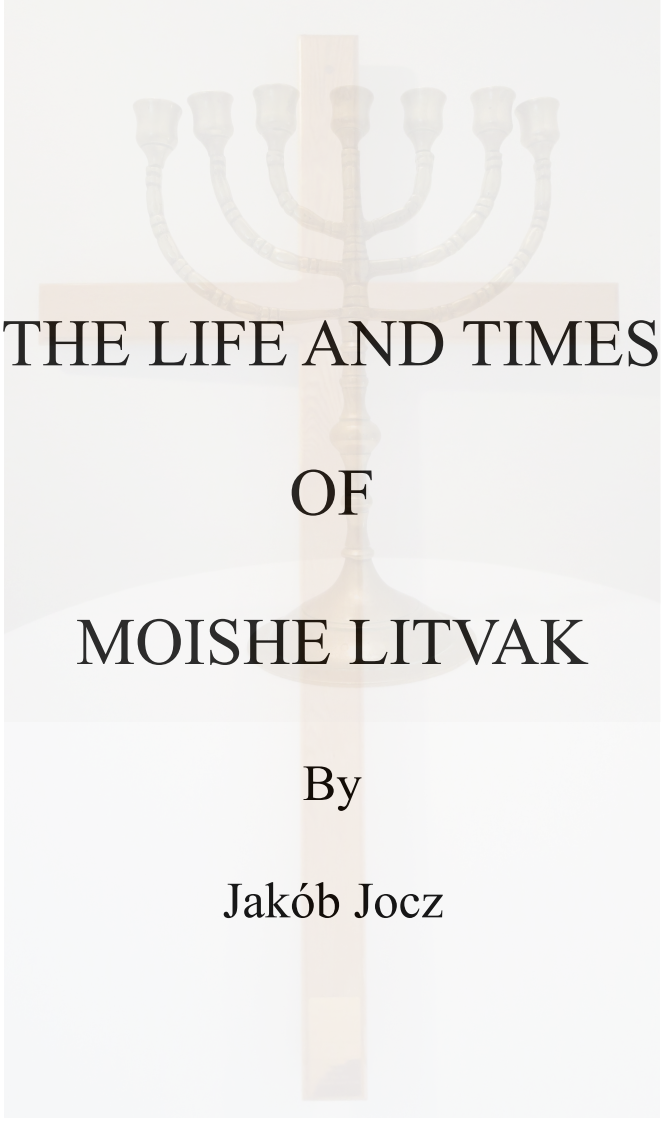

THE LIFE AND TIMES

OF

MOISHE LITVAK

By

Jakób Jocz

Digital Edition 2020

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Author's Introductory Remarks

This novel is not strictly fiction in the accepted sense. The hero and many other persons in the story are taken from life. Names of places are authentic and so are the background events against which the drama plays itself out.

The incidents of the First and Second World Wars are the result of careful research. The quotations from Nazi documents, etc., are all authentic. The incident with the boy in the soup kitchen is autobiographical. It actually happened.

The experience of the German pastor who was re-ordained to the priesthood of the Church of England reflects the general attitude of the national Church towards foreigners. Moishe's problem with his own people and with Gentile Christians is a fair description of the hostility and prejudice which exists on both sides.

Victor Gollancz is still well remembered in the British Isles for his human compassion and his fearless sense of justice. The author is grateful to his daughter for allowing him to incorporate the story of his brave attempt at reconciliation in spite of bitter criticism on many sides.

A minimum of foreign expressions have been included because they are characteristic idiosyncrasies of the people concerned.

The author dares to hope that his readers will find the book both instructive and challenging and that it will serve the cause of tolerance and concord in a bitterly divided world.

J.J.

BOOK I

CHAPTER I

The air was crisp and fresh as was usual for an early Spring. The skies had cleared and the sun was reflected in the many puddles after the recent rains. The clock on the tower was striking eleven when the colonel of the garrison appeared on his well groomed horse at the far end of the square. Somewhere a harsh voice thundered "Attention" and a thousand men clicked their heels and froze in immobility. The band started the national anthem and the sound from a thousand throats rose in the cold air "God save the Czar . . . "

There they stood, column after column, ready for inspection. A vast sea of faces from every corner of the far-flung Empire. Broad-chested men of the Mongolian steppes, flaxen-haired Slavs from Ukraine, short swarthy men from Bessarabia, lanky, tall men from the Baltic States.

The colonel threw the reins to his batman and sprang lightly from the saddle. The adjutant saluted and respectfully reported the regiment ready for inspection. The colonel responded with a wave of his gloved hand and began to walk up and down the lines. Occasionally he would stare into a tense face and tug at a chin which seemed to him to be out of line. At other times he would thrust the thick end of his whip into a soldier’s belly and rasp "pull it in!" After what seemed an eternity, the longed-for command "at ease" was issued. The response was instantaneous as two thousand heavy boots hit the cobbles. The tension broke, the soldiers relaxed but no one spoke. The uneasy silence created an air of unreality. In spite of broad daylight and the obvious physicality of the young men, the scene suggested an assembly of disembodied spirits rather than of living creatures. There they stood graded and numbered in ill-fitting uniforms, each with a rifle at his feet, in soundless existence hardly daring to breathe.

The colonel mounted the rostrum in the centre of the square. Again the command "Attention!" thundered through the air. Again a thousand pairs of heels instantly responded Again the command "at ease" broke the silence. And again two thousand feet moved in unison, The colonel began his address:

"Soldiers of the Fatherland! Our gracious and benevolent Father, The Czar of all Russia, has called you into his service. He expects you to defend the Empire with your blood. It is an honour and a privilege to be part of the invincible and great Russian army. The Czar expects total obedience from you. You will obey every command of your superiors from the corporal upwards. The slightest sign of disobedience counts as treason and will be punished accordingly. You are gathered here to pay homage to the Czar and to declare your loyalty with a solemn oath before God. Long live the Czar of all Russia. God save the Czar."

At that moment a Church dignitary began to climb the rostrum. He was a heavy-set man with a long beard, in black robes and a cylindrical hat. On reaching the top of the platform he lifted a gold icon high into the air, which appeared to burst into bright flame, reflecting the vibrant sunshine. In a deep and resonant voice the priest began to intone "in the name of the Father and the Son . . . " when at the foot of the rostrum there was a sudden commotion.

Only the immediate bystanders could hear the protesting voice, "I will not swear in the name of God." For a split second the priest hesitated but quickly recovered and continued with the ceremony of swearing in the recruits. Hardly anyone noticed the lean soldier being led away by a huge sergeant sputtering obscenities under his breath.

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"Your name?" barked the colonel.

"Moishe."

"And?"

"Moishe Litvak."

"A Jew?"

“No, a Baptist."

At this the flushed face of the colonel broke into a harsh smile as he turned to the adjutant: "Call the doctor and the priest," and he walked out of the room.

Moishe was left standing in an empty room. It all seemed like a bad dream, except for the roar which reached him from the outside. The sound of a thousand voices hurt his ears: "Long live the Czar!" The band struck up the regimental march and two thousand feet began to move. The ceremony was over.

Moishe heard the clatter of the hobnailed boots on the rough cobbles. He knew he was not dreaming. Gradually the shouted commands became fainter and then faded into the distance. Silence descended and all he could hear was the fierce beating of his heart. Suddenly the door was flung open and three men entered; the sputtering sergeant, the army physician and a youngish man in clerical garb.

The huge sergeant went straight up to Moishe, lifted his heavy hand and struck him across the face.

"That’s for disgracing your regiment before the colonel, you dirty Jew!" he cried.

The unexpected blow toppled the young man. When the priest helped him up from the floor his nose was bleeding profusely. The priest stood between Moishe and the irate sergeant.

"He says he is not a Jew, he is a Baptist."

With one hand to his face stemming the flow of blood, Moishe stuttered with difficulty, "I am both: a Jew and a Baptist."

At this the sergeant burst out in wild laughter. Going towards the door he pointed to his head, "you take over sir, the man is crazy." And he left the room.

The doctor looked Moishe up and down. "So you are a Jewish baptist. Have you always been a Jewish baptist?"

"No not always. Before I became a Baptist, I was just a Jew."

"When did you become a Baptist?"

"Two years ago I read the New Testament and discovered that Jesus was the Messiah."

"Why did you not become a good Orthodox Christian like the rest of us?"

"A Baptist is a real Christian for he does not believe in war."

"Is this what made you a Baptist?"

"Yes. Jesus teaches us to love our enemies."

"What would happen to our Fatherland if we all loved our enemies? Who would defend the Empire?"

Moishe looked puzzled. "God, created the world for men to dwell in, as brothers."

The priest who had kept silent all this time suddenly broke in: "You are both mad and a heretic. It's no good talking to you."

Moishe looked at him. The priest's pale face flushed crimson, his eyes bulged and his fists were clenched. He spat contemptuously in front of Moishe, took the doctor's arm and led him from the room. Again Moishe was left alone.

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In a large room on a dais, behind a table with a green cover, sat three men in army uniform. A few feet apart a priest was seated with an open book in his hand. On the wall behind the dais were two portraits; the Czar of all Russia in the uniform of an Admiral of the Imperial fleet. Opposite him, upright in regal posture, was the Czarina. Moishe nervously looked from one side of the wall to the other, scanning the two faces which seemed to hold the secret of his own fate and the fate of the Empire. The deep blue eyes of the Czar looked straight past him; the Czarina's pale face bore a smile of utter indifference and her eyes seemed to be preoccupied with matters of another world. Moishe suddenly realized he was being watched by the four men behind the table in utter silence. The priest's burning eyes particularly bothered him and he began to perspire. Finally, the priest stood up and read from the book:

"Give unto Caesar what is Caesar's and unto God what is God's. Do you know this text?"

The two gendarmes, the sergeant manor and the corporal, on each side of the prisoner, shuffled their feet. Moishe cleared his throat. Hesitantly and with a croaking voice coming from his parched throat he replied:

"Yes I do."

"Why did you refuse to take the oath to our gracious father the Czar?"

"Because a Christian is not allowed to kill."

"Did not Jesus say I came not to bring peace but a sword?"

"Yes, he did."

"Why then do you refuse to be a soldier?"

"Because I am under obligation to love my enemies."

"Do you mean to say that you know better than our holy Mother, the Orthodox Church?"

"The Church may be wrong to call upon Christians to kill."

"The holy Church is never wrong. You presume too much, young man!"

The priest turned to the presiding officer with a bow, "I have nothing more to say, Your Honour."

The chairman raised his hand. The guards jumped to attention, turned smartly and took the prisoner out of the room. Within a quarter of an hour Moishe was brought back. The chairman rose and all on the dais stood up with him. The sergeant major snapped: "Attention!" The men beneath the dais clicked their heels.

"It is His Majesty’s pleasure to declare you guilty of insubordination and to send you to Siberia for three years of hard labour as punishment for an act of treason. Long live the Czar!"

The chairman turned to the door and the men on the dais filed out after him.

CHAPTER II

"Eh, Jewish baptist, did you hear the news?"

Moishe put down the wheelbarrow full of bricks, straightened his back and wiped his sweaty forehead with his dirty sleeve.

"What news?"

"Our little father the Czar has declared war on the Germans. We are all going to fight the infidels. There is to be an amnesty for all prisoners, my friend. Baptist or no baptist, we will all fight together and show those dirty pigs what Russians can do!" He said it all in one breath.

Ivan was a friendly fellow. He was in Siberia for leading a peasant deputation to the Duma, the Russian parliament. His sentence was five years. As a White Russian peasant he was devoted to the Czar. He blamed the injustice done to him upon corrupt officials. He would say that if only he had the money he would have bribed the court and there would have been no sentence at all. He belonged to no political party and was only the spokesman of his village where he had been elected to serve as an Elder. It was by the common consent of the village that he was sent with the petition to the Czar. He was directed to one of the ministers in the Duma and was arrested on suspicion of being a revolutionary. Since he could not prove his innocence he was sentenced to hard labour.

