he had quickly replaced the wallet and the penknife and turned away.

We felt that this had to be a practical joke because we had passed many store windows crammed with merchandise. I remembered that the Red Army men had bought everything available in my country when they entered in 1939. Why, if in Russia there was truly so much to be had? The explanation came soon. I liked a blouse in a window on a mannequin and went into the store to make my first purchase. I discovered there were no other blouses in the store but the sample in the window. I asked for the skirt on the mannequin and was told there were no skirts for sale.

"A sweater?" I asked.

Annoyed by now, the salesgirl said, "No sweaters."

"I'd like to buy the samples in the window," I said. "I'm sure they're my size."

Aggravated, she said, "Not until the display is changed."

"When will that be?"

"In about two weeks."

"What day exactly?"

"It's impossible for me to tell you the exact time," she said angrily.

I knew by her look that the blouse, the skirt and the sweater were already promised to someone.

"One more question, please. How much is the blouse?"

"Thirty rubles."

More than a week's wages. For that amount I could get a much more beautiful one in the black market back home on Solski Square.

The Lenin Museum, one of the first attractions we were urged to visit, had expensive oriental rugs on all the floors. Photographs of Lenin as a small boy, as an adolescent, and as an adult hung on the walls. A building in miniature, a replica of the house he was born in, adorned a platform. The woman conducting the tour translated Lenin's handwritten letters into Polish, although by now all of us could read Russian.

For us, this was a long, boring day.

The following day we visited the Pieczarski Caves, whose long underground tunnels connected twenty monasteries. In the caves, embalmed monks lay on either side of the narrow paths. At certain places the ceiling dipped so low that we had to lower our heads.

The semidarkness, the waxen faces of the mummified monks, the silence, the underground musty smell—they all gave me the creeps. What if we were being lured into this desolate place, never to see daylight again? If this was a trap, no one would ever find out what had happened to us. The only person who knew where we'd gone was Serge and he was one of *them.* Hadn't I been warned by Mira and Suzan that exactly this would happen?

If I could only confide in Schwartz, who walked in front of me! But I didn't dare. He had never declared himself for or against the New System. He might be an ardent sympathizer and denounce me later if my fear proved to be unfounded.

After walking in growing despair for another 10 meters, Schwartz turned to me. In the dim light his face seemed as waxen as those of the monks. He wanted to say something, but he didn't. He walked on. Then he turned again and I understood that he too was frantic with fear, as were the two behind me. However, each of us was afraid to confide in the other. As we moved still deeper and deeper into the cave, Schwartz finally whispered to me in Polish, "What do they intend to do with us?"

"I don't know."

Schwartz again, "I feel as if I'm buried alive already."

"I'm scared, too," the colleague behind me admitted. I started to feel easier, now that the trouble was shared.

"Listen, Roma," Schwartz whispered, "You're the only girl among us. You can tell the guide that you're tired, that you can't keep on walking. His answer may give us a clue."

"You boys can be just as tired as I am," I snapped. But then I spoke to the guide.

"If you've had enough, we can leave at once. As it happens, we're near one of the exits."

"We've had enough," four voices said simultaneously.

Schwartz quickly added, "We would like to spend a little time in the churches and monasteries." He sounded apologetic.

The guide led us to the left and again to the left, and a beam of sunshine appeared from above.

There was a general sigh of relief at the sight of a crumbling stairway leading up. Forgotten were the complaints about being tired. I myself took two steps at a time, eagerly inhaling the fresh air. The most beautiful sunshine I had ever seen came into view.

We were in a courtyard that belonged to a group of ancient monasteries. The guide led us from one monastery to the other, all architecturally beautiful. The roofs glittered in the sun. They seemed to be made of pure gold. We were told that, indeed, the majority of them were actually gold-filled.

The walls and ceilings of the interiors were covered with frescos and paintings. Multicolored mosaic glass windows threw reflections on these works of art and made them look like sparkling jewels. The guide stopped in front of a life-size statue of Christ on the cross which, when he pulled a cord, dripped blood from its hands, feet and heart.

"These were the tricks used by the clergy to promote their religion," the guide said. "Naive people, mostly illiterates, believed in these miracles. There are many people in the capitalist countries who still believe in such nonsense."

Suddenly the richness and beauty faded and I complained again of being tired. I suggested that we had seen a lot for one day and would come back soon to see more.

When the guide left, all of us were relieved. Schwartz, who had smuggled in a camera, took some pictures, while the three of us formed a circle around him. Relieved that we had deceived our masters, we strolled back to our quarters.

Chapter 28

The Opera House where we were taken to see a ballet was crowded. We wondered how people could afford to pay admissions out of their meager wages unless they had additional sources of income. They were well dressed tooas like people had been dressed in Poland twenty years ago. Never before had I seen dancers perform with such coordination and grace to the music of "Don Quixote." The stage was transformed into a world of magic that touched me so deeply that the wild hand clapping and shouts of "bravo" irritated me as they brought me back to reality. But then I joined the audience in giving the performers the applause they truly deserved.

At the party following the performance, these same dancers and musicians were modestly dressed, without the slightest hint of glamor. I approached one dancer whom I had watched closely on stage. Squinting her slanted eyes, she told me that she gave all of herself while performing because she wanted to repay the New System for the rare opportunity it had given her. "Without that feeling of gratitude, my dancing wouldn't be the same," she said.

"Did you inherit your talent?"

"I think so," the dancer replied. "My mother was a dancer in Mongolia. She had a great talent, but she had no chance to perform outside her home town. She was a better dancer than our prima ballerina, who you just saw in "Don Quixote," but it was during the time of the Czars and poor people could make no headway."

"Where is she now?"

"Dead. . . . If only she were alive to see my success. What a joy it would be for her that at least her daughter had achieved everything she had dreamed of for herself."

"Everything?" I asked.

"What do you mean. . . material things? No, not material things. No money is as precious as the recognition I get in my profession. Anyway, my mother died without having had either."

"Don't you wish to become prima ballerina yourself?" I was curious about this modest girl.

"Of course. But it's not all that important to me."

"How come?" I persisted.

"For instance, our leading lady had nothing more than I had except the title."

Did she mean that money in the New System was no longer the object of veneration; that a medal for a job well done was the determining factor in the social scale? In this way a salesgirl could win out against her manager and a chorus girl against the prima ballerina.

One day, Serge took us to the General Office of the Ukrkultorg. In the four story building on Krasno-Armiejska Street, the general director, Sajewicz, who headed this gigantic state-owned company, welcomed us heartily.

The office workers cast sidelong glances at us as we were introduced to several executives. In the labyrinth of offices, clerks in old-fashioned clothes stared at us as if we were visitors from another planet.

On our way out, the General Director, smiling brightly, shook hands with each of us, as any public relations person would.

Ten days in Kiev had passed before I realized that we hadn't had a single opportunity to visit a Russian family in their private quarters. I mentioned this to Serge and he promised to do something about it.

That same evening, he took me alone to a residential section of the city where some friends of his lived. To my great surprise, the freckle-faced host at the door was none other than Chodorovski, the bank director who had given Blume the job in Lvov. Only a week ago he had been called back to Kiev. Both of us, amazed at the coincidence, exchanged greetings while his wife and the amused Serge looked on.

Then Chodorovski introduced me to his blond, chubby wife, a physician, as I remembered him telling me a year and a half ago.

"Though she works full time, she's a wonderful mother to our two children and the best wife a man could wish for," he said, and kissed her hand, a new custom he had acquired in the foreign land of Poland.

The three-room apartment, with its modernistic furniture, looked like a typical apartment in Poland, but less luxurious than Mira's, Robert's or Brustinger's.

After we had settled around the table, Chodorovski said to me, "Remember our conversation in Store Number One in Lvov? I told you then that only opportunists look for new fields of operation, and you didn't believe me. Now I am a happy man, and so grateful to my superior, who helped me return home. Look around," he added with a proud gesture of his arm.

In comparison to a manual worker's apartment, such as the one I had an opportunity to see the following day, Chodorovski's *was* luxurious in space and decoration.

"You must come to my office tomorrow and you'll see that it can match any office in Lvov," he now said to my boss. "Serge, Roma thought the Russian people apply for work in foreign countries for one reason only—to improve their standard of living."

Chodorovski reached again for his wife's hand. She responded, meeting his halfway. Then she excused herself and went into the kitchen; we could hear her puttering around with dishes. She reappeared with a serving plate of steaming *pirozki*, a pastry filled with a mixture of mashed potatoes, fried onions and chicken fat. Now she put five on each individual plate. We drank the traditional Russian *kwas*, made of fermented bread, while her husband complimented her on her cooking. He got up and busied himself with the samovar. We had tea and ate cookies and never stopped talking.

Chodorovski offered to show me Kiev by night. He phoned his chauffeur, who arrived twenty minutes later. Although he considered the car his own, it was actually a company car, and he had to account for every ride he took.

The three of us, Chodorovski, Serge and I, were sitting on the back seat. Chodorovski pointed to the more important-looking buildings on the city's main thoroughfare, Kreszczatik, a wide avenue lined with chestnut trees.

"Kiev is one of the oldest cities in Russia, with the third largest population," Chodorovski said. "This is Vladimirskaja Street, and here, look, are the remains of an eleventh century fortress, better known as the Golden Gates."

He directed the chauffeur up a hill, where we pointed at a cluster of lights shining down from tall buildings. In between stood dilapidated houses I'd seen with my colleagues when I'd strolled the streets days before. Chodorovski said, "Soon there'll be many skyscrapers." He couldn't know that, very soon, Germans would destroy the city. Pointing to the Andreyev Church, he told me it was designed by Restrelli in the eighteenth century. Then he drove us again through the splendid Kreszczatik to the student's home. He asked Serge where he wanted to be dropped off and was surprised, as I was, when Serge said, "I'll see *Tovarisz* Brand to the door."

It was 11 o'clock and it occurred to me that Chodorovski might think there was more than a employer–employee relationship between Serge and me. A little embarrassed, I thanked Chodorovski for his hospitality and stalled by waving good-bye until the car disappeared around a street corner.

Serge was close behind me on the stairs, casting a long shadow on the gray, soiled wall. I knocked at my door. No answer; Marsza was out. Serge took the key out of my hand to unlock the door. He asked whether I would mind if he came in and stayed for a while.

I became tense as he helped me out of my coat. He offered me a cigarette, which I refused. He lit one for himself and puffed rings of smoke into the cold air. Both of us remained silent. My tension increased.

"This room is really cold," he said. He crushed the cigarette in an ashtray, took off his coat and put it around my shoulders. His cheek came close to mine. I expected him to embrace me, to turn me around and perhaps try to kiss me. The electricity of the situation filled the air, waiting for a single spark.

What should I do? How should I respond? Did I want him to make love to me? The tension I felt reduced my thinking processes to nil. All was expectation.

He looked at me. "You must take care of yourself; do you feel warm now?"

I couldn't look back at him. My eyes would tell him everything.

"I like you. I've always liked you," he said. He took my ice-cold hands in his, which were warm, and massaged them. His hands reminded me of Robert's. "Look at me," he said, sitting down next to me on the bed.

His brown eyes did not waiver. His face was now so close to mine, his nose was almost touching me. I held my breath in anticipation of his next move.

Suddenly, he jumped to his feet as if bitten by a dog and started to pace the floor back and forth, one hand holding the other behind his back. Then he stopped at the window, peered out into the dark and slowly turned around to face me.

Frowning, he said softly, "I like to do things for other people without ulterior motives. All I am interested in is showing you the road to a more meaningful life." He took three steps towards me, but stopped at a safe distance. "The revolution made me understand," he went on, "that I must embrace not only my family, but all of mankind. It made me a happier man. Relax, Roma. Be comfortable. I came here for one reason only: To see you safely home and to have an opportunity to talk to you alone." His last words exerted strength. The softness had gone. From the man who was interested in me as a woman, he had now transformed himself into my employer. His voice was steely.

"What do you want to say to me?" I asked.

"I'll come straight to the point. Would you like to continue your education? Would you like to go to college?"

"Very much so!"

"I can help you. Every year I can choose four of my employees to study in a Moscow university."

"Moscow . . . ?" Aha! he wants to keep me here in Russia, just as Mira and Suzan predicted, I thought. He won't let me return home after all. My heart sank. "I do appreciate your kindness. I am flattered; I am grateful. However. . . ," I stuttered.

"You don't have to decide right now," he broke in. "The school year starts in September; you have plenty of time to think it over."

Chapter 29

Everyone connected with the convention gathered in a large hall that had been elaborately prepared for the occasion. Two gigantic pictures, one of Lenin, the other of Stalin, hung on the wall straight across from the main entrance. Each frame was embellished with strands woven of fresh flowers in a pattern that extended to the large red flags directly behind two rostrums.

Chairs placed on only one side of long rows of tables faced the rostrums and the pictures of Lenin and Stalin. Set out at each place on the tables were paper pads and fine-quality pencils, the kind that were unavailable even in the Lvov black market.

The afternoon was devoted to numbers, numbers, and more numbers. Store directors from the Ukrainian part of Russia told the audience about their successful operations. Store directors from the newly occupied territories emphasized today's larger turnover and profits as against the profits at the beginning of the occupation, a year and a half ago.

After long hours of this, a blond, blue-eyed, wholesome-looking girl of about twenty took the floor. She started to speak slowly, softly, without bringing up statistics like the speakers before her. Signs of fatigue and boredom disappeared and the meeting perked up.

"Work must be loved for its own sake," she said. "Not only because it's the source of a livelihood, but because it can also be a source of constructive living. If you *make* it so. The time spent at work should be cherished as part of healthy living. If it is, you will stop looking impatiently at your watch. You will stop counting the hours before going home and you will no longer consider home the place where you *begin* to live. Make your life more meaningful through giving your job—no matter what it is—more importance, and you will experience a sense of great achievement. Let us all, beginning *now*, take this constructive attitude. We will be better citizens, better family members, and happier people."

Her flawless skin had taken on a rosy glow, her eyes sparkled, and she looked at the crowd in a way that made every member believe that he or she, individually, was being addressed. Her emphasis on one or another word, her clear pronunciation, her pauses at the right times, and her enthusiasm carried the crowd. She was a perfect example of how successful one could be if one blindly swallowed the philosophy of the New System.

The crowd, sitting as if mesmerized, responded with thunderous applause, drowning out the announcement of the following speaker.

When the young girl left the rostrum, she was surrounded by well-wishers. The woman sitting next to me informed me that she had heard her speak once before, that she was the daughter of a peasant who had attended elementary school in her home village. The village authorities had recognized her abilities and sent her to Kiev, where she had taken a job in the Ukrkultorg, starting as an apprentice. She had worked her way up to head of a department, like myself.

But I could never address an audience of that magnitude or, for that matter, any audience, even if I knew exactly what I wanted to say. Once in front of a group of people, my throat locked and my knees buckled. I knew no other woman back home who could do what that young girl had just accomplished.

The convention ended with an elegant banquet. The white tablecloths, the shiny silver, the crystal chandeliers, the excellent service, the caviar, the geese artistically arranged on fine serving plates reminded me of the press ball I had attended in Lvov with Mr. and Mrs. Hescheles before the war. The only difference was that, at the press ball, the women had worn glamorous evening gowns, the men tuxedos, and we had danced to the music of an orchestra.

Serge was sitting at a round table for twelve among men who held positions of importance. He dropped by our table often to see whether we wanted something other than what was offered by the waiters. This same man who had kept a certain distance between himself and his Polish employees in Lvov now made all four of us feel that he was constantly available and with us all the way.

That night, undressing in Marsza's room in her presence, I felt embarrassed by my silk slip and my dainty hand-embroidered nightgown. Marsza had admired my clothing but, as the week wore on, she eventually ignored the garments and returned to her books.