Ivan had told his story a thousand times and each time finished it with a reference to bribery: "Grease the wheels and the cart won't squeak." Greasing was the universal remedy in holy Russia and everyone knew the saying as well as he knew the *Pater noster*. There was nothing wrong with greasing, only that some could afford it and others could not. Ivan could not. He came from a poor village which had suffered from drought for three successive years. He went to the capital to ask for help but only got into trouble. Now he was rubbing his hands with glee. "And so we will fight for our little father the Czar and when we win the war I will tell the Czar myself that I am a faithful Russian."

Moishe looked troubled.

"Come on, cheer up!" cried Ivan. "Our troubles are over. We will fight together, side by side. I, an orthodox Christian and you a Jewish baptist. We will show them what we can do! They will give a medal to each of us and the Czar himself will say 'thank you'!"

"But Christians don't fight," said Moishe.

Ivan stared in unbelief. "What do you mean Christians don't fight? Of course they fight. They fight the Jews, they fight the infidels, they fight the Turks and the Germans. Why not? Don't you know that Jews and Germans are the enemies of God and that Christians must fight them? I heard the priest say so with my own ears."

Moishe's face clouded. He was genuinely fond of Ivan. They had spent more than two years together. Shared hardships had brought them close. Ivan had come to regard the Jewish baptist (this was the nickname by which he was known in the prison camp) as almost an equal. He knew that Moishe was not quite a Russian in the proper sense for he did not belong to the Orthodox Church, but he overlooked this unfortunate blemish. Moishe frequently spoke to him about his Baptist faith, but Ivan could not understand how one could be a Christian outside the proper Church. Yet Moishe was a pleasant fellow, full of sympathy for

his fellow-prisoners, always cheerful and with a good word for everyone. One thing was certain, if he was not a proper Christian, neither was he a proper Jew, for no Jew could be as pleasant.

Ivan, though uneducated, had a native intelligence, and was quick to see his mistake. "Of course, Jewish baptists are different," he said, "they are not Jews, though they are not full Christians, but something in between. We will make an exception for you and allow you to fight part of the time."

Moishe gave Ivan a vacant look. He shrugged his shoulders, wiped his brow again, spat on his hands, grabbed the wheelbarrow and moved on.

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It was a balmy summer night. The time of the year when the sun never sets in this far north-eastern region, but hangs suspended like a huge red ball upon the low horizon. In spite of physical exhaustion, Moishe could not sleep but was tossing from side to side on the hard bunk. The inmates of the stuffy room were snoring heavily, a veritable cacophonous orchestra. There was an occasional groan, a sigh or a fart; sometimes a prisoner would cry out, troubled by a nightmare. The whole atmosphere was heavy with the smell of sweat and dirt. Mosquitoes and flies were buzzing around. He was suddenly overcome by a craving for clean, fresh air. Through the little window opposite his bunk he could see a patch of the pale sky and the faint twinkle of a star. His thoughts turned to his childhood days, to his family, his home in far away Lithuania. His parents were dead. But his brother, his sisters, his relatives, his friends, what were they doing now? Did they still remember him? He had had no news from home for nearly a year. Letters were restricted, the post was irregular, they were miles away from any human settlement. Was it night at home? Were they asleep? Did they lie in clean beds as he used to in the good old days?

"Why am I here?" he whispered to himself. "Why am I treated like an animal, a work-horse? What have I done to deserve it? Perhaps I am wrong. Do I know better than the rest of Russia? The Church, the scholars, the theologians, the lawyers all say we must fight for the Czar and kill the enemy. Who am I to question them? There are millions of men in Russia. They swear allegiance to the Czar, they take up arms, they shoot to kill and call themselves Christians. Am I better than they? I have no formal education. I am not even a born Christian. Certainly Jesus said love your enemies but He also said give to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s. Now I am being called back to the army to bear arms and to fight the Germans. Am I better than Ivan? How can I, a lonely Jew, stand up against the Russian Empire? And what difference will it make? They will fight, they will kill, they will destroy and then they will make peace and start all over again. The Orthodox Church says go and defend the fatherland. Who am I to argue with the priests? I do not even know Russian well enough to defend my point of view."

Moishe sighed heavily. "O God, help me, I am confused, I am frightened and I am lost in doubt. Lord God, help me. Thy will be done. Bless my people, bless these poor prisoners, grant to us peace . . . " At last he fell into a deep but troubled sleep.

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"One, two, left, right, one, two, left, right!" shouted the corporal. Men in outsize uniforms and long grey coats, laden with packs on their backs, long bayonettes and spades dangling from their belts, rifles in their hands, were on the march, trying to keep in step. This was the Siberian division. By a gracious act of amnesty, the little Father the Czar, had freed the prisoners to defend the fatherland.

"One, two, left, right, one, two, left, right!" shouted the corporal.

Moishe was halfway down the column, on the flank, in full view of the corporal's eagle eye.

"Jewish baptist!" he yelled at the top of his voice, "what kind of soldier are you? Don't you know left from right?"

Moishe broke out in a sweat. If only they would not call him Jewish baptist. He could hear the subdued snigger of the soldiers. He knew that they made fun of his clumsiness, it gave them a sense of superiority. He quickly tried to fall in step by shuffling his feet, but the more he shuffled the more confused he became.

"Company halt!" roared the corporal. The column came to an abrupt stop except for a few stragglers at the rear.

"Left turn!" commanded the corporal. The company turned left. "Jewish baptist, step forward!" Moishe stepped out of the line. The corporal came close to him. Moishe clicked his heels and stood to attention. The corporal stared right into his eyes and came so close their noses almost touched: "Report to the sergeant after lunch," he growled.

"Yes, sir."

"Return!" commanded the corporal.

Moishe made a full turn, clicked his heels, stepped into line, made a full turn, clicked his heels, came at ease, adjusted his position and clicked his heels again. All the time under the critical eyes of the irate corporal. The company marched on.

"One, two, one, two, left, right, left, right," intoned the corporal.

They marched every day for seven weeks. Sometimes they were ordered to run, sometimes to break rank and take cover. But most of the time they marched.

"One, two, one, two, left, right, left, right." At night the corporal's voice reverberated in Moishe's brain until he fell asleep: "one, two, one, two, left, right, left, right."

The drill seemed to last forever but in the end everyone marched in step, even Moishe. They moved like automata, instantly responding as one man to every command: "Left turn. Right turn. Back. Forward. Fall. Rise. March. Run." They were ready for action.

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The train in the station was packed with soldiers. Crowds of civilians were on the platform, mainly women: mothers, sisters, sweethearts. Soldiers were leaning out of the doors and windows. Some tried to laugh and make jokes but it was hollow laughter. The atmosphere was heavy with apprehension. Most of the women were wiping their eyes and trying not to cry.

Moishe had spent a week at home. This was a special privilege extended to soldiers on their way to the front. The Czar had triumphed after all. After two years in a Siberian penal

camp and seven weeks of marching to the shrill voice of the corporal, Moishe's resistance was broken. In the new regiment no one knew his nickname. He was now Private Moishe Abramovich Litvak. A fully trained soldier in the Imperial army of Russia on the way to steam-roll the German infidels.

He stood at the crowded window trying to say something to a crying woman holding the hand of an anxious little boy. The woman was his sister-in-law; the boy his nephew. His brother was standing away from the crowd, pale and frightened.

Words did not come easily. There was nothing much to say. The din of the voices all around them was a relief because it made it difficult to be heard. Moishe looked at the woman and child and smiled. She kept saying again and again: "Don't forget, don't forget!" He was not sure what he was to remember, neither was she and he just longed for the train to move.

Suddenly the engine came to life. A cloud of steam rose in the air with a mighty hiss, frightening the boy. The station-master in prim uniform raised his hand. A bell began to clang, doors slammed. A shrill whistle tore the air and startled everyone. The little boy began to cry and hid behind his mother's skirts. The engine hissed once again and the train jerked, buffers clanging. It slowly began to move under clouds of steam and sparks. The crowd on the platform surged forward. People waved, cried and shouted. Some sobbed, a few fainted. The train gathered speed and began to round the bend. Everyone fell silent as they watched the train disappear, straining to hear the rumbling noise as it gradually grew fainter. Finally, when nothing could be heard, the crowd remained on the platform as if hypnotized by some mysterious power; there they all stood with eyes fixed in the direction of the train.

Hannah held a wet handkerchief to her eyes and sobbed.

"Mummy," asked the little boy, "where has Uncle gone?"

"He has gone to war," said his mother.

"What will he do there?"

"He will fight."

"Whom will he fight?"

"He will fight the Germans."

"Who are the Germans?"

"People."

"Why will he fight people?"

"Because the Czar says so."

"Who is the Czar?"

"He is the owner of all Russia."

"Why does he say so?"

"I don't know!"

CHAPTER III

"Donner Wetter!" exclaimed Herr Oberst. He was standing on a hillock overlooking the plain. In front of him was a river reddening in the slowly setting sunlight. Beyond the river was a colourful patchwork of cultivated fields stretching for miles. A forest lay on the horizon. There was not a cloud in the sky and the air was very still. Herr Oberst and two of his adjutants were surveying the countryside through field glasses. Herr Oberst turned to one of his companions: "Major, look to the right, to the edge of the forest. Can you see anything?"

The major trained his binoculars, in the direction of the forest. He did not speak for a couple of minutes. "Yes, I see what you mean," he said finally. They quickly turned back and disappeared behind the hill.

The sun sank and the stillness deepened. All was silent except for the occasional bark of a dog somewhere in the distance. A big harvest moon gradually appeared from behind the trees and stars began to twinkle in the vaulted sky. Nature was at peace. A gentle breeze rose as the earth cooled after a hot summer day and the trees and the bushes began to sway as if lulling the world to sleep.

Herr Oberst was fully awake. This was going to be his great night. He had been waiting for this occasion for over a week, his first encounter with the enemy. From German intelligence he knew every movement of the vast Russian army. The steam-roller was creeping westward relentlessly but was unopposed. The Russian High Command was wondering what the Germans were up to. But the lower ranks suspected nothing. For them the absence of opposition meant that the Germans had taken fright and fled before the invincible Russians. The rank and file bragged about the bravery of the Cossacks on their indomitable steeds.

"How can dirty Germans stand up to real Russians?" said a Ukrainian peasant to his colleague.

"I hear," replied his friend, "that they eat white bread and drink water. How can a man have the strength to fight without good black bread, kapusta and vodka?"

"We will show them what a Russian can do to these infidels," interjected a comrade.

This kind of talk spread all through the lower ranks. The officers were puzzled, what had happened to the Germans? The Russian army was now crossing the German frontier of Gumbinnen with not a German in sight.

But the Germans were right there, though invisible. Herr Oberst and his staff were hidden behind the forward lines in a peasant hut engrossed in the study of ordinance maps. On the rough table was a battery of field telephones. There was a constant buzz coming from all directions. The time was five minutes before midnight. Herr Oberst lit a cigar. Precisely at 11:59 he lifted the earphone. There was a crackling noise and a muffled voice at the other end. Herr Oberst bit the cigar and spoke into the phone one word: "Achtung!" The answer came instantly: "Bereit."

The Oberst’s next word was equally laconic: "Feuer!"

As the hand of his watch moved towards the hour the tension in the hut thickened. At last Herr Oberst barked into the phone: "Loss!"