Chapter 30

Back in Lvov, I didn't wait for Mark to keep his promise about bringing Bruno back to me. I went to Zloczov to get him.

Suzan welcomed me with the remark, "Look who's here. I thought you had disappeared for good."

"I'm sorry to disappoint your grace, but here I am. Where is Bruno?" I replied, smiling.

"Bruno? He'll be back soon. A friend of mine took him to the park. Why don't you ask for your husband?"

"Do I have one?"

At that moment Mark entered. "I'm so glad to see you. I worried all the time," he said.

When Suzan left the living room, he drew me close to him. Everything that I had once seen in him, the things that had made me fall in love with him, I no longer saw. The man who had just embraced me was a weakling. My reaction was cool.

Bruno and I left Zloczov for Lvov the same day.

On Saturday, the usual crowd gathered around me. Even Father came straight from evening prayer to my apartment. Obviously, all of them were curious to hear about my experiences in Russia.

"Is there going to be an uprising?"

"Were you constantly watched?"

"Did a so-called guide accompany you everywhere?"

"Were you prevented from going certain places?"

One voice overlapped the other. Each sounded aggressive; some were belligerent.

"I was neither watched nor was I prevented from going to certain places," I answered.

But, thinking back, I realized that not once had I been left to myself. After breakfast, the first day in Kiev, Serge had to leave the four of us. If one went astray, Serge probably counted on being informed by at least one of the other three. It was possible that one among us was planted there to observe the rest. Perhaps that Russian who came out of the doorway and interrupted the coat-button deal was spying on us. Also, when I accepted Chodorovski's invitation to his bank the day after I had been with Serge in his apartment, he sent me the chauffeured limousine, although I assured him that I'd prefer a stroll.

A thought entered to my mind. Was an informer planted right here in my apartment; one among us, provoking me to say things I would later regret? Who might it be?

Was it Mira, the wealthy woman who needed protection and had to pay for it? Was it Brustiger, the only one I knew who had been able to get The Paragraph reversed on his passport? Was it Tur, who had been demoted and then reinstated to his former prestigious position? Was it Fischer, accused of sabotage and then cleared? Not Fischer! And not Gina.

Was I going mad to suspect everyone who crossed my path? They were my friends! How could I let such thoughts take shape. Perhaps in their eyes, they had reason to suspect *me* of being a spy? Hadn't I gotten my father, brother and cousin out of prison, a feat not repeated by anyone?

The doorbell rang again.

Guiltridden, I welcomed the interruption. I went quickly to the foyer to break up the interrogation. It was Fischer.

I threw myself spontaneously into his arms with relief. Then, as we entered the living room, I overheard Tur saying to Brustiger, "I had hoped for a frank report about inside Russia, and all I hear is what she was ordered to say."

So, in a way, they did suspect me.

"She became a sympathizer the day they let her father out of prison. She's now exactly like them," Mira said, and didn't stop when she saw me entering. “Aren’t you?” she added, and gave me one of her rare, charming smiles.

I ignored her last remark. “I’m telling you the truth,” I said.

“Come on, Roma, who are you kidding? We’re not that dumb. You don’t have to be afraid of *us*. You can tell us the real truth, not what the Communists told you to say,” Brustiger said. There was no malice in his voice.

Fischer’s eyes caressed me. His tender smile made me feel protected.

“I swear that no one told me what to say. I repeat: Perhaps I was watched, but if so it was done so secretly and professionally, I didn’t notice. Besides, I was very careful, so I did not become a target.”

“I told you, she’s one of them,” I heard Mira whisper to Tur.

“Let’s change the subject,” I said. “Now, you tell me the local news. Who was arrested? Who was deported?”

“Two of my neighbors were arrested,” Gina said.

“Accused of what?”

“The usual.”

“As a matter of fact, we also have good news for a change,” Brustiger said. “Someone was released from prison.”

“Released from prison? I don’t believe it. Who’s the lucky one?” I asked.

“Guess.”

“Rosen?”

“No.”

“Stop the game. I give up.”

“Hescheles.”

“Hescheles? I can’t believe it. How wonderful!”

“Why didn’t you bring him along?” my father asked from a far corner.

“Yes, why didn’t you bring him along?” I repeated.

“For your own good,” Brustiger answered, “it’s better to stay away from him. He might be under surveillance.”

“Or he became a spy for them,” Mira said.

“Probably,” Brustiger said. “But I do see him in restaurants or coffeehouses. I certainly wouldn’t bring him to my apartment.”

“*Your* apartment? Don’t forget, Brustiger, it’s *my* apartment now.”

"Don't be so legalistic, Roma," said Father. "If you want to see Hescheles, you should. I want to see him too."

After receiving my message, Hescheles came to see me immediately. His hair was thinner and grayer. His premature wrinkles had deepened. The evening was heavy with silences. But after this first visit he came back often, perhaps because other doors were closed to him. Sometimes Father joined us and sometimes Hescheles brought along his little daughter, about nine years old. The child worshiped her father and even copied his physical movements. She danced for me and read aloud the poetry she had written herself. I liked to listen to her recital because it reminded me of my own poetry when I was her age. Her father looked on with pride. "A little child," he said, "and already she can read, write and compose rhymes. And what unusual talent she has, her ballet teacher told me."

It seemed that his sense of parenthood had taken on a new dimension. I hoped this deeper relationship would compensate for his disappointment in some of his friends. He had lost much of the gaiety and was more sarcastic than before.

Once, when we were alone and he had just downed three vodkas in quick succession—a thing I had never seen him do before—he started to talk of his experiences in Russian prisons.

"I was arrested and investigated in Lvov. Then they sent me to Kiev. They questioned me there and sent me to Charkov. From Charkov they sent me to another city and then to another. I lost track, finally, and didn't always know the name of the place I had been brought to. The same questioning took place everywhere."

I was listening intensely, with my eyes cast down, afraid he would suddenly stop. He did stop, but only to pour himself another drink. Then he went on:

"I was brought from my cell to an office for interrogation at the oddest hours, day or night. They rushed me to a waiting room and left me there for hours, as though they'd forgotten me. I often missed my food rations. Hungry, thirsty and utterly exhausted, I would have to answer questions thrown at me by two or three commissars while another son of a bitch listened, waiting for me to slip. Another one, sitting unobtrusively in a corner, recorded my answers. Sometimes this almost hidden character would stop typing and pop a question at me too. It was so unexpected that he almost succeeded in catching me off guard.

"I defended myself in Kiev, in Charkov, and in other cities. I defended myself day and night."

I wanted to ask him what he'd been accused of, but didn't dare to interrupt him.

"And the terrible thing was," Hescheles continued, "I defended myself against a crime I hadn't committed."

As he downed the rest of the vodka, I dared to ask, "What did they accuse you of?"

My question had a sobering effect on him. He didn't answer. He was never again in quite such a talkative mood, and I was torn between trusting in the innocence of a friend who deserved to be trusted and a creeping suspicion that perhaps there could have been a legitimate reason for his arrest.

I hated myself for doubting a man of integrity and accused myself of already being one of *them.*

Chapter 31

Only a year and a half ago, the Hotel Bristol had been the pride of the city. Now its quiet elegance was gone. The oriental rugs were stained and worn; the windows were cracked and dirty, the curtains soiled. The once white tablecloth was gray and patched; the noise was deafening; the Machorka cigarette smoke was so thick I couldn't see Mira until I bumped into her.

A political rally had taken place in the hotel and we had been told by our superiors at work to attend. By now, we were used to overcrowded public places; today, however, it was worse than usual.

I joined forces with Mira and together we pressed through to "my corner" at the window. To my disappointment, two Russians in uniform were already sitting there. Many of the occupying force had acquired a veneer of local chivalry and liked to display their knowledge. One of the Red Army men stood up and, with a gesture, invited us to sit down. Since no other table was free, we accepted the invitation. The same stranger called a waiter, ordered beer for himself and his buddy and tea and cake for the "girls." But, after failing to engage us in a conversation, he left us alone.

I stared at the faded draperies hanging at the sides of the windows, saddened to see some of the golden fringes ripped off. In contrast to me and my bad mood, Mira was elated. Influenced by wishful thinking, she interpreted the speech a Russian colonel had just delivered as meaning that war between Russia and Germany might soon erupt. Mira closed her mind to the question of what might follow the Russian retreat and where it would leave us. She savored the thought that, when Communism was finally out of Poland, she would regain her nationalized properties, which would again provide her with the luxurious lifestyle she had become accustomed to through her marriage.

I was a little apprehensive. I remembered the three weeks the Germans reigned in Niemirov before the Russians came in. We had considered ourselves lucky that the Germans had had to retreat to the agreed-upon line of demarcation because we felt that nobody could treat us any worse than they did. But then, when the Russians took over the territory, we had again complained bitterly. And although we had been looking forward to their departure as well, most of us dreaded the thought of what might follow.

"Do you realize that some of us will be victims no matter who the next ruler is?" I asked.

"Only those who benefited from Communism have to worry about the next invader. You and I will recapture our nationalized fortunes; my husband will be a respected industrialist again and yours, an attorney."

"What about the others?"

"Nothing, *nothing* can be worse than what we've had for this last year and a half," Mira said.

I looked around and suggested we change the subject.

Chapter 32

Though the vast majority of our population had been hoping that the Communists would leave someday, everybody was in turmoil now that it seemed about to become a reality.

Henrik Hescheles, a frequent guest in my house, was frantic. Though imprisoned by the Communists, the alternative of having the Germans as rulers gave him the shivers. For the sixth time, he repeated that he expected to be the first one arrested because of the anti-Nazi articles he had written in his newspaper since 1933. Then he confided in me a secret plan to leave Poland illegally. To me, this was just talk. Nobody we knew had been able to get out of Poland legally or illegally since Russia had occupied our part of the country. Probably he himself knew it was just wishful thinking because he added quickly, "If I can't get out of here, I'll commit suicide."

"Don't be foolish," I said, and quickly refilled his glass with vodka.

He put two fingers into his small vest pocket. A capsule lay on his open palm. "You see? I have a cyanide pill and don't even bother to wrap it. I like to have it ready at a second's notice."

"How did you get it?"

"A doctor friend gave it to me."

"He shouldn't have!"

"Why? He has one prepared for himself too. Don't look so aghast. It's very popular nowadays to be prepared."

"That's ridiculous!" I cried. "You don't even know whether your fears are justified. Let's assume you're right, that the Germans are monsters. Let's also assume that they have their eye on you. Why shorten whatever is left of your life? As long as one is breathing, there is always the chance that something good can happen. Let me have the pill. I'll keep it for you."

He ignored my outstretched hand and dropped the pill back into his vest pocket. "From what I've heard, the Germans don't do much harm to women. Anyway, keep up your good spirits, Roma. That's what I always envy in you. If you had a noose around your neck, you'd still believe in miracles."

I put my hand on his shoulder. "You've shown plenty of courage yourself. Didn't you win against the Communists? As far as we know, you were the only one among the thousands arrested and sent to Russia to have come back home. Throw your poison away! You have a wife and a lovely daughter. Neither deserves what you have in store for them."

His face lit up. "My daughter, isn't she adorable?"

"She's a very talented little girl."

"You saw her dancing. But she has a talent for writing, too. Did you read her poetry? She's my darling."

Still, I was unable to diminish his fears. Instead, his tension began to have an effect on me. I began to dwell on the horrors the Germans had committed during their three week occupation of Niemirov in 1939. Like the others, I soon became infected with fear of the dangers looming ahead.

Chapter 33

"By the way," Mira said when I came back from lunch, "Robert was looking for you. He said he'll come to the store tomorrow. He's been drafted by the Russians. Imagine their *chutspe*! Mobilizing *our* boys to defend *their* Communism in Poland. It's crazy."

"Stop it, Mira, someone may overhear you."

The following morning, I found Robert in a military uniform, waiting in front of the store. I took him inside and tried to persuade him to hide. "Robert, why don't you go underground? The Russians will be gone any day now and you'll be able to come out of hiding, a free man."

Robert shook his head. "We weighed this matter with other draftees and came to the conclusion that we have a better chance to stay alive if we fulfil our "military obligation." The bullets aimed at us by the Germans may miss us because shelters will be provided. On the other hand, if we're branded by the Russians as deserters, *their* bullets will be aimed at us, without our having any opportunity to shoot back."

"Still. . . ."

"My mind is made up. Goodbye, Roma. I'll always remember you."

Chapter 34

On June 22, 1941, Hitler had his *Wehrmacht* cross the demarcation line, ignoring the pact he had signed in 1939 with Stalin. The Red Army, stationed in Poland, resisted weakly.

The Russian civilians in Lvov, mortally afraid of being captured by their enemy, hastily loaded their wives and children in cars and trucks. Within a few hours the families were on their way to their homeland. Then, the men themselves boarded any available vehicle and fled.

Mira and I were standing in front of Store Number One watching the trucks passing Place Marjacki in the direction of Lyczakov. Men, women and children were packed together so tightly that I wondered whether the children would arrive unharmed.

Mira smiled with all her face, something she rarely did. “At last we’re getting rid of the pests,” she said.

“Look at them. They robbed our people of everything for the last two years and now they’re running like rats from a sinking ship.”

“You must admit that they usually shopped and paid with legal currency,” I said.

“Yeah? All that shopping didn’t do them any good. Now they’re running for their lives and they have to leave it all behind. Even the junk they brought from Russia. At last, justice triumphs!”

Tur came out of the store and said, “Mira, I think it’s a little early to rejoice. If the Americans or the British took the Russians’ place, I’d join you wholeheartedly. But the Germans will be here any day. Who knows what their rule will be like? Schwartz is a smart man. He left together with Serge.”

“How do you know?” I asked.

"They stopped here an hour ago and asked whether any of us wanted to come along."

"Perhaps you did the wrong thing in not accepting Serge's offer. . . ," I said.

"You're out of your mind!" Mira cried. "I had an offer like that too. But I am a Polish Jew. I could never leave my country."

There was more emotion in Mira's words than one would normally expect to hear in a simple declaration of loyalty for a country.

Who had extended the offer to Mira, I wondered. Why didn't anyone suggest that I come along? Was it a political person? The *miscom* who was in love with her? I remembered that Serge had wanted me to go to Moscow University and, though he had admitted hoping that when I returned I would become a speaker for the Communist cause, I nevertheless believed he was my friend. Perhaps he didn't know in advance that he would have to run; how could he have?

Xenia was heading for the store. Her full breasts moved freely under her kimono blouse, her red hair, usually twisted in a braid around her head, hung loosely about her flushed face. She stopped short in front of Mira.

"Where is he?" she asked in an agitated voice.

"Where is who?" Mira asked quietly, growing pale.

"Tell me where he is!" Xenia shouted.

Mira's double chin trembled. "Where is who?" she repeated. Her soft voice sounded like Suzan's. I had always envied both of them their control in difficult situations.

Infuriated by what seemed to be Mira's perfect composure, Xenia screamed, "Look at this innocent lady! You'd better tell me where the *miscom* is. Where did you hide him?"

"Me? Hide the *miscom*? She's out of her mind!" Mira turned to Tur, who looked with bewilderment from one to the other. It was obvious that Xenia's allegation had hit him deeply.

"He's probably in Russia already. Besides, why ask *me*?"

Tears ran down Xenia's blotched cheeks. She grasped Mira's wrist. "Please, Mira, please tell me where he is. I love him. I'd like to help him. Please. . . ."

Her face very pale, Mira said, pointing at Tur and me, "You might as well ask *them.* Anyway, I've heard enough of your nonsense linking me with the *miscom.* Just leave me alone." She started to walk away.

Tur, still in shock, mumbled something Fischer-style that no one could understand. Xenia ran after Mira, grabbed her hair and cried, "You bitch, you stole him from me!"