Almost instantly a tremendous explosion shook the earth under them. The hut trembled, the windows rattled, the echo of the big guns reverberated against the far-off hills. Crash after crash hit the earth. The thuds grew in volume and the forest burst into flame. At first it looked like fireworks, rising and falling, then the glow steadied until it became one vast conflagration. The Russians were trapped in a sea of fire. Herr Oberst rubbed his hands: "The dirty Russian swine! We will teach them how to fight."

"Die grosse Bertha!" said the major, as he lit his pipe.

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Moishe lay in a slit trench near the forest. His regiment had arrived two days ago and hid in the woods. The night before, they had crept out of the forest and had begun to dig in. They camouflaged the embattlements with green branches and turf and spent the daytime resting in preparation for a night advance. Behind the forest, Russian artillery was taking up position in support of the infantry. The forest was alive with men and equipment. The plan was a surprise attack on the enemy, kept secret until the last minute. But the Germans were not fooled and their timing was superb. The Russian attack was intended for midnight but the devastating bombardment wrecked the plan. Intense heat spread behind and in front of the forest so the artillery was commanded to move back and the infantry forward. But this meant that the foot soldiers found themselves without coverage in open fields. The men inside the forest were completely disorganized and those who could not escape perished in the flames. The German trap worked perfectly.

Moishe's regiment was under orders to defend a section of the Pissa river from their fortified positions, while the regiment to their left crossed the river to probe the enemy front. This regiment had crossed the previous night unopposed. The commander was puzzled by this and became suspicious but the soldiers felt differently; they began to joke about the phony war and the German cowards. Even Moishe was happier about it. If war was as innocent as this, he would not mind serving in the Czar's army.

The accuracy of the enemy fire played havoc with the Russian plan. The regiment across the river was decimated, so was the regiment in front of the forest; of those in the forest only a few escaped.

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When Moishe came to, it was broad daylight. He opened his eyes and blinked. He was on a stretcher covered with a rug. His mouth was parched and his tongue felt like piece of leather. He strained to ask for water but could not produce a sound. He tried to motion with his hand but found that he could not lift his arm. Gradually he became aware of a piercing pain which took his mind off his thirst. His right arm, was bandaged and lay motionless on his chest, covered in blood. He tried to recollect what had happened but all he could remember was a terrifying burst of artillery fire and an explosion overhead.

He had been lying in the hot sun for a considerable time when somebody came to his side. Making a supreme effort he managed to whisper "water . . ." and passed out again.

When he came to for the second time his surroundings had changed. He was now under a roof and not in the open. The room was dark. In the distance there was the flicker of a

kerosene lamp and he heard subdued voices. He realised that it was night, that people were asleep, that he was in a hospital ward and that a burning pain was coming from his right arm. With a great effort he sat up. An apparition in white bent over him. A soft, sweet voice reached his ear and a faint aroma of perfume hung in the air. From the voice and the scent he knew that the apparition was a woman.

Except for the week at his brother's home Moishe had not spoken to a woman for nearly three years. There were no women in the labour camp or the barracks. The close proximity of a woman caught him unprepared. Blood rushed to his face, his pulse rose and he broke out in a sweat. Fortunately it was too dark in the ward for the sister to notice it.

Nina Nikolayewna Borman was the daughter of a baptised Jew. Her father was professor of mathematics at the University of St. Petersburg. The family was only officially Christian since Jews were not allowed to live in the capital, let alone hold a university position. Nina, like many other women, had volunteered for service in a war hospital after a hasty course in nursing. She was new to the job, diffident and without experience. But what she lacked in skill she made up with a warm personality and deep concern for those who suffered. She was bending over Moishe's bed; he was only half sitting up and entirely depending for support upon his left arm.

"What can I do for you?" asked Nina gently.

With obvious effort Moishe asked for a drink of water. The moment he spoke, Nina knew that he was not a native Russian. But the Russian army embraced a motley crowd of nationalities. This soldier could have been from any one of a hundred nations under Czarist rule. It was too dark to see his face. She held a glass of water to his mouth and he began to drink with eager gulps.

"I think you are a stranger here," she said.

"Where am I?" asked Moishe.

"You are in the Military Hospital of St. Petersburg."

"How is that possible?" he asked, with anxiety in his voice. "I must not stay in St. Petersburg, they will punish me for this. I am a Jew."

Nina tried to allay his fears. "Don't worry," she said with a smile "In wartime even Jews are allowed in St. Petersburg, especially if they are wounded soldiers and war heroes."

To be called a war hero struck Moishe as very comical. He had never even fired a shot, let alone seen a German. "What is wrong with me?" he asked.

Nina had no definite answer but she promised to find out and let him know tomorrow. Moishe sank back onto his pillow, racked by fever and pain until he finally he fell into a dreamless sleep.

The next morning two orderlies appeared instead of the sister. They put him on a stretcher and took him to the operating theatre. He was placed on a table, a cloth was put over his face and he was told to count to twenty. He got up to twelve when a feeling of carefree well-being took possession of him; he began to rise from the earth and drift among the clouds, closer and closer to the golden sun. It was good to be alive and to listen to that soft, soothing voice . . . "What can I do for you . . . ?"

"How are you?" she asked.

"I am fine, I am happy. Listen, angels are singing, can you hear? Let us fly together, the world is so beautiful . . ."

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Moishe must have been a long time upon the operating table. Two doctors worked on his arm, digging out numerous fragments of shrapnel. His arm was in a shocking state. The humerus was shattered, the flesh of the forearm was torn and raw. The wounds were full of pus but the doctors were loath to amputate, they preferred to wait for further developments. They wanted to give the soldier a chance. These were the early days of the war and the wounded were still treated with deference. At long last he was brought back to the ward.

For Moishe the war was over. As a result of exhaustion from under-nourishment and loss of blood, he looked like a skeleton, with hollow cheeks and yellow skin. There was hardly any flesh left on him. His arm gave him much pain. But he was young and the hospital food did the trick, he soon began to perk up. The doctors were pleased with him although they told him he was not likely to recover the use of his arm.

Moishe now had much time on his hands. For the first time in his life he was allowed to laze about, with no work to do. No duties, no responsibilities, no pressures, except a sense of oppressive uncertainty. Everyone was kind to him and most treated him as a war hero, although he had never fired a single shot. This hero worship was a source of constant embarrassment to him. People asked him the circumstances which led to his being wounded. He did not like to lie but he was also reluctant to disappoint his admirers. After a while he convinced himself of his own importance. After all, he did go to the front and face the invisible Germans. He did come under the enemy's fire and was wounded.

Moishe started to like his new role and tried to forget the past - his refusal to take the military oath, his time in Siberia, his struggle with his conscience. Gradually the story of his war experience grew more colourful in the course of repeated telling. The plain truth was rather unimpressive so he had to dramatize, adding a detail or two each time. In the end, he began to believe his story, with only an occasional twinge of conscience at the more exciting details.

There was a host of pretty nurses at the hospital. Sisters of Mercy, they were called. None of them stayed more than a day or two. They laughed and they talked and they joked, but the sweet, soft voice which accosted him on that first critical night was not among them. Nina Nikolayewna seemed to have disappeared completely. Every morning Moishe would wake up hoping to see her, only to be disappointed at the end of the day. Thus several weeks passed.

One bright morning as Moishe opened his eyes he looked straight into the smiling face of a young woman he had not seen before. "I am Nina Nikolayewna," she said. "I saw you on the night you arrived here."

Moishe recognized her voice instantly. The same experience he had had that night; the rush of blood to his head, the perspiration all over his body and the strange emotion which galvanized his very being, repeated itself. He blinked, he stammered, but could not find an appropriate word of greeting.

"I’m afraid I let you down," said Nina, "I didn’t keep my promise. I would have dropped you a note but didn’t know your name. You will have to forgive me."

Moishe tried to say something but he had lost his speech. There she was, the very girl whose voice made such an impression upon him. He looked at her in amazement. She was young, trim and beautiful. Her white veil with the red cross in the centre hid a mop of jet black hair. Her large brown eyes and her slightly dark complexion suggested Jewish blood. Her voice was soft and cultured with a melodious lilt. Moishe had never spoken to such a woman before.

Nina noticed his awkwardness and came to his rescue. "You see," she said, "I had some trouble at home. My father is widower; my mother died three years ago. He is now my responsibility; he was taken ill suddenly and I had to nurse him."

At last Moishe regained his voice. "I’m sorry to hear that. I hope he is better now."

"Oh, yes. He is much improved, thank you. Not completely well, but well enough to be left with a servant."

At this point she was called away by the head nurse to attend to some duties.

The next night Moishe hardly slept. He tossed upon his bed, thinking of Nina and longing for the morning in hope of seeing her by his bedside again. Morning came but there was no Nina. Days passed but she never re-appeared. He tried to find out what had happened to her but no one seemed to know. The volunteer nurses only came when they could and there were so many of them at the beginning of the war that their absence was seldom noted.

As the weeks passed Moishe began to think that he would never see Nina again. Meanwhile, his wounds flared up again when new shrapnel was discovered and he had to undergo another operation.

Finally, when he was fit to walk again he ventured into town. The capital was full of military personnel, chiefly officers. As a war veteran, with his arm in a sling, he was the object of courteous attention and benevolent smiles. Frequently an officer would salute and he would bow. He felt quite important.

- 5 -

Although he would not admit it even to himself, Moishe was roaming the streets of St. Petersburg in the secret hope of meeting Nina. Even though everyone was friendly and some of the hospital staff were even spoiling him, he remained a lonely man. He craved friendship and intimacy. There was no one in the hospital, neither staff nor fellow patients, he could treat as a confidant. He felt like a stranger in a strange land. Most of all he would have liked to speak to a woman. And could there be a woman more sympathetic than Nina Nikolayewna?

One late autumn afternoon Moishe was standing at a stop waiting for a tram. In front of him was an elderly gentleman leaning on stick, holding the arm of a young woman. He could not see their faces but for some strange reason he suddenly had the feeling that it was Nina with her father. His heart leaped and he froze in place. The tram came and they got on, but Moishe did not move. He just stood and watched the tram turn the corner.

The next day, at exactly the same time, he was at the same spot. Trams came and went at regular intervals but there was no Nina. When he returned to the hospital he learned that it

was being evacuated and that he was being moved deeper into Russia. This was an unexpected blow. There was nothing he could do about it but accept the inevitable.

The night before the hospital was to be evacuated Moishe found it impossible to sleep. He kept tossing from side to side and the pain in his arm added to his restlessness, but greater than his physical pain was his aching heart. He did not want to leave without seeing Nina at least once more. It was not until the small hours of the morning that he finally fell asleep . . .

He was standing at the tram stop. It a beautiful summer morning. A soft breeze was blowing off the Neva carrying the sweet scent of perfume. In front of him was Nina with her father. He recognized her voice. He coughed and they both turned.

"Father!" said Nina in her lilting manner, "I want you to meet a friend. This is Moishe Litvak, our war-hero. He did great things for Russia."

"I am delighted!" said the old man. I know all about you from my daughter. We are grateful to you for all you did for our fatherland. Please, come and visit us."

"Yes! Of course you must come!" said Nina, smiling. "It will be an honour to have you to our home. We live at . . ."

At that moment the tram arrived with a loud clang. The doors opened and they both mounted the steps. The tram began to move and Nina never finished her sentence. Moishe felt a twinge at his heart and opened his eyes. It was all a dream. He sat up in bed and bit his lips as two big tears rolled down his cheek.

CHAPTER IV

The war did not go well for Russia. The steam-roller which was supposed to crush the enemy soon began to run out of steam. Signs of deterioration as a result of mismanagement and apathy appeared earlier than expected. The bulk of the Russian army was composed of nationalities which had little sympathy for the Russian Empire. Even genuine Russians were anything but united. The peasantry and the workers were still seething with revolt as a result of the bitter repressions. Since the assassination of Alexander II in 1881, social unrest in Russia grew in proportion to the reactionary measures imposed by the government.

In August 1878, political revolt became a state offence punishable by military law. But this did not prevent repeated uprisings on the part of students, workers and peasants. The tragic happenings of 1905 were initiated early in the year by the savage shooting of unarmed striking workers who appeared before the palace of Tsarskoe Selo with the intention of presenting a petition to the Czar. The Cossacks charged the crowd, many of them women and children. Over 6400 killed or wounded are reputed to have fallen victim to government brutality. By the middle of the same year, the revolt spread to most of the Empire at the cost of thousands of lives.

The many nationalities incorporated in the Russian Empire carried on separate wars of their own. The Balts, the Poles, the Finns, the Jews, had no reason or cause to defend their Russian masters. Since the year 1867, Polish was prohibited in schools and public places. Since 1899, the Russification of Finland continued unabated. The same applied to all the other nationalities. For them to be expected to lay down their lives for their oppressors was the height of cynicism. They all hoped for Russian defeat.

The vast concentration of troops on the Western front was not equal to German technical efficiency and organization. After some fierce initial fighting the Russians began to give way. The few early successes were paid for in heavy sacrifice of life and equipment. In the end a retreat was inevitable. At the hands of Hindenburg and Ludendorff, the Russian High Command tasted their first humiliation at Tannenberg. By May 1915 the Russian retreat was in full swing. By September of that year, Warsaw, Brest-Litovsk and Vilno fell to the German forces. The Russians rallied with one more effort but with no lasting results. Their diminished strength was unable to hold back the German war machine. The Empire was falling to pieces and the coup de grace came with the Revolution of 1917.

The Russian strategy after Rennenkampf's dismissal in 1915 was to lure the Germans deeper into Russia, hoping that Father Frost would treat them as he treated the Napoleonic armies a century before. But trust in the Russian winter proved futile. The Germans were well prepared for it. They had learned the lessons of the past. They utilized the good weather for rapid advance, quickly occupied the bigger towns and prepared well for the winter emergencies by pressing the local population to dig trenches and by confiscating all available food from the peasants.

With the fall of the Polish capital and the crossing of the Vistula there was little to stop the German advance. Every day brought the Germans deeper into Russian occupied territory. The people were not too sure whether to rejoice at the Russian defeat or to tremble at

German efficiency. Most of them did both.

- 2 -

The weakening morale in the Russian army was due in no small measure to the hostility of the subjugated nationalities. The Poles, the Lithuanians, the Jews, the Balts, were all smarting under humiliation and seeking revenge. They took pleasure in seeing their overlords suffer defeat. They believed that a German victory could in no way make their position worse than it was. They had nothing to lose except the heavy hand of corrupt Russian officialdom.

The German advance through Lithuania was so fast that by the time news came that they had crossed the Niemen at Kovno, they were already battling in the outskirts of Vilno. The Russians quickly mobilized the residents to build fortifications. Men who had never in their life held a spade before were made to dig trenches. There was no provision for food or sanitation. Women and children carried food to the diggers in relays. But the trenches were never used. The German army moved so fast that all the Russians managed was to pull out in time. Deserters counted in the thousands. Poles, Jews, Lithuanians, made sure they remained behind while the Russians were in retreat. All they had to do was to tear off the insignia from their uniforms, throw away their rifles and make for home.

Among the deserters was Moishe's brother David. While Moishe was travelling by special transport further east, his brother was marching with the retreating army, every day coming closer to home. Unlike Moishe, he was not a Christian and had no qualms about war. He was conscripted, served in the Caucasus, and was called back to the forces at the outbreak of the war. During the retreat his regiment reached the outskirts of his native town. It was a hot summer afternoon when they halted for a break after a forced and difficult march. This was his chance. Unnoticed, he slipped into the nearby forest and hid in the bushes. He ignored the whistle calling to the ranks, the command to form in columns and the order to march. There was the clatter of boots on the dusty road and then silence but he did not dare leave his hide-out until darkness fell.

It was already well past midnight when the deserter cautiously knocked on the shuttered window of his home. Inside there was a stir and a sleepy voice asked: "Who is it?"

"David, your husband, please open."

The door opened quickly and David was home. Next morning when he opened his eyes the Germans were already in town. For a whole week he dared not set foot outside. The Germans were searching for the scattered remnants of the Russian army to send them to labour camps in Germany. But in the end, when there was no food left and his wife and child were on the verge of starvation, David decided to go in search of work.

- 3 -

The only employer in the occupied territories was the army. All other industries had come to a stand-still and the economy had completely collapsed. Only those who worked for the army could survive. Russian money became invalid and the only currency was that printed by the Germans for the occupied territories. The army was in complete control whether David liked it or not and finally he had to walk into the lions den and offer his services to the Germans.

"What is your name?" asked the Feldwebel.

"David Litvak."

"How old?"

"Twenty-five years."

"Occupation?"

"Tailor."

"Did you serve in the Russian army?"

This was the crucial moment. David had to think fast. He decided to tell the truth but not all of it.

"Yes," he said.

"How is it that you are here?"

"I became sick and was invalided out," he explained, blushing.

The Feldwebel needed men for a special assignment and David made a good impression, so he decided not to pursue the matter any further.

"Report tomorrow at 6 a.m."

- 4 -

The workshop was a dilapidated shed near the goods yard. Women sat on boxes sorting out Russian uniforms left behind by the retreating army. David's task was to pack them into boxes and nail down the lids. There were few men about the place. The task of labelling the contents was assigned to a middle-aged Pole named Komarski. Because their work was inter-related, David and Pan Komarski rubbed shoulders most of the day. At first there was little conversation between them but gradually a friendship developed.

Komarski was an unusual man. Greying hair, grey eyes, and a grey suit, old but clean, gave the impression of great dignity. His Roman nose and erect bearing gave him a haughty look, but this was offset by his kindly eyes and his ever-present smile.

David felt very self-conscious in Pan Komarski's presence. He was conscious of his Jewishness and his inferior breeding and was wondering what Pan Komarski thought of him. At first their conversation was restricted to commonplace observations about the weather, the difficult times, the lack of food and the high prices. But one day when they walked out together after work, Pan Komarski asked David where he lived.

"May I visit you next Sunday?" asked Komarski.

"If you do not mind coming to a poor home," said David, "you are only too welcome."

"I will regard it a privilege," replied Komarski, "and please, tell your wife to make no preparations, or I won't come."

Komarski said goodbye and walked off leaving David both puzzled and pleased. He was not used to having intimate relationships with Gentiles. In the army he had always kept to himself. They had never had a Pole enter their home. To Jews, Poles were enemies and Jew-

baiters. He was wondering what prompted Pan Komarski to invite himself to a Jewish home.

- 5 -

Pan Komarski did not come by himself. He came with a friend and he did not come empty-handed. He brought two loaves of black home-baked bread, a few pounds of potatoes, a small bag of flour, and above all, a pound of sugar. Sugar was so scarce in those days that it was a real treasure. These were luxuries worth their weight in gold in a city where the population was slowly starving to death.

He introduced his young friend. A blue eyed, blond, slightly built man by the name of Bogdan Romanovski. They sat down on the two rickety chairs while David's wife Hannah, was busying herself with laying a fire to boil the kettle.

"Well," said Komarski, taking out his pipe, "it is nice to meet you and your family in your home. These are difficult days for all of us. We all suffer together, Poles and Jews. But it won't be long now. If we have learned the lessons of history well enough, our trials will soon be over. We must stick together, Poles and Jews, if we are to achieve our freedom. There is no other way."

David was speechless. Never before had he heard a goy speak like this. Komarski guessed what was in David's mind.

"You may be surprised, Pan Litvak, hearing me speak like this, but Jews and Poles have lived side by side for centuries," he said. "Our destinies have intertwined. Many a Jew has fought and bled for Poland. You will have heard of Berek Yoselewicz who commanded a Jewish regiment under Kosciuszko in the siege of Warsaw?"

David listened in amazement. He had never heard of Jews fighting side by side with Poles. Komarski continued: "Perhaps you do not know how our great national leaders, Tovianski and Mickiewicz believed in the brotherhood of the Polish and Jewish peoples. How Lelevel issued a manifesto to the Jewish people calling upon them to forget their insults and to make common cause for Polish freedom? We must revive this spirit of fraternity for our common good."

David was still speechless so Komarski turned to his companion: "Bogdan, tell him how Mickiewicz went to the Synagogue in Paris on the anniversary of the destruction of the Temple to mourn with the Jews their loss of freedom."

Bogdan's face lit up. He had kept silent while the older man was speaking, but now he joined in eagerly: "Panie Litvak," he said to David, "we must return to our great Polish heritage of brotherhood and generosity. We must leave all prejudices aside and learn from history that our fate is tied together. Poland must once again become an example of tolerance and freedom to the nations. Let us take up the slogan of a century ago when Poles and Jews fought side by side in the streets of Warsaw: *For your and our freedom*."

David was transfixed. A vision of a glorious future was forming in his mind. No more Russians, Poles, Jews, Germans, just brothers living in peace and harmony. What a possibility! To be no longer called a dirty Jew by sneering Gentiles, but to be treated as an equal, was to David the realization of all messianic hopes. His eyes sparkled at the very thought of it.

Hannah had been listening to the conversation and she could stay away no longer. She left the little kitchen and joined her husband and there she stood, open-mouthed and trembling in so much excitement that her little boy became troubled and hid in her skirts. Komarski pulled the boy towards him, put his hand upon his head and said with great solemnity: "It is for the sake of our children that we must fight for a new and free Poland. You and your people must help, Panie Litvak."

By now David had regained his power of speech. He took Hannah's hand and turning to his guests he said simply and with conviction: "I will do so, to the best of my ability. She is my witness!"

- 6 -

The military government of the conquered territories had only one interest - to despoil the land. The crops were requisitioned; the cattle and horses were appropriated. All the owners got in return was a receipt. With true German thoroughness everything that could be carted away was sent to Germany. All brass door-knobs, church bells, copper utensils, were taken away. Even fertile top soil was taken by trainload to the fatherland. Bread was strictly rationed. Other commodities simply disappeared. The quality of the bread so deteriorated that it became indigestible. The population was starving and the old and the sick died within months. Typhoid and dysentery became rampant. Young children turned into skeletons. People began to search for roots and grass. Many died of poisoning. Men and women crawled along the streets begging for food. Money meant nothing, only bread counted. To add to the misery, doctors disappeared as the younger ones were conscripted to serve in military hospitals, and drugs became unobtainable. The situation could not get much worse as the war dragged on.

Both Jewish and Christian charitable organizations did their utmost to help. But all they managed was to establish soup kitchens where thin, non-nourishing soup was distributed to those who happened to be first in the queue. The others had to go without. People would queue for hours to obtain a few ladles of watery gruel.

- 7 -

David had lost his job. The Russian uniforms had been counted, packed, labelled and dispatched to Germany. The workers were dismissed and David walked the streets looking for work but without success. The family was hungry and there was no remedy in sight. Hollow-cheeked and shivering with cold as the winter had set in he was walking swiftly, trying to keep warm when somebody clapped him on the back. He turned to see Pan Komarski

"Panie Komarski! How nice to see you," he said with unfeigned delight. Komarski was groomed as usual, with the pleasant smile and sympathetic eyes turned towards David.

"How is it with you? How is the family? What are you doing?"

Komarski noticed his embarrassment and before David could answer, he took him into a nearby restaurant and ordered two ersatz coffees.

David hesitated to tell his woes but in the end made a full confession of his plight. It was no surprise to Komarski, everyone else was in the same predicament under German occupation. Even those who worked for the army suffered bitter privation.