Mira's scream, expressing more shock than pain, startled Tur out of his numbness. He tried to separate the two women, but Xenia held onto Mira's hair. Luckily for Mira, Xenia saw the comptroller approaching. She let her enemy go to ask the Russian whether *he* had seen the *miscom.*

The comptroller's pockmarked face expressed total confusion. "I don't know, I don't know. . . ," he said. Xenia ran away, her red hair flying.

In a high-pitched voice, the comptroller, trying to control himself, wiped the perspiration from his forehead and asked Tur whether it was true, as the secretary in the main office had told him, that Director Serge had left Poland for Russia. He looked from the silent Tur to me.

"I don't know," I said. "I think he did. Tell me, *Tovarisz,* why are your people leaving so frantically?"

Did he hear me? I wondered. Obviously, he had already made his decision; he looked anxiously on as the packed vans passed by. He looked and looked, trying to find space in them for one more. He would leave the country with just the briefcase containing some papers, work he had taken home from the Kopernica office the day before.

And it was he who had told us in one of his speeches shortly after he had arrived in Lvov, "We are a cautious people. We don't go places where we don't belong. Once we do, it is for a noble cause and we never leave."

Belatedly, to my surprise, he took the time to answer, "We are leaving because we are afraid of local collaborators. The *Jevrejskie Kapitalisticzeski* spies might sabotage our efforts to defeat the Germans. We've decided to retreat and fight on our own territory. We will fight, and. . . ." A truck slowed down. Many hands reached out to pull him up and, once he was on it, the driver went speeding off. His last words were almost drowned out by the noise of the motor, but I still could make them out by watching his lips, ". . . we will win! And we will be back! To stay forev. . . ."

For the first time I laughed loudly, mockingly, because the comptroller could no longer hear and punish me. The truck, with him on it, was in full retreat.

For hours we watched the Communists run. There were few who did not rejoice in this historic event.

The time came when no more vehicles moved in the streets. However, the rumbling noise they had made remained in my ears long after they had gone, mingling with the threat, "We will be back! We will be back!"

The Russians were so imbued with blind submission to orders from above, and so afraid of repercussions for having left their posts without orders, that some of those who were well on their way home returned to pick up the formal order permitting them to leave and were captured by the quickly advancing German Army.

Chapter 35

Tur, now our only superior, decided we should come to work the next day. "Who knows," he said, "we might be free of the New System for only a short time. Some Russians have come back; they all may, and perhaps they'll punish me for closing the store."

We, the subordinates, followed Tur's orders the next day and the following days. Only Fischer stayed away.

Tur's fearful message worked especially well on those who couldn't survive without the wages.

One afternoon, before closing time, Mira came to the stockroom, where I was changing my work shoes for high-heeled shoes. She told me I had a visitor.

"Fischer!" I thought.

It was Gina.

"You're still here?" she asked.

"Where did you expect me to be?"

I didn't feel that anything had changed. I woke up in the morning with the same alarming fear of being late for work and, still filled with anxiety, I hurried to be on time so as not to wind up in a labor camp.

"You have no more Communists to be scared of; you no longer have to account to them. Why are you here?"

"They may come back," I cautioned.

"Not on your life!" she said.

"Tur says they may."

"He's still under the spell of the old routine," Mira replied.

She was right. Except for Gina, almost everybody was following routine. All our co-workers had assembled, the last few days, as if nothing had changed. The only one still absent was Fischer.

Nobody could tell me whether he had attached himself to Serge, for whom he had such high regard, and gone with him to Russia. How else could his absence be explained? On the other hand, would he go away without saying good-bye to me? Impatiently, I waited for a love letter, or at least a message.

"Maybe it's not addiction to routine; maybe they need the money," said Gina.

Mira, now her old self, reacted with one of her rare smiles, which made her look very pretty. "Roma, Tur and I have volunteered not to take wages. Only the poor among us are getting paid. Anyway, the turnover shrank and we decided to divide the intake among them. Didn't we, Roma?"

I nodded.

"Why are you working at all?" Gina asked.

Mira stopped smiling. "I never thought I'd be afraid once my arch-enemy left, but I am."

"What are you afraid of?"

"I don't know. The constant fear that has been with me for two years can't be shaken off that easily. Perhaps they'll come back."

"No!" Gina interrupted. "They went for good. I'm not afraid of *them*! I am afraid of the Germans. They're expected any minute. They're after the Jews!"

"The Soviets hated the Jews just the same. No regime can be any worse than the Communists," Mira exclaimed.

"Some day you may regret that you didn't leave Poland," Gina said. At this, Mira laughed out loud.

I looked from one to the other. What did Gina know that we didn't?"

"Never!" she said.

"Don't say never," Gina said, and her big eyes glittered mockingly. "Roma, you were ready to go. Let's. I'm going to walk you home."

Outside, a few teenaged boys in tattered clothing called us "dirty Jews," and one shouted at the top of his lungs, "We're watching you, you thieves!"

They were speaking Ukrainian.

Another screamed, "With the management gone, it'll be a cinch for you Jews to rob the store!"

"That does it," I said to Tur. "I am quitting as of *now*. Here are the keys."

"If you're not coming in tomorrow, neither am I," said Mira.

"You girls do what you think is best for you. But remember, I did not accept your resignation. Please understand my situation. I am the responsible one. The Russians came back once; they may again, and it's I who will have to answer to them."

He was so afraid that he asked Mira and me to sign our names alongside his own beside the total on the cash register slip. He had never used us as witnesses before. As he had for the last two years, he personally delivered the cash to the main office on Kopernica Street, even though he knew that only native clerks of low rank would be there.

Gina and I walked in the direction of Kazimierza Street, keeping close to the walls. On the way she pointed out groups of characters similar to the one's we'd encountered near Store Number One.

"The Ukrainians behave as if they think they're the future lords of the city. Perhaps they've already made a deal with the Germans. If not, they'll certainly collaborate and make it easy for our enemy. You know, Roma, I'm not walking you home. Paul will worry."

"Go home. Go home, Gina."

We embraced as if we were parting for a long time.

I detoured from my usual route and turned from Legionov to Sykstuska Street to avoid the men hanging around stores and municipal buildings. I arrived home out of breath, and I relaxed only while giving Bruno his dinner.

Once Lvov had no form of administration, the tenants of every apartment building organized a security group of men who rotated in guarding the entrances day and night. These civil guards would only let people they knew into the building. They would also alert the tenants in case of fire caused by the expected military activities.

Mrs. Kost was teasing Bruno that his turn to stand guard would also come. I laughed, and the atmosphere grew lighter because of that dear woman.

The doorbell rang. Sure that it was Fischer, I rushed smiling to the door. I was disappointed to see Hescheles. His wife had advised him to ask for permission to stay overnight in my house, where he might feel more secure than if he remained in his own. I set him up in Brustiger's room. Brustiger would be standing guard that night.

Hescheles kept me up a good part of the night, drinking vodka and discussing the cruelties he expected the Germans to inflict on Jews. He left in the morning and returned the same evening. It was Saturday, and for a moment I thought he had come early, much too early, for our traditional gathering, even if he were the only guest. No; he wanted to stay overnight again.

I told him that Brustiger was home and that I had no spare bed. He glanced at the couch in the living room and, without a word, went slowly to the door. After a few minutes, I ran to the window, opened it, and called after him. He didn't hear me. His small figure disappeared around the corner. He had mentioned that he intended to look for shelter with a lawyer friend who lived on Brayerovska Street.

As I was standing at the window brooding, I noticed smoke pouring from the Brigidki Prison, and this wiped the incident with Hescheles from my mind temporarily.

One of the rumors circulating was that the Russians were so busy dismantling factories to send them to their homeland that they had no time to organize an orderly evacuation of their "political" prisoners, and had set fire to the prison to rid themselves of the problem. Why it only smouldered, nobody knew.

I ran down to find out whether our building, located across the street from the prison, was in any danger, but I was told by the guards downstairs to "relax."

Passers-by claimed to have heard cries from inside the prison. Again, so ingrained was the fear of punishment for independent action that, although the Russians were far away by now, no one had opened the gates.

Chapter 36

The next day the German Army was in Lvov.

The soldiers didn't rush into the houses as they had done in Niemirov in the fall of 1939, but marched in an orderly fashion for hours through the main streets.

The Poles watched suspiciously as a Ukrainian welcoming committee threw flowers at them.

Almost two years had elapsed since the Germans had entered Niemirov. However, in 1939, they had remained in our town for only three weeks because they had advanced beyond the line of demarcation agreed upon by Hitler and Stalin. They would remain much longer in Lvov.

A crowd of people was gathering in front of the Brigidki Prison. Somebody had opened the gate.

"Anyone inside?" shouted a tall, plump women with carrot-red hair. There was no answer. The woman stamped her foot. "They couldn't have taken all the prisoners to Russia!"

"I'm waiting for my son to come out," said another woman, with tears in her eyes.

"Let's get inside; let's see for ourselves!" The redhead stepped up to the entrance, already guarded by Germans. She waved to the others to follow her.

A young man with rolled up shirtsleeves said, "Maybe the Germans are in cahoots with the Russians and won't let the prisoners out."

"But they're enemies now," someone called out.

"So were the Jews and the Communists. Enemies first; pals later!" The redhead stopped short and turned. "The Jews, in cahoots with the

Russians, hanged three priests." She paused, then added in a louder voice, "If you don't believe me, go to the prison on Batorego Street and see for yourself."

"Why did they do it?" the young man asked.

"Jews don't need a reason for killing priests." The woman gave the young man a sharp glance. She was very tall and her carrot-red hair was teased high. She was plump and seemed enormous. "If you think the Jews and the Russians stopped after hanging the priests, my friends, you're mistaken," she went on. "They cut off the noses and the ears of the corpses, that's what the heathen beasts did!"

Now about fifty or more voices rose in a roar of anger and indignation. The young man, the one with the rolled-up sleeves, could be heard shouting, "Revenge! Revenge!"

Then I heard myself say, "*Prosze, Pani* (please, madam), did you actually see these corpses?"

She addressed her answer to the whole crowd, "When I heard about this bestiality, I rushed to Batorego Street but the German guards wouldn't let me in, just as they won't let us into this prison. But others inside saw it with *their own eyes* and told me everything." Pointing at me she continued, "She must be a Communist herself, or, even worse, a Jew."

I slowly inched away from her terrible stare, and from the crowd. I was afraid to run. As I moved away, I could still hear the shrieking voice, "And you know what the Jews did? They pissed on the priests!"

This fantastic remark was having its effect. A crowd of 50 screamed, "*Bij zyda! Bij zyda! Bij zyda!* (Hit the Jew). I was well behind them. Once out of their sight, I ran all the way home. A pogrom started the following morning, sanctioned by the German authorities. Non-Jews living in predominantly Jewish neighborhoods had been forewarned to display holy pictures on the outside of their entrance doors and in their windows, or to suffer the consequences. Common decency had disappeared overnight. The law of the land ceased to exist. That day, Gentiles were free to do what they wanted with the Jews. . . beat them, rob them, kill them. Apparently, the Germans themselves were not partaking in this bloodbath. They were to look the other way, remaining above it all. However, there were some who couldn't stand idly by. Their own sporting instincts were aroused, and here and there they entered the melee.

From one of the open living room windows I saw a hunchbacked dwarf, with a child walking beside her. A man stopped and snatched her pocketbook. He searched it and, probably finding nothing of value, tossed it up in the air. It made a wide arc before falling at the feet of a German Brigidki Prison guard. The German prison guard picked it up and threw it back to the hoodlum as if it were a game.

Now the hoodlum ran after the dwarf, caught up with her and, as if she were some kind of oversized ball, tossed her to his newly acquired buddy, a few feet away. The buddy didn't catch her. The dwarf struck the pavement. She lay there with a horrified look, her terror-stricken eyes fixed on the child.

"*Mameniu, Mameniu*," the child cried.

A bearded Jew coming around the corner from Brayerovska Street diverted the hoodlum's attention from mother and child. When the Jew realized the trap he was walking into, he turned on his heels. But it was too late. The hoodlum ran, grabbed the man's beard and, holding onto it pulled him along. Then he punched the Jew in the face. The Jew stumbled and fell into the gutter. "*Shema Yisrael*!" the Jew repeated. But soon his calls grew weak. In a minute, he no longer moved.

The German retreated to his post, took out his gun, and aimed at the Jew, who seemed to me to be already dead.

"Mummy, Mummy, he shot him, he shot him!" I heard Bruno cry.

"What are you doing at the window, Bruno? How long have you been watching?" I shouted. I sat down and held him on my lap, trying to calm myself.

"Mummy, why are they beating people?" His round eyes were wide open with fear. "I'll be a good boy, Mummy, I promise."

I pressed him to my heart. I could hardly speak without giving away my own terrible fear. "I know you will, *Brunusiu.* Nobody will hurt you. You hear me? Nobody!" I repeated.

I was terrified. How would I be able to protect my son? How? Now that this horror was no longer confined to the Jewish neighborhood; now that the lightning of the storm had struck the district directly in front of my windows, it might also strike my apartment.

"Bruno, darling, let's play a game. Let's play hide-and-seek. You hide under the bed. Be very quiet and wait until Mrs. Kost comes to look for you. O.K.?" I said, hearing the breathlessness in my own voice.

"Mine or yours?" he asked.

"Mine."

He obediently slipped under my bed.

I covered the bed with a throw that reached to floor and went to the kitchen to prepare dinner. While rinsing the potatoes, I heard the doorbell ringing, and then the code knock.

I took for granted it was Mrs. Kost; who would dare to be out on the street? Or was it Fischer?

It was Gina, who had come all the way from Leona Sapiehy Street for the sole purpose of finding out how we had made out. She said the worst was over.

"How do you know?"

"If the rumor I heard is true, the pogrom was supposed to last eight hours, and those eight hours are past. That's why I took the chance to come here. Besides, Leona Sapiehy Street remained quiet."

She had found the streets empty except for speeding German patrols.

"Where is Bruno?" Gina asked.

I led her into my bedroom and said loudly for him to hear, "I don't know where Bruno is. Bruno! Where are you?" Then I bent down to tell him that the game was over. But he lay on his side, his eyes closed. He had fallen asleep.

"Come Gina, look."

We both crouched on the floor and looked at the small body lying in sleep.

"How can I protect him?" I whispered.

Gina, the one who had all the answers, had no answer this time.

I pulled Bruno from his hiding place, put him on my bed, and wiped bits of dust from his nose and chin.

"Stop crying, Roma," Gina scolded, "the majority of tenants in your building are Gentiles, so your building wasn't a target. And perhaps it never will be. It's less time-consuming for the gangs to stick to predominantly Jewish apartment houses. That way one attack after another can be launched without the delay of breaking in on the wrong party. The gangs have it all figured out. They have their wives and children waiting outside with empty potato sacks. . . ."

"Did you say wives and *children*?"

"That's what I said. As soon as the sacks are filled, the wives and children go home with the loot, and the men go on with the business of plundering."

"What about Place Teodora?"

Gina looked gravely at me, "Place Teodora is entirely different from Leona Sapiehy. And also different from Kazimierza Street."

A small group, consisting of some of Lvov's most prominent Jewish citizens, headed by Rabbi Levin and including Henryk Hescheles, had formed a delegation. Risking their lives, they went, while the pogrom was on, to Count Szeptycki, Archbishop of the Greek Catholic church. His influence extended far beyond his own mostly Ukrainian congregation.

The delegation was able, miraculously, to weave its way unmolested through the streets. The Archbishop expressed sincere sympathy for the Jewish victims and regret that his fellow countrymen had unleashed their fury in such a horrible manner. He promised to do everything in his power to stop the mob from committing further brutalities.

The delegation left with high hopes. On their way back they were stopped by the very mob that the Archbishop promised to control, but had not yet reached. The whole delegation was taken to a prison. None of them was ever seen again. The only survivors were Rabbi Levin's two sons, whom the Archbishop had kept in his custody.