Komarski took out his pipe, filled it with a home-made weed, lit it and wrinkled his brow. As he began to puff he said, "I think I could find you a job. It is not a very safe one and is not well paid but it would provide you with food."

David waited to hear more but Komarski stopped. "This is not the place to talk about it," he said finally. "Come and see me tomorrow morning." He gave him the address. "Keep our visit secret, don't even tell your wife that we met. Promise?"

"I promise," said David, more puzzled than ever.

"See you tomorrow, then." Komarski rose and they went their separate ways.

- 8 -

David did not sleep much that night. He was both frightened and exhilarated wondering what kind of job it might be. The most difficult part was the need for secrecy. He would have loved to discuss it with Hannah, but he could not break his promise.

The next morning he was up early and after a breakfast of a piece of rationed bread made mainly of potato with a trace of flour and unsweetened tea made from dried camomile, he left the house.

The address was a curious one in a part of the town he hardly knew. The twisting road leading along the river had few homes. There were no people visible. He reached a green gate set in a high wooden fence. There was an iron rod for pulling a bell. He had been told to pull twice and then wait awhile before pulling a third time. Instead of Komarski, a woman appeared. She looked at David suspiciously and asked what he wanted.

"I would like to see Pan Komarski."

"What is your name?"

"David Litvak."

"Please come in."

David found himself in a large garden, with no house in sight. But at the end of the garden was a clump of trees. The house, a veritable villa, was behind the trees. David had not expected so sumptuous a residence. Komarski was at the door to greet him. He made David welcome and brought him to a well-furnished room where a table was already set for breakfast. David had not eaten so well for many months. There was home-made bread and jam, and real coffee with cream. During the meal only a few words were exchanged but when the table had been cleared and the door closed, Komarski took out his pipe and began to talk.

"You see, Pan Litvak," he began, "many of us believe in the rebirth of our Polish fatherland. The war presents a wonderful opportunity for us to regain our freedom. Russia is on the verge of a revolution. The Austrian Empire is toppling. The Western front is still holding but once the Americans join the Allied Forces, the Germans stand no chance. There are rumours that this may happen any day now. We must be prepared. To be successful we

need a unified front at home. Poles have a bad tradition of disunity. There are many parties holding different ideas, all pulling in different directions. Our task must be to unite the opposing parties in one common objective - the regaining of Polish freedom. Your duty would be to carry the idea of national unity into the Jewish camp. Jews must understand that there is no hope for them under present conditions. Only in a free Poland will they become true and equal citizens. You will thus not only be serving the Polish cause but also the cause of the Jewish people if you join us in the struggle for national liberation."

Here Komarski stopped, waiting for David's reaction. After a long silence David asked the question which occupied his mind while Komarski was speaking: "What would you like me to do?"

"Are you a member of the Bund?" asked Komarski.

"No."

"Of any other Jewish party?"

"No, I have never meddled in politics."

"Well, I would like you to become a full member of the Bund, penetrate their organization, exert your influence and sell the idea of Polish-Jewish unity. This would be your task to start with. Our aim is to link Jewish Socialism with the P.P.S.

David knew that this was a reference to the Polish Socialist Party which was strongly nationalistic. After another prolonged silence, David said: "I would like to try."

Komarski seemed to be satisfied. "Meanwhile," he said, "I will give you a letter to a priest, a good friend of mine, and he will see to it that you do not starve. You will hear from me shortly."

CHAPTER V

Komarski’s letter proved useful. David was received kindly by the priest. He was provided with soup coupons for the family, a small amount of flour, a bag of potatoes and a few candles. The candles were of great value as few houses had electricity and lack of light was a major problem.

The soup-kitchen opened at 5 in the morning and David knew that unless he was early he would not be served. The next morning, while it was still dark, he left the house with a can for the soup. The soup-kitchen was run by the Sisters of the Convent of the Sacred Heart. It was located in a narrow street next to the church. When David arrived, there was already a queue of people trying to keep warm. They looked grotesque, wrapped in old garments to keep out the cold. Few spoke. When the kitchen opened there was a rush so that the bigger and the stronger reached the counter first. David did not push. He finally reached the steaming container. He handed over his coupon, was promptly served and ran home as fast as he could. Hot soup for breakfast was a luxury few people enjoyed in those bitter days.

One day David did not feel well. Their boy Hayyim, now 7, was willing to take his father’s place. His mother woke him before dawn, wrapped him in whatever she could find and sent him off with the can in his hand. Hayyim was a small boy even for his age and undernourishment had weakened his tender constitution. The frost hit him and filled his eyes with tears. The snow squeaked under his feet and his breath froze in the air. He ran as fast as he could. When he arrived, the doors were already opened and people were pushing and shoving. Hayyim joined the crowd and managed to wriggle inside to keep out of the cold. But reaching the counter was another matter. Because of his size he was just lost in the crowd, hardly visible and each time he came close to the counter the surging crowd pushed him away again. A woman noticed his plight and began to shout: "Let the child through! Make room! Poor little mite!" But no one took any notice and it was a long time before Hayyim came within sight of the nun who ladled the soup. "Now, my boy, where is your coupon?" asked the nun, not unkindly.

Hayyim suddenly realized that he had lost his coupon in the press of the crowd and he began to cry.

"Now, don’t cry," said the nun, "what happened to your coupon, my son?"

"I’ve lost it," he said, in his faulty and uncouth Polish.

At the sound of his voice all those round him suddenly fell silent. Somebody shouted: "He isn’t a Polish child, he’s a Jew."

Immediately the cry was taken up by the crowd: "Don’t serve him, he’s an imposter, a Jew! We have our own children to feed."

The nun’s face hardened. "I cannot serve you," she said, "this is only for Christians."

A large man pushed himself forward. He pulled the cap from Hayyim’s head and stared straight into his eyes. "I knew he was a Jew," he said in triumph. "I could hear it the moment he spoke."

"Away with you, you dirty scoundrel!" they shouted and threw him out.

Little Hayyim was too scared even to cry. He ran for his life, but when he got home he collapsed in a spasm of sobs.

- 2 -

The incident in the soup-kitchen had a peculiar effect upon David. He brooded over the matter for a long time and in the end he decided to see Pan Komarski. David realized the importance of his mission. Hayyim, his son, and the sons of thousands of other Jews, would have to live in Poland with their Gentile neighbours. The ignorance, the prejudice, the division, must stop if Jews were to develop into ordinary human beings. The change must take place on both sides. Poles must learn to treat Jews as fellow-citizens; Jews must respect and honour Polish culture and tradition. After the initial shock, he had only pity for those ignorant peasants who mistreated his child. For their behaviour he blamed the Catholic Church which thrived on anti-Semitism. By tradition Jew-baiting was the speciality of the clergy. To fight the disease, he realized, one would have to fight the Church. All this, and more, he was going to tell his friend Komarski.

Komarski listened attentively and with sympathy. Only when he came to the part the Church played in the fostering of hostility did David notice a change in Komarski's face. His brow clouded, the usual smile disappeared and his grey eyes seemed a shade deeper than usual.

"The priest you took the letter to was not unkind, was he?"

"No, but he was your friend," retorted David. "I wonder how he would have treated me if I had no letter from you. He would probably have said the soup coupons are not for Jews."

"David," this was the first time that Komarski had called him by his first name. "David," he repeated, "you must realize that these are difficult times. People's nerves are on edge, most people are at the point of starvation. The Church is not all bad. There are good Christians and bad Christians. We have to win the bad ones. This only shows the urgency of our task. Let us do what we can."

- 3 -

When David entered the room where the central committee of the Bund was holding its meeting, all eyes turned towards him. The chairman rose to introduce the newcomer. "Comrades," he said, "this is David Litvak. He is here at my invitation. He comes as an emissary of the Polish National Committee of Liberation and I would like you to hear what he has to say."

In a quiet voice David thanked the chairman for the opportunity and the trust he put in him and expressed the hope that his mission would be successful. Then he proceeded to explain his purpose. He finished his speech with these words: "We must learn to trust one another. There have been mistakes on both sides. We Jews have never really taken the trouble to understand the Poles and to appreciate their culture. After all we have lived in this country for centuries. This is our chance. If all goes well, a new Poland will rise from the ashes. It will be a land of freedom for all inhabitants. But we cannot stand idly by and wait for it to happen. We must have a stake in the movement if we expect to enjoy the benefits. I have come to ask you to throw in your lot with the national effort for the restoration of Poland.

This sentence was more than Berel Katz could bear. He jumped to his feet and cried, "Provocateur!"

This term was widely used in revolutionary circles. It was applied to those who tried to infiltrate the clandestine movements in the Russian Empire on behalf of the government. But with Berel Katz it had a wider application. Everyone with whom he disagreed ideologically was worthy of the epithet. "Provocateur!" he shouted again with utter disdain. "Do you mean to say that we, Jewish workers, who fight for world revolution are to make common cause with Polish national reactionaries? Never!"

David went pale and froze in his place. This was his first attempt at reconciliation and it met with a rebuff for which he was not prepared. There was a clamour of voices and they all rose to their feet. At last the chairman was able to make himself heard.

"Haverim, comrades," he shouted, "we are a democratic organization. There is no reason to get excited. David Litvak is a genuine emissary and no provocateur. Let us vote."

"Those for pursuing the matter further, raise your hands."

Five raised their hands.

"Those against."

Five were against. It was up to the chairman to cast the deciding vote.

Motke Berzak, a heavy-set man with a large forehead, bulbous nose, thick lips and a goatee, rose to his feet. "Haverim," he began again, "you know me well enough. I have served the party since 1905. When Feivel the baker was tied to a Cossack's horse and dragged through the streets, I led the assault. As you know, we managed to free our man and smuggle him out of the country. I have always stood for justice for the under-dog. We must not condemn David Litvak out of hand. Let him speak."

David moved closer to the table. He began with Hayyim's humiliation in the soup-kitchen. He told them the story in every detail. The eleven men sat in silence but one could see their indignation rising at the indignity perpetrated against the boy. Finally, Berel Katz asked in an irate voice: "Well, what has this to do with your mission? You seem to contradict yourself."

"Not at all," replied David, "on the contrary. It just proves that the masses are uneducated, that the priests encourage prejudice, that Poles and Jews must come together to re-educate our people."

David told them about Pan Komarski, Bogdan Romanovski and his P.P.S. friends. "Haverim," said David, "these men mean well and are trustworthy. They realize that Jews and Poles are destined to live together. Unless workers unite and fight together for common cause Poland will fall into the hands of reactionaries when liberation comes.

Berel Katz jumped to his feet again: "We are not fighting for a free Poland, we are fighting for a free world! The P.P.S. is a nationalistic, reactionary party. It is a party dominated by priests. We must have nothing to do with it."

It was obvious that opinion was sharply divided. Some were for and some against co-operation. In the end it was decided to leave the decision to the Central Committee in Warsaw and the meeting was adjourned.

Within a month the verdict arrived from Warsaw: there can be no co-operation between the Bund and the P.P.S.

- 4 -

The war dragged on. The allies increased their pressure on the western front, but the Germans counter-attacked with dogged tenacity. The fighting reached unprecedented ferocity. The carnage on both sides was terrifying. A stalemate seemed to be inevitable since neither side would give in. In order to strengthen their position, the Central Powers proclaimed Poland an independent state on November 5th, 1916, but this was only a tactical move. In fact, neither Germany nor Austria trusted the Poles and were particularly distrustful of Joseph Pilsudski and his Legionaries.

The Germans realized that only a quick victory on the eastern front would permit their total engagement of the allied forces. They thus began a barrage of propaganda directed towards the Russian soldiers. Rumours abounded that they even offered safe conduct to Lenin and Trotski and arranged for their transportation to help disrupt the Russian state.

In Russia, life was becoming unbearable. Hunger, disease and social unrest spread among the masses. Workers and peasants began to revolt. They were joined by the garrisons of St. Petersburg and Moscow. The Czar resigned on March 15th, 1917, and the revolutionary government signed the peace treaty of Brest-Litovsk with the Central Powers. But the German schemes came to nothing. The U.S.A. joined the allies and this turned the scales against Germany and Austria. A new chapter in European history began.

- 5 -

Russia embarked on the path of radical revolution. Lenin removed Kerenski from office. Trotski organized the Red Army to fight counter-revolutionaries. Ukrainian nationalists under Petliura and Wrangel proclaimed an independent people's Republic at Kiev in 1917. The Poles under Pilsudski declared themselves a resurrected and free nation. It was at this stage that the scramble for territory began. The Germans and the Poles came to blows in Poznan; the Czechs sought to occupy Cieszyn in Silesia; the Ukrainians claimed Lvov and the Lithuanians Vilno. In the end, war against revolutionary Russia became inevitable.

Pilsudski came to an agreement with Fetliura that Poland would keep the south-eastern lands in exchange for help to free the rest of Ukraine from Bolshevik domination. Thus a new war began between Poland and Russia. By April 25th, 1920, the Poles took Jhitomir, about 80 miles west of Kiev. It was meant to be a war of liberation and for a while the Polish armies were successful. By May 8th Kiev itself, the capital of Ukraine was in Polish hands. But by mid-June the Poles were already in retreat under the fierce onslaught of the Cossack cavalry under General Budienny. Within a month the whole of Ukraine was lost to the Red Army. The Polish army, outnumbered by five to three, untrained and ill-equipped, began to give way. By August 1920, the Bolsheviks reached the outskirts of Warsaw across the Vistula and it looked as if Poland had lost its chance. But under the leadership of Marshal Pilsudski, the army rallied and once again broke the iron ring of the Russians. Peace negotiations with the Bolsheviks followed and the peace treaty of Riga in March 1921 finally brought hostilities to an end. After seven years of war and untold misery the country was left impoverished, depopulated and torn by strife.

Komarski's vision of a united and democratic Poland was never to be realized. The old antagonisms of class, culture and race persisted as before. Only the masters had changed.

David Litvak's efforts came to naught. The Jews did not trust the Poles. The Poles never loved the Jews. The Bund regarded the new regime as oppressive and reactionary. Pilsudski though originally an active member of the P.P.S. had abandoned his old allegiance; he ceased to be a comrade and became a Pole. The Jews knew from past experience that there could be no future for them in a nationalistic state except by total assimilation. But this was exactly where their problem lay. Assimilation meant what?

There were many answers to this question. Some understood assimilation in cultural terms. Polish culture, language and tradition would make a Pole of a Jew. Others understood assimilation in social terms; equal rights for all in a class-less society would solve the Jewish problem. This meant a continued struggle for socialism and world revolution. Again to others nationalism was the greatest enemy. Some looked to Russia for an ultimate answer to all minority problems. But the bulk of the Jewish population refused to search for a solution at all - they were determined to remain what they were - Jews. They spoke Yiddish, read their own literature, published their own newspapers, went to their own theatre and sang their own songs. In essence, David Litvak belonged to his people, he was a Jew.

But how can you live as a Jew in a nationalistic, pseudo-Christian state? This was the Jewish problem. At first, they thought they could. But gradually as new pressures began to build up, it became only too obvious that there was no future for Jews in Eastern Europe. Jews began to emigrate. Those in sympathy with the Russian experiment, mainly those from the border-lands where there was an established Russian tradition, went to Russia. Those of Galicia and western Poland, sought refuge in Germany. Many became Zionists and went as settlers to Palestine. But most tried for the U.S.A. There was a strict quota imposed by the U.S. government. All sorts of conditions were imposed before admission to the land of promise, "the golden land". Jews waited for years in the hope that one day their turn would come. David Litvak was one of those. From the day he registered as a prospective immigrant for the U.S.A. it became the goal of his life - to escape from Poland to the land of the free where the streets were paved with gold . . .

CHAPTER VI

While Polish Jews were looking for ways to escape from Poland, a new flood of emigrants was let loose as a result of the Russian revolution. Once the Bolshevik regime had established its iron grip upon the country, life became intolerable for those who did not qualify as peasants or workers. Gentry, merchants, intelligentsia, men of the varied professions, middlemen, industrialists, and a host of others, became the hounded victims of the social upheaval. Few Jews were workers and none were peasants. Some, of course, were members of the Communist party and actively engaged in reconstructing Russia, but they were a small minority. The bulk of the Jewish population was in Ukraine, mainly in cities like Kiev and Odessa. It was in these areas that the struggle between the conservative forces and the revolutionaries was at its fiercest. It was also here that anti-semitism had a long history and had resulted in much bloodshed. The Jews were mainly middlemen and small merchants, they were thus exposed to onslaught from both sides. To the Bolsheviks they were capitalists and to monarchists they were communists. Only a few managed to escape, mainly to Poland.

- 2 -

Moishe was in a different category. He was no capitalist, no communist, not quite a Jew; just colourless, an invalided soldier, belonging nowhere. A man without a livelihood, without a fatherland, without a destination. A man with one good arm, dressed in a torn uniform and a great-coat. No insignia, no documents, no identity. Just a man. There were thousands of such people walking from village to village and town to town, begging a meal and sleeping anywhere. Moishe had joined the army of walkers in search of a haven.

The Revolution found him in a military hospital in the city of Riazan south of Moscow. He had already undergone five operations. Most of the shrapnel had been removed. He still had his arm but it hung down useless. He could move the fingers of the hand, but only with an effort. It was this fact which saved him from amputation.

At the outbreak of the Revolution the nature of the hospital changed. Most of the doctors had disappeared and the voluntary nurses left. The administrative staff was unable to feed all the patients. When food became scarce, those of the wounded who were in any way mobile went in search of food. Moishe was among them.

Riazan was in the very heart of Great Russia some 600 miles from Moishe's home town. He had only to turn east and bear north towards Minsk. But by some unconscious longing Moishe took the road north towards Moscow. The closer he came to the ancient Russian capital the more difficult it became to obtain food and to find shelter. By tradition, every village starosta had a moral obligation to offer hospitality of one kind or another to a traveller. But these were no ordinary times. Peasants were unwilling to take in strangers for fear that they become politically implicated. Also, there was no food to spare, they had barely enough for themselves. Those were difficult days for everyone, but especially difficult for a homeless and helpless soldier. There were too many of them on the road to be given hospitality.

Moishe slept in potato fields, in haystacks and sometimes in cattle sheds. He lived off the

land, mainly on what he could pluck from the fields as it was early autumn and the harvest was ripening. One rainy day he felt unwell, he was shivering and nauseous. He paid little attention to his indisposition and put it down to the weather but by afternoon his condition had grown worse and he was unable to continue. He sat down under a tree by the wayside and fell into a fitful doze. He did not know how long he slept or what happened to him but when he woke he found himself in a peasant's hut on a pallet on the floor. As his eyes grew accustomed to the dim light, he noticed two men at the far end of the room. He strained his ears and caught snippets of their conversation:

"What do you think is wrong with him?"

"It's too early to say, but I suspect typhoid. He must be moved from here at once. I will arrange for him to be taken to the district hospital. This is for your own safety. It is against the law to keep him in the house."

Moishe wanted to protest that there was nothing wrong with him but he was shivering all over and could not produce a sound. Within minutes he slipped into a state of delirium. Nina Nikolayewna was bending over him, her big beautiful eyes glowing. He heard her soothing voice saying, "Don't worry, we will look after you. You are in good hands. You are a real war hero. Our little father the Czar will visit you." At the end of the bed his brother was looking at him and smiling: "I never thought you had it in you. Fancy beating the Germans single-handed! They will now decorate you with the Order of Merit!"

When Moishe emerged from the phantasmagoria of fever he had been in the makeshift hospital for three long weeks. The doctor thought he would never make it. But his body, hardened by privation, put up a tremendous fight and refused to give up. He was emaciated and worn, eyes sunk in their sockets, cheekbones sticking out and skin yellow. But he was alive and ravenously hungry. As he was lying with his eyes shut dreaming of food, he felt somebody approach his cot. He opened his eyes and looked straight into the smiling face of Ivan. Moishe blinked, rubbed his eyes and looked again. The thought came to him that his fever had returned and that he was imagining things. But Ivan stretched out his hand: "Hey, Jewish baptist! The doctor says you are quite well now. No danger of infection any more. I have brought you some food. Tomorrow I will come to fetch you home to our village."

By degrees Moishe pieced together the story of the past few weeks. The village he had reached halfway to Moscow was Ivan's. Moishe and Ivan became separated when assigned to different units. Ivan was also sent to the front but survived unharmed and when the war ended, made for home. He was once again the starosta and since he was a Siberian convict under the old regime, he enjoyed special confidence under the communists. He was delighted to meet his buddy from the penal camp and was determined to do all he possibly could to put the Jewish baptist on his feet again.

Moishe spent the winter in the village. Life was primitive but fairly quiet. While Russia was undergoing the convulsions of a bloody revolution, in the small village outside Dednovo nothing much was happening. Rumours reached the peasants that the little father, the Czar, was no more, that everyone was now a comrade, that the workers and the peasants were the rulers of Russia and that religion had been abolished by the government. But the village priest still held services, people attended church as usual and continued to pray for the Czar.

One day in early Spring, a commissar arrived at the village. The starosta was instructed to

call a public meeting. The peasants were so frightened that they all turned out. They met in the parish hall and the priest was present.

The commissar addressed the meeting: "Comrades, I have come on behalf of the Executive Committee of the Revolutionary government. My purpose is to instruct you in the democratic procedures of our glorious revolution. From henceforth we are all equals. The workers and peasants of revolutionary Russia have no other masters but themselves. We want you to organize a village commune with full participation of all inhabitants. All political and economic questions must be democratically decided by the majority. All aspects of your village life fall under the heading of politics and economics. An important question is that of religion. It is pre-eminently a political question. As you know, the Church has always sided with the rich against the poor. The Church is therefore the enemy of the people."

At this point all eyes turned towards the village priest. He sat in a corner away from the rest and behind the speaker. Hitherto they had regarded him as the father of the village. In fact the traditional word for priest in Russian is "pope" which means father. He had never sided with the rich for there were no rich to side with.

The commissar quickly grasped the situation. He began again: "When I speak of the Church I do not just mean your village church but the great churches in the big towns and the prelates at whose order your village pope holds office. They are the blood-suckers of the people. They do this in the name of a god whom no one has ever seen. We do not see him because he does not exist. He is the invention of the priests who use him to frighten simple folk like you and to keep you submissive. We want you to be free. To become free you must free yourselves from the fear of god, he is nothing but a bogey."

At this point there was a stir. Most peasants crossed themselves. An old man hesitantly rose to his feet and asked whether he might say something.

"Of course you may. This is a democratic meeting," said the commissar benevolently.

"Well," began the old man in a shaky voice. "I am an ordinary peasant. I am not educated, I never went to school. All know is how to till the soil. But God has always been close to me. He has been a guide and comfort to me all my life. He is no bogey."

He ran out of words, looked round with some embarrassment and sat down heavily. There was silence in the room. A brooding kind of silence. Suddenly the priest rose, made few steps towards the audience and solemnly pronounced the traditional Easter greeting: "Christ is risen!" Like a well-rehearsed chorus, the answer came instantly from the assembly: "He is risen indeed!"

Before the commissar could think what to say the men began to file out. This had happened in other villages and the commissar was not surprised. He knew how to deal with the situation. Next morning he saw the starosta.