The thought that perhaps Hescheles could have been saved—if I had not been a prude and had allowed him to stay overnight in my apartment—tortured me day and night.

He had gone from me to another friend and it was there that the delegation had formed.

Poor Hescheles. His premonition that he would be one of the first victims in the German occupation had come true. And I had accelerated his doom.

In 1939, 109,500 Jews—about one-third of the Gentile population—resided in Lvov. In 1941, the number of Jews exceeded 150,000. They consisted of those who had fled from the western part of Poland. Many of them preferred not to register, and now, while the Grand Deportation was taking place, some of the refugees, like Mrs. Kost, were hiding.

Stefan Banderas units had joined up with the invading German forces and had played a major role in stirring up hatred for the Jews. Their activities and those of other Gentiles lasted for days, far beyond the original eight hours. From July 25th until the 27th, in *Action Petlura*, about 2,000 Jews, including 100 public figures, were shot.

Chapter 37

An edict had been issued for everyone to return to his or her job. Afraid to be attacked on the way to and from Store Number One, but more afraid of the consequences of disobeying orders, I decided to take what I thought was the lesser risk. Also, I hoped to see my colleagues, Mira and Tur, and certainly Fischer, who would now obey the call to work—that is, if he had not run away with Serge to Russia.

But there was no Fischer in sight, and neither Mira nor Tur had had any word of him.

Under the new circumstances, I could not expect Mark to travel. I would be the first to warn him against a trip fraught with danger. To see him I would have to go to Zloczov.

I was still heading the musical and sporting goods departments, but a well-educated Ukrainian was now assigned as my assistant. Under his veneer of politeness—he frequently used the words "*Prosze, Pania*"—he opened the door for me, his voice soft and appealing. But I was aware of his resentment, a resentment based on his conviction that Ukrainians should now fill all managerial positions. Ready and willing to reverse our positions, I went to the main office and made the suggestion. The Ukrainian director told me to ignore Boluk's hostility; he was assigned to this particular job to learn the business first and get his promotion later.

On July 15, another edict was issued, directing every Jew to wear a white armband with a blue Star of David on his right sleeve. I embroidered the star and starched the whole band, making it as attractive looking as possible. Blume thought it ridiculous to make such a fuss over the armband. "You treat it like a mark of distinction," she said with a sneer.

"I hate it just as much as you do," I told Blume. My quiet tone stopped her from making further comments.

Bruno could not understand why his mother had to wear an armband while his Gentile playmate's mother did not.

Now, with the armband on my right sleeve, I walked the streets close to the walls, with a constant feeling of apprehension. Once inside the store, I withdrew to the stockroom and left most of the chores that involved the public—Germans and local Gentiles mostly—to Ivan Boluk. Mira was my only comfort.

Often I took out the only letter from Fischer I had kept, and read:

> I get into a rage when I think how fair and just you are and how unfair and unjust your lot is. My heart aches knowing that you have to cope all alone. I'd like to protect you, but I am permitted to love you only from a distance. I think of you constantly. Remember, I love you.

But where was he? Who would lend me their shoulder?

In response to the German order, a *Judenrat* was formed. Through this Jewish Council, the Germans could have their demands promptly fulfilled. The members of the *Judenrat* were recruited from among former community leaders. Some volunteered; others had to be drafted. The first head of Council was Josef Parnes, who was killed sometime later when he refused to supply the Germans with a quota of Jews for forced labor. In addition to supplying unpaid workers on demand, the *Judenrat* had to supply the Germans with apartments, furniture, antiques, musical instruments, and anything else they requested. A German could satisfy any desire, whether it was for an old master painting or a piano, just by requisitioning it through the Jewish Council.

Later, Jews were prohibited from wearing fur coats or fur collars on their fabric coats. We were compelled to bring these items to the Maintenance, or "Supply Bureau," in an action called *Winterhilfe*, or "winter-help." The collected furs were shipped to Germany. Women could be recognized as Jewish from a distance by the faded color of a coat and the "new" look of the fabric color where it had been stripped of its fur.

Two or three days later, I stood beside Mira in front of Store Number One. We observed Poles, Ukrainians and Germans coming and going, bargaining with Jews and returning again and again to the gold market that had sprung up overnight in many places, as well as on Place Marjacki.

The Germans had demanded, through the *Judenrat*, that ransom be paid by the Jews to the German authorities. The Germans had threatened that, if the deadline was not met, buildings inhabited by Jews would be burned, with everyone inside. Each Jew gave as much as he could, but the Germans only wanted cash.

Brustiger took a loose diamond from a matchbox. Mira and I had no difficulty paying our share, and those who no longer had any cash tried to sell their valuables. Now I watched how the poorest of the poor sold their meager trinkets: a pair of gold-filled cufflinks, a single string of pearls, a thin gold chain, an old wristwatch. I was aware of the remains of my own small fortune compared to the pitiful remnants of the poorer people. As they gave their last baubles, and each deal was concluded, my heart convulsed. Of course, the only buyers in Lvov were Gentiles.

The price of gold, silver and jewelry tumbled to an all-time low. Whereas, two months ago, I had received the equivalent of 4,000 zlotys in rubles for a 20 dollar gold coin, this morning, I had gotten the equivalent of 600 zlotys.

Chapter 38

As the situation deteriorated, synagogues were destroyed, Jewish cemeteries desecrated, and I thought more often of what Edwin Grutzner had told me. I started to form a plan that would have an impact on my whole life. I was going to look for a Catholic girl, more or less my age, and ask her for her birth and baptismal certificates. I would assume her name and her identity; then I would move to another city, where no one knew me or my child. I would place the child with a Catholic family, where he would be safe and comfortable. That was the blueprint for a lease on both our lives.

But the first step in realizing my plan already seemed unattainable. Where could I find such a Catholic girl, an angel who would help us? I reminded myself that Brustiger had spoken about his Polish girlfriend in superlatives.

Now I asked Brustiger to ask his girlfriend for her certificates. I considered it a good omen when Karola Cecylia Szarek was willing to give me her documents, provided that I would use them as my own in a place far away from Lvov, where nobody knew her or me. She made me promise that, if I was caught using them, I would say that I had found them on the street. Meanwhile, she would replace the documents by writing to her parish in Bratkovka that she had lost them and needed duplicates.

I hid the precious papers in the Oscar Wilde novel, *The Portrait of Dorian Gray.* But where could I go, alone with a child, having no friends of the Catholic faith in any city far from Lvov. Who would help me settle there with counterfeit papers?

The new management, now called "Promtorg," soon gave into Ivan

Boluk's pressure and fired me. The first few days, I felt relieved because I was no longer exposed to the street hoodlums twice a day. Then I missed the food coupons I had received as a job holder, which had entitled me to basic consumer goods at normal prices. The authorities had promised that food rations would soon be available to everybody. But, so far, food could only be had on the black market. Prices soared to an all-time high.

Afraid to show a 20 dollar gold coin, I sold the diamond bracelet Mark had given me on our first wedding anniversary. But there was simply no food available. Occasionally, we heard from a friend that a Gentile neighbor had visited relatives in the country and had brought back enough provisions for herself and a little something extra to sell. Immediately, someone would go to the person and consider himself lucky if he could buy a dozen eggs or a kilo of potatoes.

Mrs. Kost gave me an address where I found flour, potatoes, and eggs. A week later most of it was gone. My pantry contained only three potatoes and a dab of rancid butter, sufficient for one skimpy meal. I cooked the potatoes first, and then fried them. I served half to Bruno for breakfast and left the other half for his lunch, hoping that by dinnertime I would be able to buy something edible. I was constantly hungry. Yesterday, I had caught myself licking Bruno's plate clean.

Now, when I put the fried potatoes on the table for Bruno's breakfast and he started to eat, it was more than I could bear. I grabbed a piece of potato from his plate and, while he stared at me, I chewed greedily. Avoiding his eyes, I grabbed another piece. Without having swallowed it, I ran out of the apartment, asked Mrs. Kost to take care of my child, and rushed outside.

Resentment against Mark turned into uncontrollable rage as I ran around the block. "Bastard! Bastard! Bastard!" I cried. Abandoned by him, abandoned by Fischer, and with my parents struggling for their own survival, where, *where* could I turn?

As if automatically propelled, my feet carried me to the same Polish woman who had sold me groceries a week ago. I took a position in front of her door, where, if she looked through the peephole, she would not see my armband. I rang the bell and waited.

The woman opened the door, looked me over, gave a passing glance at the armband and said that whatever she had brought from the village to sell was already gone.

"Mrs. Goralska, I have a child and we've eaten the last crumb of bread. Please. . . ."

"You'd better leave or I'll call the police," she said.

I left. Walking away, I suddenly remembered. If anyone had food, Mira would have it, I thought. However, she lived too far away for a Jew to walk to, I could get caught in a raid on the way. But I was hungry. Then, I got an idea.

Frantic with fear, I went into a doorway, yanked the "sling" off my sleeve, and hid it in my pocketbook. On the street again, I grew even more frightened. Edwin Grutzner was not at my side. My fast stride on Legionov Street took me in almost no time to Valy Hetmanskie. The statues of Stalin and Woroszylow were now gone. I came to Jagiellonska Street, passed the bank Chodorowski had managed, and realized that the Russian occupation seemed like "the good old days." Perhaps I should have accepted Serge's scholarship to the University of Moscow?

While crossing Jagiellonska Street I bumped into a woman. Panic stricken, I said, "*Przepraszam,*" and continued walking. But the woman called out, "Roma Brand!"

I was recognized!

It was the Polish girl who had registered me two years ago when I applied for a job in the Ukrkultorg. There was no way out. I was at her mercy. I stopped; we shook hands while I cleared my throat more than once. Stammering, I told her that I was on my way to Mira Hendler, "the cashier, you remember? I want to buy some food."

To my great surprise, she said, "I can sell you some. You know what? Meet me here at 3 o'clock in the afternoon. I'll have bread for you."

"I'll be here! I'll be here!" I cried out to my acquaintance, who was now a godsend. However, doubts soon replaced my happiness. What if she had made this appointment only to hand me over to the authorities? If only Gina were here, Gina would know whether I could trust the girl.

It was only 12 o'clock when I arrived at Mira's. Mira welcomed me warmly. She was about to serve lunch in the livingroom. Table settings for two were spread out on a white tablecloth for herself and her little daughter. Her husband was not home. She brought an additional setting and complained that she was compelled to do everything herself because she no longer had a housekeeper. Then she brought two frying pans from the kitchen, each containing a luscious omelette still sizzling in its butter. She set the frying pans on the table on silver trivets. She cut an omelette in two and, as she was lifting half of it to put on my place, my false pride took over. I said, "I had my lunch already." I could have bitten my tongue because Mira didn't then coax me, as every hostess usually does. Instead, she uncovered a basket filled with neatly sliced bread, spread one slice with butter for her daughter and another for herself.

I could feel the crackling breadcrust under my teeth. My teeth, independent creatures, had their own longing for direct contact with the light-brown crust of bread in the basket. My eyes also assumed an independent life of their own. They followed Mira's beautiful hands, which I had often seen moving over the piano keyboard, especially the one that now held the fork. Now this hand cut a little piece from one half of the omelette and lifted the dripping golden morsel slowly to her mouth. Her double chin quivered as she chewed with her lips pressed together. She swallowed. Then she opened her lips, but only wide enough so that another precious mouthful could be inserted. She chewed slowly, as in a nightmare.

When she started on the second half, the one that could have been mine, were it not for my false pride, I closed my eyes.

My lips trembled. My mouth was full of saliva. I was deaf to Mira's and her child's talk; I heard only the nonexistent sound of chewing.

When the torture of watching them eat was over, I said, "Mira, where do you get your groceries?"

Reluctantly, she said, "From Xenia. Remember her?"

"How could I forget her? We were friendly; I sort of liked her. Where does she get them?"

"She goes to Horyniec once a week. After she's supplied her own needs she sells the rest to me. We have a standing arrangement." The last sentence sounded like a warning.

"I thought you detested Xenia."

"She improved a lot," Mira said. "You wouldn't know her. She uses perfume and she seldom picks her nose any more." Mira smiled mischievously.

"What's her address?" I asked.

"She told me not to give it to anybody."

So Xenia was helping her ex-enemy, Mira, and Xenia's "friend" couldn't have her address, even to obtain badly needed food for a child.

How I now detested my false pride! Instead of revealing that I was starving, that at this very moment my child was eating a fried potato, I had foolishly refused the omelette. Mira probably thought I had more than she.

I gritted my teeth and, to divert myself from the pangs of hunger, I asked, "How is Tur?"

"I don't see him. . . very often."

"How is he?"

"I told you, I don't see him!"

So Tur, no longer useful, was out of Mira's life? Perhaps the rumors about and Mira and the *miscom* were true?

"You were such close friends, you and Tur. What happened?"

"He lives so far away. . . it's dangerous. . . ." Abruptly she changed the subject. "By the way, how is Fischer?"

"Haven't heard a word from him since the Russians left. He probably escaped with Serge to Russia. I thought that perhaps Tur had heard from him. My habit of not asking my friends for their addresses seems to be an unfortunate one for me." I said it tartly, sure that she would understand my hint and give me Xenia's address.

She didn't.

I dragged myself back to the corner of Legionov and Jagiellonska Streets, where I was going to meet the bread-bearing secretary. The round brass clock on Chodorovski's bank showed the time to be 2:45. The Russians who had managed the bank for the last two years were thousands of miles away. The bank had been closed for weeks. But the clock was running.

Should I risk the meeting with the Polish secretary, or should I go home and think of other possibilities? But I was so hungry that I was willing to trust a person I hardly knew. She had helped me get the job once, she might help me this time too. Besides, to her it could be just a profitable transaction, I murmured, while I stationed myself at the window of a closed bookshop so as not to appear to be loitering.

As I examined the titles of the dust jackets, the print waved in front of my eyes. I was very near to fainting. Fear that the girl would not show up and hope that she would raced through me almost simultaneously. I watched the hands of the bank clock reflected in the glass window and clenched my teeth.

I saw her coming at four minutes past 3. She was alone and she carried a bundle under her arm. "You see, I kept my word," she said.

"Thank you so very much."

We entered the first doorway open on Jagiellonska Street. I paid; she gave me the bundle, I peeked into the bag, saw a loaf of white bread and couldn't control myself. I tore off a piece of bread with my fingernails and put it in my mouth. It was the best white bread I'd ever tasted. I hardly chewed it. Burning with an inextinguishable hunger, I attacked the loaf again and again.

The girl had long ago put the money in her pocketbook. But she didn't turn to go. She watched me and finally said in a sympathetic voice, "You must have been starved."

"Yes, I was very hungry. Thank you once more."

"You don't have to thank me. I was in a village yesterday and bought enough for my family and enough for resale to make a little money. I make this trip once a week; if you're interested, I can sell you other merchandise next week."

"I'm very interested," I replied gratefully.

"Here is my address. Come next Wednesday and we'll do business."

My mouth was watering just imagining the feast Bruno and I would have. "Of course, I'll be there next week; I'll buy everything you can spare. Thank you."

Then, with the treasure under *my* arm, I went hurrying home to my child.

Chapter 39

"The Germans have closed our block on Kazimierza Street," Mrs. Kost said, after catching her breath. "It's a raid. Someone said, "The Special Commandos are searching every apartment for gold and other valuables." She wiped the perspiration from her forehead with the back of her hand. "We paid our ransom; what more do they want of us! Roma, is it all right if I stay with you for a while? I am so afraid."

"You're welcome to," I replied.

"The Frieden girls from across the hall want to stay with you, too," Mrs. Kost said apologetically.

"They are welcome too."

From under the mattress I quickly got out the matchbox containing the diamonds Brustiger had entrusted me with, believing they were safer with a woman. I ran from my bedroom to the living room to hide it behind a Knut Hamsun book in a glass-paneled bookcase. Next to it stood Oscar Wilde's book, in which I had hidden my new birth and baptismal certificates. Then I reminded myself of the precious electric cooker containing my gold coins, and for a moment my mind went blank. Where was it? I had so often moved it from one place to another that now I had to concentrate to remember where it was. I ran to the night table in my bedroom, back to the living room, and then to the foyer, and finally remembered hiding it on the bottom of the wooden closet in Bruno's room under a heap of the child's underwear. I grabbed it and pushed it into the trashcan in the kitchen.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Kost had brought the two Frieden girls.

Shortly after, we heard loud voices and banging on the door. Four young men in uniforms burst into the apartment. One of them, very blond, very fair, and very handsome, named Kurt, grabbed the neckline of my dress, pulling the inflexible fabric as far as he could, and slid his other hand inside. Having searched between my breasts, he pulled out his hand, grinning, and said, "She has nothing."

The other Germans, following his lead, grabbed the necklines of Mrs. Kost, and of both the Frieden girls. One found Mrs. Kost's little cotton bag with the drawstring, which she had hidden in her brassiere. He emptied the contents on the upholstered bench in the foyer. There, on the beige velvet, lay everything Mrs. Kost possessed: a simple string of pearls, two gold teeth caps, a fine gold chain with a tiny heart-shaped pendant, a ring with a pearl, and a silver bracelet.

The other two found money and jewelry the Frieden girls had hidden in their brassieres.

Lately, parents would divide their valuables among their children, hoping to escape by some miracle and to have something left with which to pay their way to a foreign country, or buy their way out of arrest.

Mrs. Kost and the girls were convinced that I would be able to help them, to impress the Special Commandos with my German and have them leave us alone. I failed them. Now the four Germans started to search the house roughly. One threw off the bedcover, the blanket and the pillows. Another slashed open the mattress, finding nothing. And the third opened one drawer after another and dumped everything on the floor. Underneath a pile of lingerie, the fourth found a jewelry box I had forgotten in my excitement. He opened the lid without taking it from the drawer and called, "Kurt, look what I've found!"

Kurt, evidently the leader, turned from the upholstered chair he had just cut open and leaped toward the chest of drawers. He looked inside and licked his lips. Piece by piece, he lifted out my diamond earrings, two diamond rings, strings of pearls, a long gold chain and two gold bracelets. The other two stopped the search and looked on.

Now Kurt lifted out Mrs. Kost's diamond studded watch, her most valuable possession. It was attached to a loop of long black ribbon, which he slung, like a bracelet, over his wrist. It dangled, glittering, in front of his greenish-gray-clad thigh.

I reproached myself for having left the box in such a conspicuous place and hoped desperately that they wouldn't discover my little fortune hidden in the electric cooker.

Mrs. Kost's watch, worth about 100 dollars, meant a great deal to her. She had given it to me to sell when she wanted to contribute some cash to the Jewish Council for the ransom. A Gentile had offered me 20 dollars and I had refused to sell it. Instead I had loaned her 50 dollars and we had decided to wait until the prices went up.

Now she sat and watched, her heavy body drooping. Despair had drawn lines in her plain good-natured face.

"Please, please, leave me just this one piece, it's a wedding gift from my husband and he's gone," I said, pointing at the watch swaying from the black ribbon.

"Come and get it," he said, and licked his lips.

I started slowly in his direction.

"If you catch it, it's yours," Kurt said. He held the black ribbon between his thumb and forefinger, stretched his arm high up and suddenly let go of the watch.

I sprang forward, palms spread, and caught it in the air.

"It's yours," said Kurt.

I sighed with relief, then turned around and caught Mrs. Kost's glance. Her fat face, perspiring, reflected her gratitude.

The treasures the Germans found were apparently sufficient in quantity to satisfy their appetites, for Kurt then said that we would receive receipts for the requisitioned jewelry by mail. But instead of leaving, Kurt ordered Mrs. Kost into my bedroom and carefully closed the door. After five minutes she came out with tears in her eyes. The three Germans watching us in the living room prohibited Mrs. Kost from talking to us. Then it was the turn of the Frieden girls. Each one came out obviously shaken. We were still not allowed to talk.

I was the last to be called into the bedroom. After the door closed, Kurt said, "*Kleider 'runter*," and motioned for me to take off my clothes. I looked at him.

"*Kleider 'runter*," he shouted.

My hands moved around to the back-buttoned dress but remained suspended in the air.

"*Himmel Donnerwetter noch einmal. Kleider 'runter* (Damn it! Once more, clothes off)!" he swore.

My trembling fingers struggled with the buttonholes. Kurt formed a fist with his right hand and took a step towards me. I swiftly pulled the dress up and over my head. He then tore away my brassiere and ordered me to take my panties off. I quivered. Kurt squeezed two fingers over the seams of the dress, threw it aside to the floor and reached for my panties. I stood naked, my hands covering my breasts. After he had checked every garment, he came closer. I moved back. My foot collided with the leg of the bed and I screamed in pain.

"I am sorry," he said. "Don't be afraid of me, I am only doing my job." His voice sounded as if he were really sorry, then it became coarse again, "Turn around." I turned my back to him.

"Bend down! Touch the floor! With both hands!" he ordered. I stood as though paralyzed. I heard him sit down behind me.

"Are you deaf? Legs apart! Bend down! Touch the floor with both hands!"

I obeyed.

Between my spread thighs I saw Kurt upside down with his legs straddling the wooden arms of the chair. He licked his lips.

When I came out of the bedroom, Bruno slipped from Mrs. Kost's lap and ran towards me. I couldn't touch him. I couldn't look at Mrs. Kost or the two Frieden girls. Nor, apparently, could they look at me. Each of us stared above the other's head. No one spoke, not even after the Special Commando left.

And, as if by tacit agreement, we never mentioned the incident. Though Kurt's orders had been to search for valuables hidden inside us, he had gone no further than that.

Chapter 40

For the first time in history, our local municipality, now subordinated to the German authorities, had no problem gathering enough sanitary workers at an hour's notice. The Jewish Council was ordered by the German authorities, who had received a request from the city administration, to conscript the workers needed daily. Since no wages were paid, the municipality could afford to engage as many as the man in charge of that department requested.

The Jewish Council scheduled every adult Jew to do manual work once every three weeks. Men dug ditches and repaired roads; women cleaned offices and did general housework for Germans.

Winter came early and men and women were assigned to shovel snow on the streets. When I was called, Brustiger suggested a woman who would go instead of me if I paid her a day's wages. I wanted to do what my compatriots who had no money were compelled to do, so I put on high boots, a warm coat, and went to the assembly point near the offices of the Jewish Council. About eighty people were already lined up.

I was included in a group of twenty women who were sent to Grodecka Street. Each of us, with the armbands on our right sleeves, was to shovel the snow from the road for the length of a block and pile it up in heaps next to the curb.

The traffic was heavy because Grodecka Street connected the railroad station with midtown. Tramways, military trucks, cars, and horse-driven sleds made cleaning very slow. My boots were too heavy and my long coat handicapped my movements.

Our guard, a soldier with protruding ears that were red from the cold below his small cap, shouted at me again and again, "You there! You move like a snail!" I slammed the shovel edge with all my strength against the half frozen snow, with little result. Then, every few minutes, I had to step aside quickly when a tramway or truck came rolling. Some of the drivers, making a game of it, raced toward me and stopped just short of running me over. One truck came within a hairbreadth of me; I was about to jump aside when a tramway came from the opposite direction.

I screamed.

I awoke in the Jewish hospital. Mrs. Hescheles, a full-time volunteer in the hospital, was my nurse. She sat for hours at my bedside. Both of us talked endlessly about her husband. The care she took of her daughter kept her mind busy and somehow made it easier for her to wait patiently for his return. She fiercely believed that he would come back. I spoke to her of my deep regret for not having let him stay overnight; perhaps he would not have been included in the committee which went to Archbishop Szeptycki and might still be here with her.

Her hand gently touched mine, "We don't know what would have happened. If, if, if! I believe in destiny. Let's pray that, wherever my husband is, his strength will last long enough to overcome the difficulties."

I wondered whether she knew he had a cyanide pill ready to swallow. "He was strong enough to overcome the difficulties in the Soviet prisons; he will be this time too," I said eagerly. "I only hope our friendship will continue after he returns."

"It will, it will. He respected you very much. Maybe it's your old-fashioned upbringing. . . ."

Though she said it in a soft voice, I felt reprimanded. And, though she did everything to make me feel comfortable, my guilty feeling increased. Quiet and somber, she went from room to room, fed one patient, read to another, helped dress and undress the handicapped, did everything as if she had been a trained nurse.

She brought me a Polish daily in which a notice of my accident appeared, "Roma Brand crossed Grodecka Street, ignoring the signal of the driver on a truck loaded with lumber. She is in hospital suffering from internal injuries, a victim of her own carelessness."

Why was this falsified statement printed? Had the truck driver run me down on purpose and was he now afraid of the consequences? Was the German military that watched us work afraid of a bad reputation? Was somebody still concerned about a Jew suffering injuries?

After going through some tests in the hospital, I was found to be all right, apart from a few black and blue marks and a bearable pain in my sacroiliac joint. Two days later, Blume and Brustiger picked me up and took me home.

Now we heard of Field Marshal Zukow's resignation, and of the great advances the German Army was making in Russia. We were deeply troubled. Rumors that a closed ghetto was to be created, like the one in Warsaw, were substantiated by the Jewish Council. The location chosen was a district populated mainly by Jews and connected with the rest of the city by the Zamarstynovska Bridge.

The Jews living outside that particular area started a pilgrimage to the future ghetto, trying to rent rooms or to store some of their belongings with relatives or friends. In case the eviction order came suddenly, they wanted to be sure of a place in which they would have some of their own clothing.

Gestapo guards on each end of the bridge searched bundles and arrested anyone who looked old and worn. The gestapo led these Jews to a nearby building behind a fence. According to the rumors, these elderly people were to be deported to labor camps, where they were to perform work suitable for their limited energy, like knitting or plucking feathers. That's what Mrs. Hescheles believed her husband did in a labor camp. It took weeks before the Jews in Lvov realized that these people were kept somewhere incommunicado, and years later we found out they were the first to die in the Belzec death camp.

I debated constantly with Blume, Gina, Brustiger and others what to do to prevent my parents from being deported to such a camp. Place

Teodora One was not included in the area of the would-be Ghetto. My parents would eventually have to cross the Zamarstynovska Bridge and perhaps disappear, as many others had.

Their care was taken out of my hands when the Ukrainian, Trusievicz, sent by Abner, arrived in Lvov to take them back to Niemirov. Trusievicz told me that the Gestapo had not set up a permanent unit in Niemirov. A few SS men from the unit stationed in Rava-Ruska came by car to Niemirov once every two weeks to check the town out, but that was all. He also told me that there were few local troublemakers, although later there would be plenty, and active troublemakers, too. Those that were there were held in check by the resident Gentile community.

Blume was to follow Father, Perele, and Tin-Tin as soon as she sold the textiles and some other belongings, things they could not take along without calling attention to themselves. For the money received she was to buy American dollars.

Blume remained alone in the flat. Now, since new rumors claimed that Place Teodora would also be part of the ghetto, I decided to move into my parents' flat instead of having Blume move to Kazimierza Street.

It turned out to be an excellent hiding place and a refuge for friends in distress. The seven steps leading to the entrance door diminished the probability of there being a surprise visit from the Gestapo or from the lingering hoodlums.

A neighbor now hung a large padlock outside the entrance door every night, and with no lights on, the flat looked like a vacant store.

Used to living in an apartment house with all the modern comforts, I did not find the change easy to take.

After putting Bruno to bed, Blume and I would sit in the dark listening to the outside sounds. Each time we heard steps heading in our direction, we tensed. Later, in bed, I thought of what Gina had told me earlier in the day: that the Gestapo used dogs to trace hidden Jews and that no sound or scent escaped them. I was glad Blume didn't know. She had left her bed and crawled into mine. Now her hand searched for my hand. Although quaking with fear myself, I whispered words of encouragement, "Don't be afraid, Blume. Those aren't boots. It sounds like a man and a woman. Nothing to be afraid of. . . a woman. . . ."

The steps came dangerously near, and when they stopped under the window, I held my breath. "Perhaps the couple stopped to kiss," I whispered. After a while we heard the steps again, but they were fading away. "You see, Blume?" I pressed her hand reassuringly and looked over at Bruno's bed. The sound of his regular breathing eased my tension somewhat and, after a time, I too fell asleep.

Chapter 41

Our arms loaded, Gina and I congratulated each other on our luck in finding flour, butter, and eggs; we wondered how long it would last and what kind of feast we were going to have.

A man came out of a stationery store and crossed the sidewalk toward the gutter, bumping into me.

"Excuse me," the man said.

The voice sounded familiar. Between my bundles I looked into his face and saw Fischer staring at me. Was it a ghost? Fischer was in Russia!

I touched his outstretched hand to feel whether it was flesh and blood. He shook my hand casually, asked me for my *new* address and then stepped quickly into a chauffeur-driven Opel.

I remained at the curb in a stupor of amazement.

Not so long ago he had been dressed in threadbare clothing—and now he had access to a chauffeur driven car! The most surprising fact was that he wasn't wearing the white armband with the blue Star of David. Fischer was a Jew! A very assimilated one, but nevertheless a Jew. Or was he?

From the day he disappeared, I had thought of him with resentment for going away without either telling me or sending a message and, after, for not writing one of his beautiful letters. To Bruno's question as to why Mr. Fischer stopped giving him music lessons, I had a simple answer: "Our friend went to Russia on business." If Fischer had been here in Lvov all the time, why hadn't he looked me up? He was the man who claimed that life without me wasn't worth living. He was the man who had wanted to protect me. If he was here, it seemed, it meant he had dropped me when

I needed him most. I had thought often of both Mark and Fischer. Hurt by both, humiliated by both, abandoned by both, I had cursed all men, and now I especially cursed Fischer.

"He asked for your *new* address. That means he was looking for you on Kazimierza Street," Gina said.

"Don't defend him, Gina," I said, but to myself I murmured, "I can't understand, I can't understand."

"He'll explain, I'm sure," Gina said.

"Do you think I'll see him again?"

"Of course, he took your new address."

"He didn't write it down. Do you think he'll remember?"

"Of course he'll remember!" Gina replied enthusiastically.

"I am not so sure. He's changed. He didn't stop long enough to ask how Bruno was."

"He has changed all right; he has really come up in the world."

"He was in an awful hurry to get into the car, as if he were embarrassed by our meeting. I don't understand."

"I don't understand *you*!" Gina cried out. "You never let him make love to you, in fact, you rejected him over and over and now you expect his loyalty, admiration, what else? He owes you nothing."

"He proclaimed his love to me over and over again. . . ."

"Wake up, Roma. It's about time to leave your romanticism to the teenagers; it's time for you to enter the real world!"

"Gina, it's not lovemaking, it's love that counts."

We were interrupted by sounds of shouting.

"Roma! There is a raid! Let's turn into Boimov Street, quickly!"

We turned, and luckily avoided the raid.

The following day Fischer came to Place Teodora.

Bruno ran into his outstretched arm, screaming joyfully, "You're back! You're back!"

Fischer swung him up in the air and the child was delighted. Then, sitting on his lap, Bruno asked Fischer why he hadn't brought his cello.

"Next time, *Brunusiu,* next time," Fischer said.

Although he couldn't understand the solemnity of our situation, Bruno, strangely, behaved as if he did because, when I took him to his "room," he didn't resent it.