"You are an anti-revolutionary village and are siding with our enemies," he said in a rough tone. "We know how to deal with such people. Unless you all change your attitude quickly I will have to report you to Moscow."

The starosta was taken aback. He thought that last night’s meeting was democratically conducted. He explained that he had no control over the minds of the villagers. What was he to do?

"You are to call them together tonight and explain the consequences of opposition to the

glorious revolution of peasants and workers. You cannot afford to stand against the will of our people. If everyone says there is no god, your poky little village cannot say that there is one. I will see you after the meeting."

This was it; an obvious and unveiled threat! Every household was quickly notified of the important meeting in the evening. This time neither commissar nor pope were present. The starosta presided.

"Well, men," he began, "we are in trouble with the pope and the commissar. If we agree with one we estrange the other. This is a difficult situation."

He told the peasants of the commissar's threats and they listened silently. After a while the old man who had spoken the previous night stood up again.

"I said what I thought last night and I am not going to change my mind. I believe in God, the Church and the pope. Let them do to me what they like."

A few others, mainly older folk, expressed similar views. The younger men were cautious. They knew what it meant to fall afoul of the authorities in the capital, no matter who they were, gentry or comrades. As the discussion continued for some time and threatened to divide the village, someone suggested that they vote.

"Who is for God," said the starosta, "raise your hand."

Fifteen hands were raised.

"Who is against God, raise your hands."

Seventeen hands went up. Moishe who was present, but without a vote, burst out laughing. They all turned towards him.

"Well," he said, "God lost by two votes and the Bolsheviks won. What a lark!"

The commissar was pleased with the outcome of the meeting. He had achieved his end. Moishe's remark came to his notice but he decided to do nothing about it at the time. He left the following day.

The peasants went back to their fields. The pope held services as usual. All the villagers went to church as their fathers did before them and life returned to normal. But in mid-summer the commissar was back. As before, he called on the starosta.

"What am I hearing about you?" he began. "The village decided that there is no god by a majority vote and yet you behave as if nothing happened. You cannot have it both ways, either you are for us or for them. What is it to be?"

Ivan was greatly upset but had nothing to say. He just stood in front of the man and looked embarrassed.

"You know what I think?" asked the commissar, "it's the pope and the stranger in your house who are to be blamed for your indecision. I will teach them to make fun of the revolution!"

He turned round and walked out. The next Sunday there was no church service, the pope had mysteriously disappeared the previous night.

Now Moishe felt uncomfortable. There were rumours that people were being taken away by the militia without warning. Some said that they were being sent to Siberia, others maintained that they were being shot. In the end he decided to speak to Ivan. The starosta was as confused as everyone else. After some discussion it was decided that Moishe must leave the village and go elsewhere, at least for the time being. He was fully recovered, except

for his arm. The good air, the simple but wholesome food and his youth were in his favour. He decided to go.

Parting was not easy. Ivan was like a brother to him. He was treated as a member of the family. The villagers had taken him to their hearts. They enjoyed his wit and his good humour. But there was no future for him there and sooner or later he would have to go in any case. For safety it was decided that he leave quickly and at night without saying goodbye to anyone.

- 3 -

It was a balmy, starry night at the end of June when Moishe left the village. Except for the occasional bark of a dog and the croaking of bull-frogs in the village pond, nothing stirred. Ivan saw him out while the family was fast asleep. With his bundle on his back and a staff in his hand, in the old army uniform patched and cleaned, Moishe made his way across the fields towards the river to keep off the main road leading to Moscow. He decided to by-pass the capital and keep out of sight for a while until he had reached country where he was unknown.

It was pleasantly cool and in the vaulted sky a million stars were shining. It felt good to be alive and he was glad to have left the village. He was walking into an unknown future but with confidence. His direction was home, many miles away. He was not too sure how far but he knew that he would get there in the end. With the breaking of dawn he began to feel tired and made himself comfortable in a haystack where he fell asleep.

When he woke the sun was high in the sky and shining straight into his eyes. He was hot and hungry. He went down to a creek, washed his face and took out some bread and cheese which Ivan had given him for the journey. It was a hot day and he decided to spend the morning in the shade. He was lying under a bush and dreaming when he suddenly heard the rumble of a train not too far away. This gave him an idea. Why not try to get on a train? It would be so much faster and more convenient.

The railway line was on the other side of the brook and near a forest. It took him some time to reach it. He walked along the line from sleeper to sleeper straining his ears for the sound of a train but there was only silence. All he could see was the endless stretch of rail shimmering in the hot sun. He must have walked for several miles when he came upon a shed in a small clearing next to the forest so he decided to spend the night there. After eating what remained of his food, he stretched out and soon fell asleep.

Moishe woke with a start around midnight. He heard voices and the sound of people running about. Dishevelled and still half asleep he walked out of the shed and there in front of him was a goods train, immobile with a dead engine. It transpired that they had run out of wood while still twenty odd verst from Kaluga, the nearest junction. This was his chance. He found the man in charge who looked him up and down suspiciously. "You are not one of those counter-revolutionaries who are hiding in the forest?" he asked bluntly.

Moishe assured him that he was a demobilized and invalided soldier on his way home. The man was a good-natured fellow and believed him. "If you want a ride, you will have to help us chop wood to restart the engine," he said.

They had to wait until daylight before doing anything about it, so the leader, convoy,

engine driver and his mate went back into the train to spend the night and Moishe returned to his shed.

At daybreak they began the arduous task of procuring wood without the usual tools. All they had was a small axe. Moishe, with only one arm, could do very little but he tried his best. The transport carried potatoes and other garden produce to Smolensk, so there was plenty to eat. They laboured the whole day and late into the night until they were finally able to fire up the boiler. It was anything but a fast journey. The engine puffed and groaned and sputtered but it moved and slowly they made the twenty-odd verst to Kaluga.

There was a long delay at the junction before the train could move on. Moishe made friends with the station-master who offered him a temporary job. He needed a lookout to accompany the train. There was always the danger it would be waylaid by bands of hungry marauders and Moishe's task was to sound an alarm to warn the crew. After five days delay they were ready to set out for Smolensk to deliver food to the garrison. So Moishe became a railwayman.

- 4 -

Moishe stayed with the railway till the following Spring. His run was on the main line from Kozlov to Smolensk. The train ran there and back with food supplies for the military command. It sometimes took over a week to cover the comparatively short distance. The main difficulty was fuel. The crew now carried a cross-cut saw and several axes. They were also heavily armed. The winter was particularly difficult with heavy drifts of snow, bitter cold and frozen water. This was an additional hazard. Water hydrants had to be unfrozen by laying a fire at the base. Sometimes they would work an entire day just to obtain water and another couple of days to lay in sufficient wood. In addition, Moishe had trouble with his arm. The cold weather caused almost unbearable pain. There was no pay for his work. He worked for the privilege of riding in the train and sharing the crews' food supply.

One day, in early Spring, at the depot in Smolensk he fell into conversation with an engineer on another run. Moishe told him about his many difficulties and the hopelessness of his present position.

"Why don't you leave and try something else?" asked the engineer.

"What can a one-armed man do?"

"Well," said the engineer, "come with us on the run from Smolensk to St. Petersburg. It's a bigger town and there are greater opportunities than in a smaller place."

At the mention of St. Petersburg Moishe's heart skipped a beat. Secretly he had hoped to return one day and maybe this was his opportunity. Who knows, he might even meet some of the people who were so good to him and perhaps even Nina Nikolayewna herself?

The train from Smolensk to Petersburg was pulled by a modern engine which ran on coal. It was a considerably faster journey with fewer mishaps. From Smolensk to Vitebsk there were no problems at all. But after Vitebsk there were long delays on the route. They had to pull out on sidings to let military trains pass. There was a constant flow of military transports back and forth. It looked as if the war was anything but over. After two weeks of travelling when they finally pulled into St. Petersburg, Moishe felt as one who had arrived.

CHAPTER VII

St. Petersburg was a different city from the one Moishe had left some three years before. The big shops were closed, the carriages had disappeared, the houses looked neglected and the population was haggard and listless. T'here were slogans painted in red on every wall and the notice boards were covered with official proclamations. The trams were still running but infrequently and were crowded to overflowing. Moishe headed to the left side of the Neva where the hospital was located. He squeezed into the tram at the Baltic station, crossed the Alexandrowski Bridge and alighted at the corner of Nizhegordskaya and Klinicheskaya, within yards of the Military Hospital. As he arrived at the building he knew so well, his heart began to beat at double pace. He was hoping to see Nina Nikolayewna but he was disappointed. There was not a single person he knew. Everyone had left; not a doctor, not a nurse, not a staff member was the same. The only man he recognized was the old porter.

The trim, uniformed man with the well-tended moustache he remembered was now haggard and stooping. Moishe tried to make himself known but the old man did not recall him. Moishe was bitterly disappointed and left to walk the streets aimlessly until he found a hospice for invalided soldiers where he spent the night.

The next morning he began his futile search again. He found the tram stop where he had seen Nina and her father three years ago. He stood vigil there for hours in anticipation but she didn’t appear. For three long days he kept watch at that stop refusing to give up hope. But in the end he had to admit defeat. He found St. Petersburg depressing and unbearable and decided to leave as quickly as he could. The engineer who brought him to St. Petersburg was willing to take him back and after another long journey he found himself in Vitebsk, which seemed to be a stage nearer home.

- 2 -

Vitebsk was in disarray. Revolutionary fervour had completely disorganized the town and people were walking about aimlessly. Soldiers in torn uniforms, without insignia were milling about in the streets. Orators were haranguing the crowds at street corners. There were hecklers who held opposing views and doctrinaire attitudes led to occasional fights. The militia was trying to keep order but with little success. People were hungry - they wanted bread not political theory. The five points of difference between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks were of no interest to hungry men and Moishe soon realized that Vitebsk was no place for him. But by now he had enough experience with railways to know how to get another ride and he decided to head west which would bring him nearer to his destination.

The run from Vitebsk westward proved to be dangerous. Preoccupied with the task of daily survival, Moishe was only dimly aware of what was happening in the outside world. He knew that there were hostilities further west but had paid little attention. He was about to face reality head on.

The train reached the junction of Orsha and stopped. All the other trains did the same. They were now so near the front that they could hear the boom of the guns. A battle was raging between the Red Army under Tukhachevski and the Polish Legionaries led by Pilsudski. The prize was Minsk.

The Poles had occupied Minsk, an important centre, on August 10, 1919, but they could not hold it. The Russians reorganized their troops and by sheer weight of men and materials were pressing westward. In fact their drive came to a halt only when they had reached the Vistula on the outskirts of Warsaw. Minsk had a large Jewish community. In the eyes of the Poles all Jews were communists and they took the opportunity to mistreat the men and pillage Jewish homes. When the front broke and Moishe reached Minsk he found himself in a ghost town with windows shattered, shops closed and people dispersed in the countryside. Without friends, shelter or food he was walking the deserted streets. After long walk through unknown and depopulated streets he came upon a long queue of people. He discovered that the queue was for a soup kitchen run by the International Red Cross and he quickly joined it. Soup and bread made a big difference. He felt better after the meal and his next thought was shelter. A militiaman walked by, a big man with a red ribbon on his sleeve and carrying a rifle. "Sir," Moishe accosted the man, "can you help me?"

"I'm no sir." said the man gruffly. "Everyone is now a comrade. What do you want?"

"As you can see, I am an invalid and a stranger here, where can I spend the night?"

"Why, are you blind? Can't you see any homes? You can sleep in any house you like; no one can stop you. These houses now belong to the toiling masses. Just go in and demand shelter."

Moishe thought he was joking but he seemed to be in earnest.

"How can I go to complete strangers, and ask them to let me in?"

"There are no strangers anymore," the man replied. "If these people are workers they will receive you, if they are capitalists, their homes do not belong to them. Don't you understand?"