Alone with Fischer, I asked point blank, "Why didn't you call?"

"Please, Roma, no questions! I am in no position to give you the answers. Just believe that I looked for you as soon as I could."

"What do you mean as soon as you could?"

"For a while I was out of town. . . ."

"In Russia?"

"Not in Russia! Right after I returned to Lvov I went to Kazimierza Street, where I was told by the superintendent that you'd moved without leaving a forwarding address."

"Why didn't you ask Brustiger or Mrs. Kost?"

"I had my reasons."

"There's always a reason."

"At first I didn't want to look for you in the store because I wanted to avoid a surprise scene in front of the new employees. Later, I did inquire in the store and was told you were still registered under the Kazimierza Street address." He took my hand and continued, "Believe me, Roma, I never gave up hope that somehow I'd find you. The last resort would have been to go to the Jewish Council, but that entailed some danger for me. The main thing is that I've found you, so let's not talk about it anymore."

"It's easy for you to say."

"Just listen to what I *can* tell you. You know that I'm of the Protestant faith. . . ."

"In the store we thought you were Jewish."

"You were wrong. I was and am Protestant. My ex-wife is Protestant. My two children were brought up in the Protestant faith in Germany by their mother."

"I knew that you were married to a German woman and that your children stayed with her, but. . ." I stopped short. My assumption that Fischer was Jewish must surely have been wrong. Of all people, he had no reason to lie to *me.*

And then he told me a most incredible story. When the Germans had come to Lvov, he, a Polish citizen, had applied to become a

Volksdeutsche, one of those who returned to the German nationality of his ancestors. Because he had studied in Germany, and because of his history with his ex-wife and children, his case was favorably considered. Nevertheless, he had to go through a routine examination. He was called before a special committee that scrutinized him thoroughly. An anthropologist measured his broken nose, his earflaps and the empty spaces between his teeth. A professor examined his German and a psychiatrist had him talk of his childhood. Then he was told he had passed. He had become a *Volksdeutscher*.

The Poles, and even more Ukrainians, who applied to become *volksdeutscher* and were accepted were treated royally. They received spacious furnished apartments, formerly belonging to the Jews, and more food coupons. They were permitted to shop in Meinl stores where a large sign, "*Nur fur Deutsche*," designated the area "for Germans only," and prohibited anyone else from entering the premises. Though thus privileged, the *volksdeutscher* remained a few notches below the real "aristocrats," the *Reichdeutsche*: those Germans who had always been Germans.

I could not believe that Fischer had chosen to become *volksdeutsch* for material reasons. He had never used his buyer's position for economic gain during the Russian occupation, and had even been given the nickname "idiot" for not taking advantage of his position. Mystery surrounded him like a cloud.

I had been staring at him while he was talking and I stared at him after he had finished. His eyes bulged behind his thick glasses.

"I suppose you're shocked."

"Indeed I am," I said.

"Someday I'll explain it to you. For now, my dear Roma, please trust me." He looked away and changed the subject. "As you know, after the Russians left, the Ukrainians took over the Ukrkultorg and nobody resisted them. Many of them remained in good positions, but under strict German supervision. The German management called on me to keep working as a buyer for them. They fused Ukrkultorg with another company by the name of Promtorg, and I became executive buyer. As soon as I knew where I stood, I looked for you and was told that you had quit your job."

"I was fired."

He took both my hands, looked into my eyes and asked in a gentle voice, "Now, tell me, how are you, Roma?"

"Do you have to ask?" I made a gesture pointing at the flat. "You know very well that our situation is grave."

"Why don't you do something about it?"

"What can I do? I have Catholic documents."

"That's great!"

"But I don't have the slightest notion how to make use of them. I promised the girl who gave them to me to use them only in a faraway city where no one knows her or me. Now where can I go? I have no Christian friends in Warsaw or Cracow, nor anywhere else, who would help me establish myself under another name."

"Show me the papers."

I got them from between the pages of *The Portrait of Dorian Gray*, which I had lately hidden between an armoire and the wall in the bedroom area, and I put them on the table before him.

"Good. Very good," he said. "However, you need one more document bearing the name of Cecylia Szarek with *your* photograph on it."

"That's impossible! Where will I get such a document?"

"Nothing is impossible. Let me think. Wait a second. . . ! Yes, I have a way! It might work. Listen, get rid of your armband and come to my office. No. Not to *my* office; go directly to the personnel department in the same building on the second floor and apply for a salesgirl's job. We need salesgirls. Say you are Cecylia Szarek and, if asked, show them these documents."

"And?"

"And you may get the job."

"And?"

"And you'll have to go to work every day for about two weeks. It takes approximately two weeks to process an employee. You'll get an *Arbeitskarte* with your photograph and Cecylia's name."

"Two weeks? It's crazy! I did that once when I was hungry and will never do it again! I felt like a hunted animal. Each time someone looked at me, I thought I'd been discovered."

"You'll have to do it! I'll work it so that you'll be assigned to a store at the far end of the city, where nobody knows you. Let's see. . . I've got it! We have a store in the vicinity of Saint Anna Church."

"I could never do it! Removing the armband once for a few hours is one thing, but to have to do it fourteen times in the morning in order to go to Saint Anna Square, and then to have to replace it again when I return to Place Teodora, without getting caught—I'd need twenty eight miracles!"

He nodded, he blinked, and, when he blinked again, it became obvious to me that there was something new in Fischer's face.

"I agree that it's extremely dangerous. But it's a risk you'll have to take if you want a *future.*"

Future. It was a word we had erased from our vocabulary. We lived from day to day. No, from hour to hour. Now, this word coming from Fischer sounded new, strange, promising.

"What about Bruno?"

"Once you have your documents in order, the child will be all right because no Catholic mother carries her child's birth certificate."

"Assuming I have this additional document, what then?" I had begun to think.

"First you apply for the job. When the time comes, I'll think of something."

"I'll have to ask the real Cecylia Szarek for permission. Anyway, I don't think I can go through with it," I said.

He got up, took me by my shoulders and said, "I'll expect you in my office tomorrow!" It sounded like an order. "Where is your enterprising spirit, Roma?" he said, blinking again. He went to kiss Bruno and left.

Blume came home and gave me the money she had received for my garnet bracelet. It had survived the Special Commando search because it hadn't been in the metal box with the other jewelry. It was such a small amount that I reproached her for not having sold the garnet brooch, too.

I told her of Fischer's visit and his plan. She begged me not to do it. It was crazy to expect it to be successful, she thought.

Later, Gina, then Brustiger, called my attention to the severe punishment that would follow if I were caught without the armband. "And for what?" Brustiger said. "For some other crazy plan Fischer will think of next?"

I didn't go to Kopernica Street.

I was sure that Fischer would come to visit me the next day, and was deeply hurt when day after day passed and he didn't show up.

On Place Teodora, without a telephone, I seldom heard from Mark. Blume had sold almost everything our parents had left in Lvov and was about to leave for Niemirov. Our parents insisted she come home and I felt I had no right to stand in her way. She asked me to come with her to Niemirov, but, in my opinion, that would be regression. I had left the small town and would never return. The only thing bothering me now was that, with Blume's departure, one more person my child loved would be out of his reach, as would his beloved Tin-Tin. And who would I leave Bruno with when bartering for food?

Again, Brustiger came to my rescue. He introduced me to another Catholic girlfriend, by the name of Danka Bracka. Her deep-set brown eyes were never completely open; they seemed to be mere slits and she had a shifty expression. Her hand, as she extended it to me in the usual greeting, felt moist and flaccid. However, when she told me that she planned to go to Warsaw to help her Jewish fiancé in the ghetto, my aversion passed.

She agreed to take Bruno for a walk every day at noon. The sum I was to pay her was insignificant for the service she would render. Bruno, blond, very fair, blue-eyed, and with his perky nose, looked almost Polish, and in the company of a Polish Catholic woman would not be exposed to the danger of being caught in a raid. The child needed fresh air, and I needed time for doing errands.

Danka Bracka was a stroke of luck. Brustiger now advised me to team up with Danka, using my counterfeit papers, and go to Warsaw. I agreed that this would be a good solution, but Danka wasn't yet ready to leave Lvov.

Even with this good fortune, I was still unable to lift myself out of the state of depression that had overcome me. I had stopped taking care of the house, as well as of myself. Blume was out most of the time, doing errands before leaving for Niemirov. A glimpse in the mirror deepened my sadness. The blue of my soiled house robe had faded. I moved closer to the mirror and brushed my fingers over the lines on my forehead that had grown so deep at only twenty-three. It was then that I noticed the black under my nails. I turned to go to the washbasin in the “kitchen,” but all at once the few steps seemed too great an effort to make. I slumped to the floor, buried my face in my hands and wept.

Chapter 42

Brustiger, after weeks of trying, had finally landed a job with a German firm and could now feel safe on the streets. The German working card protected the owner from being included in a roundup.

Brustiger proudly displayed the card. His mood lifted mine somewhat.

"When are you getting married, and who is the lucky lady?" I teased him. Men between the ages of eighteen and eighty who held German working cards were sought in marriage by women of all ages for the protection it offered them.

Mira entered and we stopped laughing. Mira, who rarely smiled but also never cried, was wiping her eyes. Her lace bordered handkerchief was all wet. Preparing herself for the probability of being compelled to move to the ghetto area, she had packed some of her belongings to bring to an aunt who lived on the other side of Zamarstynovska Bridge. Her mother had helped her carry the heavy load. At the bridge, the Gestapo guard had stopped them. He searched the bundles and allowed Mira to proceed, but her mother, an old woman, was led to the building behind the fence.

"It was all a mistake," Mira cried. "Mother has one of the best working cards. From the *Wehrmacht* itself. If only I had known German, I could have explained it to the guard and he would have let Mother go!" She burst into sobs.

I remembered her refusal to give me Xenia's address when I was hungry; I remembered her not coaxing me to the eat omelette—and kept silent.

She took a handkerchief from me, then calmed down and looked at me with a pitiful expression. "I wasn't nice to you, Roma, I know. But this is a matter of great importance. My mother is a sick woman. I'm sorry I was mean, I'm sorry. All you have to do is to come with me and explain to the guard in *German* that it's a mistake," she begged.

I thought, "It's not her, it's her mother who needs help," and, despite Blume's advice and my own aversion to Mira, I consented to go with her.

Near the bridge Mira pointed out the guard. I approached tentatively, my heart pounding, and just as I was about to address him from a distance of about ten feet, and ask for permission to speak, two groups of Jews, one of four and another of three, stepped up on the bridge, were stopped by the same guard and were searched.

Mira had remained at a safe distance, and now I was tempted to leave. But I saw a German military man photographing two gray-bearded Jews near the gate leading to that mysterious building. I walked up and asked for permission to speak to him.

He glanced at my armband, focused his camera, and snapped a picture. I explained the mistake made by the guard in sending an employee of the *Wehrmacht* to the building behind the fence.

The military man didn't answer. There was only one thing left to do. Enter the gate and find someone inside who would give me some information. As soon as the German turned his back, I walked in. I hadn't taken five steps inside when a sudden shout stopped me. It was the same German. He had seen me walk in and had followed me. He approached and pushed me back. I fell to the ground. "You don't belong here, *verstanden*?" he screamed, bending over me. He grabbed the lapels of my raincoat, pulled me up and, when I was on my feet, grabbed my arm with one hand, opened the gate with the other and threw me out.

Outside, I fell again. My hands and knees were bruised, my stockings ripped and my lower back hurt. Mira, who had seen me flying out the gate, ran over to help me up, and I limped home with her. "I'm sorry I wasn't of any help to you. . . ." I said.

"You did what you could," Mira said.

"That means they don't recognize the German *Arbeitskarte* any longer," said Brustiger, who had waited for us, with Blume, at Place Teodora. "I paid 100 dollars for nothing."

Only years later did it become known that the old and tired-looking people arrested at Zamarstynovska Bridge were used as guinea pigs for the newly erected gas chambers at Majdanek and Belzec. Only then did I realize that the fuming German military man had hurled me from death to life.

Brustiger's visits suddenly stopped. Worried, I went to Kazimierza Street, rang the doorbell, and, when no one answered, code-knocked at Mrs. Kost's door.

She let me in and promptly burst into tears. "My son, my Baruchl, they took him. . . ."

"Who took him?"

"Don't you know, the *Gazlunim*! Those bandits in the Jewish Militia." She choked on her words. "My Baruchl slaved once in three weeks just like everybody else, and more. My good boy substituted for Dr. Brustiger to make a little money—God knows, we needed it—but when I recently heard that some men hadn't come back home from work, I tore the summons up and wouldn't let my Baruchl go to work. And what do you think the *Gazlunim* did? Three of them in those disgraceful uniforms, militia uniforms, came for Baruchl. Jewish boys in uniforms—a disgrace! Against my will, they took Baruchl away for a day's work, they said." She sobbed and could not go on talking.

"Why didn't you call on Brustiger? He has connections. Maybe he could help to buy your son from the militia."

She wiped her tears with the back of her hands and then wrung them in desperation. "They took him too, Roma, him too. . . ."

I took a sharp breath. "When?"

"The same day, on Thursday morning. When my Baruchl didn't return for the night, I went the next day to the *Judenrat*. That *Gazlen*, the bandit, sat behind a desk smoking a cigar. Mind you, a cigar! He said, 'I don't know anything.' That's exactly what he said. He didn't know! Who would, if not him? He took Baruchl. I started to scream at him, saying, 'I won't leave this office until you tell me where my Baruchl is!' It helped. By God it helped! That cigar smoking devil called in another *Gazlen* and both whispered something I couldn't hear. Then the other one said"—she choked down a sob—". . . he told me the Gestapo took Baruchl to *Yanovska Lager*!

This was the Yonovska Death Camp in Lvov! I put my arm around her and led her to the sofa. We sat next to each other, crying.

"Only eighteen years old and that big shot, with that fat cigar in his mouth, said, 'We can't help it, we had to fill the quota.' He has to fill a quota with my Baruchl. . . ."

Usually a tower of strength, Mrs. Kost was broken now.

"Baruchl and Brustiger will come back, Mrs. Kost, you'll see," I said, and at that moment I believed what I said, just as Mrs. Hescheles believed that her husband would come back.

"Brustiger, maybe. But I live from hand to mouth, Roma."

"Mrs. Kost, I forgot to tell you, I sold your watch and I got a good price," I lied.

She lifted her face to me. "How much?"

I hesitated for a moment and said, "Two hundred dollars."

"Two hundred dollars? I never expected that much! Perhaps I could bribe someone with such a fortune."

"I don't have the money with me. I was afraid to carry it, especially since I didn't know whether I'd find you home. Maybe you'd like to come along now to pick it up?"

"That's good news for a change," Mrs. Kost said, getting up and wiping her tears with the back of her hands. "I'll go and change my blouse."

As Mrs. Kost had predicted, Brustiger had found ways to get out of the Yanovska Camp. Afraid of being followed, he had not gone to his apartment on Kazimierza Street. He had made some detours on the way to Place Teodora, where he came to see me. He had been exceptionally lucky, he said. He'd been assigned to dig ditches outside the camp, and he used the opportunity to run away. The one who had given him the assignment hinted that this was a chance to escape. I didn't insist on knowing the details of the arrangement, but Brustiger made it clear that he hadn't paid a single dollar for that help.

The *Arbiter Elegantiarum*—Brustiger's nickname—now looked like a vagrant. He no longer had his pencil-thin, well-groomed mustache. A rash covered his face and hands. His eyes were inflamed and his lips cracked. He refused to sit down because he was concerned that the lice he now had on him would spread all over the flat.

He had seen Baruch. Baruch was sick with typhoid fever, like most of the inmates. Brustiger had been sick, too, we found out later, but at the moment he didn't admit it. He told us that the camp was a living hell. The sick tried to hide their illnesses because, if they were noticed by the guards, they were taken up to the hill to "the sands" and shot.

Brustiger had been pacing back and forth. I insisted that he sit down in spite of the lice. He picked a wooden stool. In the "kitchen," Blume prepared tea and brought it back to the "living room" along with Bruno's biscuits. Brustiger, once the perfect gentleman, after remarking how expensive the biscuits must have been on the black market, dunked them in the tea and shoved them into his mouth, the drops dripping from his grimy fingers.

I went to the "kitchen" to hide my tears. After a few moments, I returned, put my hand on his shoulder and asked what, if anything, I could do for him.

The Brustiger I once knew as self-reliant now gave me a list of dangerous errands. He even sent me to Mrs. Hescheles, who lived at the other end of the city—thus exposing me to possible raids—to ask whether she would take him in as a boarder. It was only months ago that Brustiger had refused to invite Mr. Hescheles into his own house, fearful that Hescheles was being surveyed by the Russians.

On the way back I was to stop off on Kazimierza Street and get the now lice-ridden Brustiger some clothing. Since I had safeguarded his diamonds until now, he asked whether I still had them. I took out the matchbox and gave them to him.

I left Bruno with Blume and Danka Bracka and started out. Mrs. Hescheles agreed to take Brustiger in. Once in Brustiger's apartment, I didn't know which suit to select from the many he had brought back from

England before the war. I decided on two shabby-looking ones, and then picked out a few shirts and a sweater. I did it all in a hurry.

On the spur of the moment, I decided to detour in order to visit Karola Cecylia Szarek, his girlfriend and my future double. Perhaps she could lift Brustiger's spirits. We cried together as we talked about the former *bon vivant*. Karola took the bundle from my hand and accompanied me to Place Teodora. With a Gentile walking beside me, I felt more secure the rest of my way home.

Chapter 43

Gina came rarely because of the great distance that separated Leona Sapiehy and Place Teodora. I saw little of Mrs. Kost. Brustiger, however, settled with the Hescheles family and, "protected" by Gentile company, visited me frequently. He informed me about all the past tragedies I might not have heard of and about those expected.

Bruno was out with Danka Bracka; Blume was out, too. In the quiet of the flat, I sat in bed reading *Madame Bovary*, my favorite refuge these days. I heard the code knock at the door. I thought it was Brustiger, or perhaps Blume, who was brave enough to have gone out to sell the garnet brooch and who had probably forgotten her key again.

It was Fischer.

I quickly swept Bruno's shirt and socks from a chair in the living room area and ran to throw them on his unmade bed. Then I remembered the two large coffee stains running down the front of my faded house robe and, when I returned to the living room area, I started to play with the front buttons to hide them as best I could.

Fischer sat down on the couch next to me and stared at me. "What's wrong, why didn't you apply for the job?"

I looked down at my lap and didn't answer.

He went on in an oddly stern voice: "I can help you *today*. Tomorrow it may be too late."

Startled, I looked up. Why, was he married? He was not a Jew; what's more, he was a *Volksdeutscher*. What could change for him tomorrow? In a prim voice I said, "Why, I haven't seen or heard from you for eight days."

"Please, Roma, no reproaches! Each visit to this neighborhood is a dangerous excursion for me. Don't you realize that?"

Look who's speaking about danger, I thought, but kept silent, looking down again.

"Roma, the world hasn't come to an end. Not yet, anyway."

I heard the bitter twist of irony in his voice. "It hasn't for *you* and yours," I said.

He reached for the hand that fidgeted around the buttons and said softly, "I can't stand watching you destroy yourself."

I jumped to my feet. "You seem to forget who's doing the destroying."

He stood up and took my hand again and, in a pleading voice, he said, "I haven't forgotten, my dear Roma."

"One is powerless, they're so clever," I cried. And I told him of Baruch's tragedy, of Brustiger's and of Mira's mother's arrest despite her having worked for the German Military. I told him of my unsuccessful intervention, showed him the bruises on my hands and knees, and complained of the pain in my lower back.

For the first time since he entered the flat, he put his arms around me and said, "You always needed protection, mostly from yourself. You are crazy to do these things." Then he pleaded, "Apply for the job."

Now, having Danka Bracka to take care of Bruno, I was less apprehensive about taking the plunge. "Tomorrow I'll apply for the job," I said, and rested my head on his shoulder. I closed my eyes. I wished to remain in his embrace forever.

But Fischer disengaged himself, moved away, and shouted, "Not tomorrow! Today! This afternoon! Get dressed and get out of this stinking room! If you don't. . . if you don't, I'll never see you again!" His voice had never sounded so sharp.

What had happened to mumbling Fischer? Shyness and timidity had been his most noticeable characteristics. Now he spoke forcefully and wanted *me* to be aggressive, too.

"I don't believe you."

"You'd better, Roma, because I mean it. It's the last time you'll see me *here*."

"I don't believe you," I said again.

But he was already out and gone.

In a doorway on Kopernica Street, a few blocks before the Promtorg office building, I removed the armband. Then I went in to the personnel department and applied for a job as a salesgirl. When the man in charge started questioning me, I was terrified.

"Name?"

"Cecylia. . . Cecylia Szarek."

"Did you say Cecylia Szarek?"

I felt the blood flushing my cheeks. "Correct."

"Nice name," he commented. Then he asked me the date and place of birth, which I knew by heart, and about my sales experience. He filled out a form. It took me a long time to sign my assumed name. After the personnel manager scrutinized the form, he said I was hired.

But my fright in having given false information lingered as I slowly went up the two flights of stairs to Fischer's office.

Fischer came smiling from behind his desk to greet me.

"I got the job," I said.

"I knew you would." He put both hands on my shoulders, looked into my eyes without blinking and said, "I want to apologize for being so rude this morning. Will you forgive me?"

"Of course, Fischer darling! I got the job!"

"I know. You have to believe in yourself, Roma, really believe that you can succeed in this masquerade. After two weeks you'll get your working card and you can leave Lvov immediately."

"I won't stay another second longer than I have to. God, what if someone recognizes me?" I shivered. "And where will I go?"

The skin crinkled around his bulging eyes as he smiled down on me fondly, "Once you were the bravest among us. You'll regain your self-confidence as soon as you are in a different environment."

After I kissed Bruno goodbye and left him—usually—in Danka Bracka's care, Blume would embrace me as if we were parting forever. She would remain standing on the elevated landing looking down after me with tears in her eyes. Each evening she would greet me with a look of surprise, as if she hadn't expected to see me again. What would I do all alone after she departed for Niemirov? But I couldn't persuade her to stay now that she had received word from our parents that all was quiet in Niemirov.

I had been tired before I began this double life, but once actually in it, I was rapidly becoming exhausted.

My strange enterprise had become increasingly dangerous. On the street I wore the blue star armband. I feared being picked up in one of the frequent raids. Without it, I feared being recognized and denounced. In the doorway where the transition from Roma Brand to Cecylia Szarek took place, I feared someone might spot me. And in the store on Saint Anna Square, I was in a state of constant anxiety lest a customer whom I had served during the Russian occupation on Place Marjacki, in Store Number One, would recognize me.

Once Yula Letzter of Niemrov came into the store. Upon seeing me behind the counter, her big blue eyes almost popped out in surprise.

I trembled because she was wearing the "armband" and my Polish co-worker would wonder. But, Yula quickly composed herself, paid for her purchase and left, living up to her reputation of being smarter than her larger boss.

Often I was on the verge of giving up without any urging from Blume and Brustiger, but Fischer often came to inspect the store, to help keep up my morale. A tender smile, a note passed on to me behind the back of another sales clerk, gave me new energy and I regained my self-control.

The notes were totally different from his letters of not long ago. Of course, he scribbled them on any scrap of paper in the store without being noticed by the only other employee. Once he wrote, "Be patient!" Another time, "You're doing fine." And still another, "You're making a future for yourself."

Future. The word took on meaning for me again. It kept me going.

It took sixteen days before I was summoned to the main office to pick up my precious working card. At home, I looked at my photograph and my signature under it—a name that wasn't mine—and was awed that this one piece of paper could bridge the gap between death and life.

I wrapped it carefully in paper and hid it, with the birth and baptismal certificates, between the armoire and the wall in my bedroom area.

Blume, unable to fall asleep and always fearful of that knock on the door, decided to leave for Niemirov now. Once again she begged me to come along. Once again I refused.

The nights alone with Bruno were frightful. Now I realized how much my younger sister's presence had meant to me. I missed her naive chatter and her help in doing errands. I even missed Tin-Tin, and so did Bruno. I longed for Blume, Bruno longed for his daddy, and I waited for Fischer.

What good was my exertion and struggle in getting a working document for Cecilia Szarek with my photograph? I was now in the exact same situation I had been in before. Thirteen long days had passed since I had stopped working on Saint Anna Square, and nothing had changed for me. I was bitter. Fischer knew that I couldn't come to see him. With the armband, I would compromise him. Without the armband, I was not only an impostor but, in his office, a deserter too, for I'd never given notice that I was quitting the job. And though he had told me his visits to Place Teodora were dangerous for him, I felt personally rejected.

Perhaps he felt that he had done all he could and that it was now up to me to mold my future and do whatever I had to do alone. I could do absolutely nothing with those documents on my own. Even if I had a non-Jewish acquaintance in Warsaw or Cracow, I was too drained to undertake a trip with Bruno. Everywhere, danger loomed. With Blume gone, I had to use the little energy left in me to search for food to feed my child, myself and those who showed up for temporary refuge, which included Danka. Doom seemed just around every corner.

Chapter 44

Alone, I listened in the dark of the night for booted footsteps or for the barking of a dog. I would stare in the direction of Bruno's bed and hear him breathing in his sleep. This would calm me somewhat, so that I could relax enough to fall asleep. But soon I would be awakened by a nightmare and lie until morning with my eyes wide open.

One day I caught a cold and began to cough. The coughing spell could be heard on the street. Since a neighbor had bolted and padlocked my flat from the outside so that it would appear to be uninhabited, any noise reaching the street could prove disastrous.

Every day someone was torn from our midst. People caught in a raid were taken to Yanovska Camp and never came back. It seemed a matter of weeks before Lvov would become a city without Jews.

I tortured myself with reproaches for missed opportunities. If only I had accepted Serge's offer and gone to the Moscow University. If only I had remained with Bruno and Benny's mother in the assembly place, and we'd been deported to Russia. The hard life there would have been better than facing the possibility of a roundup on the street, or of being taken from my flat to be shot on the sands of Yanovska Camp.

I was toying with the idea of going to my relatives in Niemirov when Fischer showed up. He walked in, sat down on a chair, and, without apologizing or explaining his long absence, he said, "Next week I am going to Warsaw by car and you're coming with me."

"When did you say?"

"Next Tuesday."

I had waited for his help. I had been desperate. Now, when he offered it, my mind recoiled. I didn't have the strength. "I have to give Bruno a chance to say good-bye to his father and I have to collect my belongings, which are scattered at Karola's and Danka's. I have to say good-bye to my friends and I can't do all of this in four days. . . ."

"Stop it! Don't you know what's going on?"

I looked at him. Those sharp sentences were so different from the mumbling syllables he had uttered during the two years of the Russian occupation. It was difficult to believe it was the same man.

"Listen, Roma," he blinked, "almost 33,700 Jews were killed in Kiev between September 30th and October 1st."

"I don't believe it!"

"You'd better. A German who took part in the butchery told me. Columns of Jews were machine-gunned and fell into the ditches. Don't interrupt. It's not horror propaganda, it's the truth!"

I'd known about occasional murders on the sands in the Yanovska Camp or in the backyards of the local prisons, but 33,700 people murdered for no reason? Why does Fischer want to scare me? I got up and put water on the stove for tea and heard him say, "This eyewitness told me the name of the place—Babi-Yar or something like it. It's too bad I can't take you to Warsaw *today*, but I can't before Tuesday."

"What about Bruno?"

"You can go to Zloczov tomorrow and come back the day after. And I advise you to speak to *nobody* of your plans."

"Mark has to know."

"But don't tell anybody else."

"I'll do whatever you say." I sat down beside him again.

He took my hands. "Promtorg is buying merchandise in Warsaw and I will be traveling back and forth quite often. I'll be in a position to bring your belongings later." He paused. "Do you think Mark will be difficult about Bruno?"

"I don't think so. He wants the best for his son, too."

"Are you still in love with him?"

I didn't answer. His question took me by surprise, as did my reluctance to answer. Silence fell between us.

Fischer broke it by saying, "Do you need money?"

"No!"

"Still the same old pride. You must learn to bend a little. You've helped others, now you must help yourself."

"I'm tired."

He disengaged his hands from mine, got up, took out his wallet and placed 50 American dollars in bills on the table in front of the chairs.

I blushed. "I don't need money, thank you, Fischer."

"Don't be embarrassed, this money is not a gift. I owe you more than three times as much."

"You were supposed to return the loan after the war. That was our agreement," I said. I took the money from the table and pushed it into the side pocket of his dark blue jacket. I smiled at him.

"That's the face I like to see." He put his arm around me and smiled, too, such a big smile that it showed his missing teeth, which I found oddly touching.

Life in the streets of Zloczov seemed peaceful. On Mickiewicza Street, where my in-laws lived, I noticed the quiet and the cleanliness and couldn't help but compare it with the deafening traffic in Lvov.

Neither Mark's warm welcome, nor Suzan's icy stare as Mark and I exchanged news, awakened any special reaction in me.

When we had a few minutes alone, I told Mark of my plan.

"It sounds like a thriller," he said.

"Today it may seem a fantasy; tomorrow other people will be doing the same thing. In fact, you should do it too, Mark."

"Really? I'll think about it," he stuttered.

At the dinner table Suzan said, "Mark told me you have some wild scheme about taking Bruno to Warsaw. But he's decided not to let him go with you. We're going to keep the child here."

"What?" I turned to Mark.

Suzan continued, "If you want to go to Warsaw, go! Go to Honolulu if you like, it's none of our concern. But Mark will not let you involve a four-year-old child in such an adventure."

"This adventure, as you call it, may save Bruno's life," I said, and fixed my eyes on Mark.

"She exaggerates as always." Suzan's voice was mocking. " 'Life and death', she says. Do you have an apartment, or at least a furnished room in Warsaw?"

"So far I have nothing there."

"Then you can't take the child *now*." She said it firmly, as if that settled the matter.

I willed with all my might for Mark to look at me. I said, "Well, why don't *you* speak up, Mark?"

Mark raised his eyes from his plate, gave me a quick glance and then looked down at the plate again. "Suzan is probably right," he said in a small voice.

Once again he was surrendering to his sister's will.

Repressing my disgust, I tried as objectively as possible to size up the situation. I swallowed, determined to keep myself under control. I had to think clearly, to see what I could do to keep my child with me. I put my elbows on the table and leaned across toward Mark. "Mark, with your knowledge of Polish and with your Gentile appearance, you run little risk of being recognized as a Jew. You always wanted to assimilate with the Poles; now is your chance. Buy yourself counterfeit documents as I did and come *with us* to Warsaw."

"Adventuress!" Suzan yelled.

Mark played with a teaspoon and then took his glass to his mouth, evidently unaware there was no more tea in it. A feeling of exasperation and anger rose in me.

"Well," I cried.

Mark looked at his sister again.

I felt the blood rush to my face. I turned to Suzan, "What is this about Mark's decision to keep Bruno here? Was it his decision, or yours?"

She stared at me without answering.

I could feel my cheeks burning. I shouted, "I am fed up with you sticking your nose into business that is strictly between me and my husband."

"I can hear you without your screaming at me. What will the neighbors think of us!"

I screamed even louder, "I don't care!"

She shoved her chair back from the table. "I will not take any further abuse from a person like you," she said in that controlled, icy tone, and strode majestically from the dining room through the sliding door to the kitchen.

It was the first time I had faced up to her, and a sense of relief and freedom surged through me even though she had had the last word.

I turned to Mark breathlessly. "You're afraid of her! You were always afraid of her," I sneered. "You can't stand up to her even where your child's welfare is concerned."

The door from the kitchen to the foyer slammed and I realized that Suzan must have been listening on the other side of the sliding door.

My hands in my lap, clenched into fists, I cried, "Damn her! Damn her to hell!"

Mark was playing with crumbs of bread. He raised his head and, without looking at me, tried to speak softly. Still he stuttered, "She loves Bruno very much. She really does."

Poor Mark. The once very slight stuttering had been charming. Now it was an impediment. I noticed that his fingers, rolling bits of bread into pellets on the white tablecloth, trembled. I looked closely at Mark. His skin had a yellowish, unhealthy cast and on his right cheek I noticed a tic, a nervous tic I remembered seeing on Fischer's face. Was there an epidemic? But mostly I was touched by the increase of his stuttering and, in a flash, my anger drained away. I bit my lips. "Are you all right, Mark?" I asked.

He nodded.

"Are you sure?"

"Really. . . this stuttering only happens when I'm under great pressure. . . Listen Roma, maybe it's not such a bad idea to leave Bruno with us until you get yourself settled in Warsaw. You'll be free to move around and get things done without the burden of a child. Doesn't that make sense, Roma?" Now he faced me.

"Maybe. . . ."

"And after you've made all your arrangements, you can let me know by telegram and we'll meet you in Lvov. It will be too dangerous for you to come to Zloczov without your armband. People might recognize you." He sighed.

"Perhaps we should find out how Bruno feels about me leaving him?" I said.

"Don't worry about that. It won't be the first time. You know how he feels at home here and how happy he is with us. "Well," he smiled for the first time, "What do you say, Roma. Agreed?"

I shrugged.

"It is settled then. You send a telegram and I'll bring Bruno to Lvov."

"Will Suzan let you?" I asked, my voice strident again.

"Suzan loves the child. She wants the best for him, too. You know that. We will be there, I swear!"

"I haven't made up my mind yet," I said.

After a sleepless night spent weighing the pros and cons of the situation, I had to admit that it would be better if I could bring Bruno to "a home" in Warsaw that had already been set up for him.

In the morning, after breakfast, I took Bruno by his hand and led him to the living room. I sat down on the brocade covered easy chair and pulled Bruno into my lap. "Mummy must go away, darling. But after two weeks she'll be back and take you with her on a beautiful holiday," I said.

"I want to go with you, Mummy"

"While you're here, we'll go out and buy a two-wheel bicycle," Mark, who had joined us, said quickly. "I've been planning to get it for your birthday, but since you're such a good little boy, you can have it now."

"A bicycle on two wheels?" Bruno's pale face lit up.

"We can start looking for it first thing tomorrow morning," Mark said.

"Tomorrow morning?" Bruno's face fell again. "I want to go with Mummy," he said, tears springing to his eyes.

"You see?" I said to Mark.

Mark squatted down in front of us. "Listen, Bruno," he said. "Mummy has to go first by herself to arrange things because it's a secret trip we're going on. So don't tell anybody. Promise? This will be *our* secret, a secret between the three of us."

ARCHIWUM

Bruno's blue eyes darkened. "All *three* of us will take a secret trip *together*?"

Mark nodded soberly.

"All right. Mummy can go. And I won't tell anybody." His voice sank to a whisper.

I pressed his slender body to my heart.

Then we laughed. Mark laughed too. Even Suzan, who had just come into the living room, started to laugh.

When it was time for parting, Bruno said, "Come back tomorrow, Mummy."

I held him in my arms and smoothed back his flaxen hair.

"I love you, Mummy," Bruno said, throwing his little arms around my neck. I could feel his warm tears against my cheek.

Not wanting the child to see me cry, too, I swallowed.

I held him away from me, pointed my finger at myself, nodded "yes" and then pointed the same finger at him. This sign language, known to him as "I love you too," struck him as so utterly funny that he burst into loud laughter while the tears continued to roll down his cheeks.

Chapter 45

Three days later, on a dreary afternoon, I entered the dimly lit doorway of a dilapidated apartment building in Lvov. Nobody was around. I struggled with the armband, yanked it off my right sleeve, and stuffed it into my large pigskin handbag. This time I took it off with the intention of never wearing it again.

I decided to wait a little, so that any passerby who might have seen me enter would now be far away. A change was taking place within me. With the removal of the "sling," I was shedding my timidity. I stood shivering in the dimly lit alcove for a few moments and then walked out into the street.

My name was no longer Roma Brand. From now on it was Cecylia Szarek. Would I remember to answer to my new name? Was I doing the right thing in taking this false identity and leaving behind everyone dear to me? I had no more time to think about it because I had to meet Fischer, who would take me by car to Warsaw.

I found the department store Opel waiting at the designated Legionov Street corner, Fischer sitting next to the Polish driver, and Danka Bracka in the back. I got in beside her.

As we were leaving Lvov behind, twilight was changing to darkness. The air was damp and cold and the road was treacherous because of the snow-covered holes.

My thoughts drifted to Bruno. I vividly remembered his little hands in mine. The small bones of his hands felt as fragile as a bird's. I saw his tearful face; on it was written, "Mummy, don't go." Although he never said it, I could hear his childish voice, "Mummy, don't go."

I sensed that Fischer had turned to look at me, but it was too dark to see the expression on his face, his flat broken nose, or the gap of his missing teeth. However, I had the impression that he was smiling to encourage me.

We were approaching Rava-Ruska. Fischer had thought it unwise to stop on Rava-Ruska, but I wanted to say good-bye to my oldest sister Anna, so he gave into my tears.

The town looked as peaceful as Zloczov. The terrible roundups in Rava-Ruska, and the wholesale murder in the not far distant death camp of Belzac had not taken place as yet. Fischer made the driver stop the car on a side street. I hurried across the marketplace to the Halbertal's two-story house and knocked at the glass-paneled entrance door.

"Who's there?" Anna's voice sounded apprehensive.

It was always the woman who went to the door, since, at that time, it was believed that she was less likely to be arrested. I heard footfalls in the street and quickly stepped aside so as not to stand in the light falling through the glass panels.

"Who's there?" Anna repeated.

I waited till the footfalls receded. "It's Roma, open up."

Anna's face reflected her happiness upon seeing me. I told her that I could only stay for a minute and she called her husband, Hersh, to come out of hiding. His brother and mother, living in the same house, looked in and welcomed me.

My relatives had been informed of my plan through Blume, so no explanation was necessary. But Anna asked me where Bruno was. When I told her of Suzan's and Mark's insistence on keeping the child until I was "settled" in Warsaw, she wholeheartedly agreed with their decision.

"Mark also plans to come to Warsaw under an assumed name," I said. "Of course the three of us will have to split up so that, if one is caught, the other can survive. I must find a Polish woman who will take in a child as a boarder. I'll rent a furnished room for myself and another for Mark."

My brother-in-law nodded in agreement. "But how will you accomplish it?"

"A Catholic girlfriend from Lvov is going with me. She promised to help me arrange things."

"That's good. That's good," Hersh said.

"What does Father say to all this?" I knew that, in my father's eyes, I would look as though I were deserting my people and denying my religion. "What does my father say?" I repeated.

To my great surprise, I heard Hersh say, "He approves."

"He does?" I heard this with relief.

I had wondered if my father, the deeply pious Jew, the Belzer Rebbe Hasid who, throughout his whole life, was propelled to think, to act, only within the rules of the Torah, would, or could, understand.

"I saw your father last week in Niemirov and he told me he is going to pray for you three times day. So will your brother Abner and myself."

The heavy burden pressing against my chest diminished. I questioned Hersh again, "And what does *your* father say?"

"My father is not here, he's with the Belzer Rebbe."

"How come he's not with his family?"

"You must know that the Belzer *Tzadik*, the Righteous, is much more exposed to the danger of falling victim to the Germans than others. So we feel that his place is around the Rebbe."

"Your mother feels the same way?" I asked, in awe.

"Of course. She is proud of her husband."

"My father would approve of what you are doing. I wish more among us had your courage," I told them, with respect.

Suddenly aware of the time, I hurriedly embraced Anna and Hersh. Elated by their reassurances, I kissed his mother and hugged them all quickly once again, afraid that the car might leave without me.

I fumbled in my large brown handbag for the armband, the hated "sling." Thrusting it into Anna's hand, I said, "Burn it!" and flew out of the house.

I ran across the market place. The car was waiting. Fischer hurried to open the door for me, pressing my hand in the dark.

Nowy tytuł: ROMA BETWEEN TWO INVASIONS

ARCHIWUM WSCHODNIE

UWAGI

dotyczące maszynopisu książki p.t. "SLOPE AND ABYSS"
p. Sandry Brand

Książka jest późniejszym zapisem wspomnień Autorki z okresu jej pobytu we Lwowie od września/października 1939 r. do wiosny lub lata 1942 r. Brak jest dokładnych dat, trudno nawet o wskazówki dotyczące pór roku.

~~Książka~~ Tekst zawiera 340 stron maszynopisu, 46 rozdziałów, z których początkowych 35 dotyczy okresu okupacji radzieckiej, a pozostałe - niemieckiej.

Autorka - bohaterka, w tamtych latach nazywała się Roma Brand, miała 22 lata, ukończyła gimnazjum we Lwowie, mieszkała do czasu wkroczenia wojsk radzieckich w Niemirowie razem z mężem prawnikiem /nazwiska jego nie podano/, oraz dwu i pół-letnim synem. Mąż Romy pochodził ze Złoczowa. Rodziny Romy i jej męża, obie żydowskie, nie utrzymywały ze sobą kontaktów. Rodzina Romy była ortodoksyjna, silnie związana z tradycją i religią żydowską /Hassydzi/.

Dr MARK RATHAUSER

Po wkroczeniu armii radzieckiej, Roma z synem przenosi się do Lwowa, rozpoczyna pracę w charakterze ekspedientki w dziale muzycznym i sportowym jednego z pięciu sklepów zarządzanych przez UKRKULTORG.

Wspomnienia Romy dotyczą spraw związanych z pracą w instytucji sowieckiej, z jej udziałem w organizacji związkowej, stosunkami rodzinnymi /mąż pozostaje w Złoczowie, rodzice w Niemirowie/ i sąsiedzkimi, codzienną egzystencją /zmiana mieszkania, problem opieki nad dzieckiem etc./.

W tym czasie Roma zawiera bliższe znajomości z koleżankami i kolegami z pracy, m.inn. z Juliuszem Fischerem. Fischer zakochuje się w Romie, a ona odwzajemnia jego uczucia.

W dalszej części książki /rozdziały 13 do 25/ znajdują się m.inn. opisy restrykcji ze strony okupanta sowieckiego, wprowadza się obowiązek posiadania paszportów i stałej pracy, nasilają się aresztowania i deportacje /28 lipca 1940/.

Roma w obawie o życie rodziny sprowadza ojca z żoną i siostrą Blumą do Lwowa /plac Teodora Pierwszego/. Wzmagają się prześlad wania przez NKWD wobec handlujących na czarnym rynku. Aresztowany zostaje ojciec Romy, a potem jej brat Abner. Roma próbuje ic ~~najpierw~~ odnaleźć w kolejnych więzieniach, a potem uwolnić, przekupując najpierw sumą pięciu tysięcy rubli oficera radzieckiego; uwolnienie ojca i brata następuje jednak dopiero po wpłaceniu następnyc pięciu tysięcy rubli krawcowi o nazwisku Grien.

Trzy kolejne rozdziały poświęcone są podróży Romy do Kijowa na zjazd związków zawodowych. Stwarza to możliwość zwiedzenia miasta i dokonania porównań ówczesnego Kijowa ze Lwowem.

Dalsze wspomnienia /rozdziały 30 do 35/ dotyczą okresu przed atakiem wojsk niemieckich i panicznej ucieczki Rosjan ze Lwowa. Przed wycofaniem się podpalają oni więzienie Brygidki, które Roma może obserwować ze swojego okna w mieszkaniu przy ulicy Kazimierza.

Po opuszczeniu przez Sowietów Lwowa wzmagają się antyżydowskie nastroje wśród ludności ukraińskiej.

Wkraczają wojska niemieckie. Ukraińcy przy akceptującej postawie Niemców dokonują wielogodzinnego pogromu Żydów /rozdziały 36 do 39/. W obronie ojca Romy i dziewięciu innych Żydów występują żołnierze niemieccy. Z jednym z nich /oficerem/ Roma zaprzyjaźnia się; to on ostrzega ją że represje wobec Żydów będą się nasilać oraz podsuwa pomysł zdobycia dokumentów świadczących o aryjskim pochodzeniu i ucieczki ze Lwowa.

W tym czasie Niemcy wprowadzają obowiązek noszenia opasek z gwiazdą Dawida, ściągają kontrybucje od Żydów, zakazują noszenia futer, a w końcu tworzą getto.

W końcowej części książki /rozdziały 40 do 46/ opisane jest dramatyczne pogorszenie się sytuacji bytowej Romy. Traci ona pracę, doskwiera jej głód, niemieccy żołnierze obrabowują jej mieszkanie, musi się przeprowadzić do getta. W tym czasie otrzymuje dokument chrztu od Karoli Cecylii Szarek, która świadomie daje go Romie do wykorzystania.

Pewnego dnia na ulicy Roma spotyka Juliusza Fischera. Jest volksdeutschem i pracuje u Niemców. Fischer pomaga Romie w zdobyciu pracy i uzyskaniu dalszych dokumentów na nazwisko Cecylii Szarek. Wywozi ją ~~w kierunku Warszawy~~ /przez Rawę Ruską/ w kierunku Warszawy. Towarzyszy jej osoba o nazwisku Danka Bracka. Syna pozostawia Roma u męża w Złoczowie.

Narracja prowadzona jest w sposób ciekawy, akcja wartka. Szczególnie interesujące jest przedstawienie życia ludności żydowskiej we Lwowie. Autorka koncentruje się na losach rodziny i najbliższych znajomych przy okazji poruszając problem stosunków Rosjan, Ukraińców, Niemców i Polaków do ludności żydowskiej. Wśród bohaterów występuje m.inn. Henryk Hescheles, redaktor naczelny pisma "Chwila", osoba znana we Lwowie.

Autorka przytacza wiadomości zaczerpnięte z publikacji historyczn dotyczące dat, ilości ludności żydowskiej we Lwowie w różnych okresach etc. Przytacza również znane z innych źródeł krążące po Lwowie dowcipy o okupantach sowieckich.

W książce występuje wiele nazwisk, nazw instytucji, stanowisk, nazw ulic; niektóre z nazw wymagać mogą ewentualnie konsultacji merytorycznej, n.p. czy Autorka mieszkała przy ulicy Kazimierza /jak podaje/, czy Kazimierzowskiej.

Tytuł: "Slope and Abyss", w dosłownym tłumaczeniu "Pochyłość i otchłań" źle brzmi po polsku, należałoby go skonsultować z Autorką. Podtytuł "Russian Occupation" - "Okupacja rosyjska" jest nieścisły - akcja toczy się w czasie okupacji sowieckiej /radzieckiej/ i niemieckiej, a nie rosyjskiej.

Książka została napisana dla czytelnika amerykańskiego, dlatego też Autorka zamieszcza informacje o Polsce i Polakach dla czytelnika polskiego zbyt oczywiste. Byłoby ewentualnie wskazane dokonanie pewnych skrótów i pominięć. Książka może być interesująca, zwłaszcza dla ludzi związanych emocjonalnie ze Lwowem, przywołuje bowiem znane miejsca i atmosferę w okresie obu okupacji.

/Anna Lewakowa/