The militiaman hurried on leaving Moishe puzzled. The sun was sinking and a wind blew up and it turned very cold. Autumn was gradually giving way to winter. Moishe finally decided to knock on a door. He heard some subdued voices and shuffling feet before somebody asked from inside: "Who is it?" Moishe paused and then answered: "A war invalid."

"There is no one here to take you in," said the voice, "please, find another place." Moishe excused himself and walked away. He walked for several miles until he came upon a building which he recognized as a synagogue. After some hesitation, he decided to walk in. The place was dark and empty except for a faint flicker of light at the end of the room. From behind a door he could hear the sing-song of a man at prayer. He listened carefully. There seemed to be only one voice. After waiting a long while, he knocked at the door. "Nu" said the voice. Moishe walked in.

- 3 -

The room was dark except for a candle on a bare wooden table. A man with a grey beard and side locks as is customary among religious Jews, was bent over a large book. Swaying gently from side to side he was reading in sing-song undertone. Moishe could not distinguish the words but he knew that this was the local rabbi studying the talmud. He walked up to the table and noticed the rabbi's surprise at the presence of a stranger. He had obviously mistaken him for someone else.

"Nu?" said the rabbi in the familiar accent of the Lithuanian Jew.

"Rabbi," said Moishe, "I am a war-invalid and have nowhere to spend the night."

Moishe spoke in Russian but the rabbi spoke Yiddish, the Russian-Lithuanian Yiddish as is customary in those parts.

"Can you help me?"

"No Jew is a stranger among Jews," said the rabbi.

"I have no bedding, I have no money, I have nothing."

"Where do you come from?" asked the rabbi.

Gradually and hesitantly Moishe told his story. He was seated opposite the man. The candle flickered and threw weird shadows upon the bare wall. Except for his own voice the room was quiet. Moishe was trying to speak Yiddish, a language he had not used since the day he left home. He described his refusal to take the oath, his years in Siberia, his re-call to the army, his experience at the front, his life in the hospitals and his long trek home. He had not spoken like this to anyone for there was no one he could speak to who would understand. The rabbi didn't interrupt except for an occasional, "oy! oy!" But when Moishe mentioned St. Petersburg, the rabbi interjected:

"St. Petersburg, you say? It's a great city. My brother used to live there. He was a professor at the university but not a good Jew, I'm afraid. He had to flee because of the revolution and is now staying with us, he and his daughter." At that, Moishe pricked up his ears. Strange, he thought, a professor at the university with a daughter . . .

Moishe was too weary and too hungry to continue, and now fell silent. The rabbi too, was silent staring in front of him. Finally he roused himself and turned to Moishe: "Nu, we must see what we can do for you. You cannot stay here but we will give you something to eat and put you up for the night. Tomorrow we can decide what else can be done." The old man rose, adjusted his long coat, took his stick and told Moishe to follow him. At the doorpost he kissed the mezuzah as prescribed by rabbinic law and walked into the street.

The rabbi's house was not far from the synagogue. It was in a humble part of the town close to the river. Small wooden houses with narrow windows bordered the cobbled streets. The occasional flicker of light from a window indicated that there were people behind the closed doors. They arrived at a brick dwelling with two stories. Passing through a dark corridor they climbed a flight of stairs, feeling their way in the dark. The rabbi knocked at a door and a woman's voice, clear and bright, responded in Russian: "Who is it?"

The old man answered in Yiddish: "Vetter Shmuel and a guest, please open."

The door opened quickly and they stepped inside. Moishe had not been inside a Jewish home for many years and was immediately struck by the homey cosiness, very different from Ivan's cottage. The smell of food made his mouth water and he realized how desperately hungry he was. "Nu, come now," said the rabbi, "and meet the family".

The room was small and lit by a kerosene lamp and a large table took up most of the space. At one end of the table sat an old lady with a pretty bonnet on her head. She had iron-rimmed spectacles suspended at the very tip of her nose while she was knitting a sock. At the other end of the table was an elderly man, clean shaven, trying to read. His face was in the shadow but the golden rim of his pince-nez reflected the lamplight.

"Zlate," said the rabbi, turning to his wife, "I have brought a guest with me. He is a war-

invalid, hungry and tired. Give him something to eat." Then turning to Moishe: "This is my brother from St. Petersburg, I told you about. And here is his daughter."

Behind them was the person whose voice Moishe heard through the door. He politely bowed to the gentleman at the table and turned towards his daughter. He was filled with curiosity and fear. It could not be, he said to himself, such coincidences do not happen. It was too dark where the girl stood to distinguish her features but he could see the spareness of her figure and the heavy tresses round her head .

"Good evening to you all," he said in Russian.

"Good evening," she replied, "you are welcome."

Again the voice struck him as familiar. He was sure he had heard it before.

A simple meal of bread and weak tea was all they could offer and no one spoke while Moishe was eating. When he finished, the professor asked him where he came from and where he was bound. Moishe explained his situation in few a words and when he mentioned the hospital at St. Petersburg the young woman interjected excitedly: "Was it by any chance the Military Hospital on Nizhegorodskaya?"

"Yes, it was," said Moishe, with a stutter, for by now he was sure it was Nina.

They all looked at him in amazement and Nina came close to him and took his hand.

"I think I have met you before," and she suddenly burst out laughing. "I know who you are!" she cried. "You are the Jewish soldier who was worried that he had been brought to St. Petersburg."

"You remember!" said Moishe, deeply moved. "What a coincidence that we should meet again."

"Papa," said Nina, turning to the professor, "you remember my telling you about it at the time?"

"Yes, I do, my dear."

"Nu, nu," said the rabbi, "strange are God’s ways, His Name be blessed."

- 4 -

Moishe remained the whole winter with Rabbi Shmuel. He ate at his table and slept in the small room adjoining the synagogue. Traditionally such a room was provided by every synagogue in Eastern Europe for indigent visitors who have nowhere else to go. But the Jewish community was now scattered and synagogue life had almost come to a halt, except for a few pious old men who came occasionally to read a "page" of talmud and to speak to the rabbi. Food was very scarce and orthodox Jews found it very difficult to observe the dietary laws. They lived mainly on cabbage and potatoes; bread was a luxury. Except for a friend of the rabbi who carried on some business on the black market, the family would have been in danger of starving. For the rabbi’s brother and niece it was an especially trying time since they were used to a different kind of life. Moishe was inured to hardship but he felt guilty about imposing upon the hospitality of his hosts.

Politically, the rabbi’s position was even more difficult. Except for the fact that he was an old man he would have been arrested by the communists. But even so he was a marked man. It was only due to his obvious poverty and honesty that he had been left unmolested. But the synagogue was declared closed by order of the revolutionary city soviet. Only the little room

was open and thus they dragged on through a cold and harsh winter.

Moishe's only comfort was Nina and they got to know each other well. She was well read and could converse on many subjects. He had little education and listened with rapt attention as she held forth on politics, literature and philosophy.

Moishe was indifferent to the revolution. He not approve of the Czarist regime with its bureaucracy but neither did he approve of the communists with their materialistic philosophy and their disregard for human life. Nina was different. Like most young educated Russians she was drawn to the revolution but at the same time she bitterly resented the treatment of her father and the many discomforts to which she was now exposed. She had no religion of her own but she was strongly drawn to her uncle whose humble and saintly life she could not help admiring. She felt a certain hostility towards Jews because of their cultural backwardness and commercial enterprises, but at the same time she was proud of her father's origin and had a profound respect for Jewish history. She loved the Greek-orthodox liturgy of the Russian Church but was violently anti-Christian in respect to doctrine and mores. Such were the contradictions under which she laboured while in search of a lofty ideal and a worthy cause. There was therefore, much Nina and Moishe had to discuss.

Moishe's position was the exact opposite. His lack of sophistication gave him a simplicity and directness of approach to all philosophical and political questions. What Nina admired in him was his disarming single-mindedness. His philosophy of life was largely moulded by suffering. By nature and conviction he was essentially a God-fearing man. His war experiences only served to confirm his belief in divine providence. There were three coincidences in his life which enriched and confirmed his faith: his survival at the front, although he had lost the use of his arm; Ivan's sudden appearance at a time when his life was in the balance; and his encounter with Nina when he least expected it. He had thus a deep awareness of God's presence although he lacked all the outward marks of religion. His early upbringing had instilled in him a respect for the Hebrew Bible and his faith in Jesus as Messiah was largely related to this fact. The Old Testament quotations in the New Testament lent an authenticity to the story of Jesus and made a profound impression upon his unsophisticated mind. Above all he loved the Sermon on the Mount. It was the spirit of this Sermon which gave him the courage to stand up against the military machine of mighty Russia. To his simple mind his position was unassailable and he found it difficult to understand why the clergy who preached the teaching of Jesus could not see his point. It was his account of the incident in the barracks square when he refused to take the oath, told in utter simplicity and without any effort to impress, which affected Nina most in the story of his life. She could not help admiring a man who had such strong convictions and was prepared to pay the price without regret. All her theorizing stumbled against Moishe's matter-of-fact behaviour. It was obvious to Nina that Moishe was not a Christian in the traditional sense. Nor was he Christian in the sense her father was one. Her father's baptism was in order to wash away his Jewishness. On the contrary, Moishe went out of his way to emphasize his origin. He never pretended to be anything but a Jew. His very name "Moses" testified to this fact. But she had never met a Jew who really believed that Jesus is the Messiah. It was so odd and so unusual that she sometimes wondered about Moishe's sanity. But from his speech, behaviour and sincerity there could be no doubt about his normalcy. In

fact Moishe was an enigma to her and for this reason especially attractive. The more she saw of him the more she liked him.

Their conversation about religion was entirely private and neither the rabbi nor the professor knew anything about Moishe's views. He was pleased to join in the Hebrew ceremonies, pronounce the benedictions and do most of the things a good Jew ought to do. The rabbi never doubted Moishe's piety and he held him up as an example to his brother. For Moishe himself there was no contradiction between his faith in the Messiahship of Jesus and his Jewish practices. Was not Jesus himself a Jew and were not his disciples Jews? Did he not go to the synagogue on the Sabbath day and read the Holy Scriptures?

Moishe had no interest in metaphysics. He did not even know the word. His theology was simple and centred upon living in the spirit of Jesus and the Sermon on the Mount. This was for him the essence of Christianity and he could not see how it contradicted his being a Jew. All this he tried to explain to Nina and for the first time in her life the New Testament, especially the Gospels, began to make sense. She had been brought up in the Church and attended the liturgical services. She loved the singing and the atmosphere. The dress of the clergy, the images, icons and candles made an impression which she could not explain. But the words of the liturgy meant nothing. In fact she did not even understand the language in which it was sung.

One day Nina asked about the circumstances which led Moishe to his present position.

"I was brought up in a religious home. I knew that the goyyim were called Christians but never knew what it meant. From their behaviour I knew that they had a bad religion. That was all. I never heard of the New Testament and it never occurred to me that there was any connection between us Jews and the man they worshipped as their god. We avoided them and they avoided us.

"It so happened that a friend of mine invited me to go with him to hear the Baptists. 'Who are the Baptists?' I asked. He could not explain, all he said was that they were different from the ordinary Gentiles. I had never had any dealings with Gentiles but curiosity won and I went.

"We found their assembly hall, a small and humble room near the River Vilya. They were all simple folk, mainly artisans. What impressed me most was the way they received us. To have a couple of young Jews in their midst they said, was an unusual privilege for them. And they seemed to mean it. Their worship was quite different from that of the Synagogue. To start with there was no cantor. Everyone sang most lustily. Then they prayed without a book. Men and women prayed as they felt, simply and from the heart. Men and women sat together. I had never heard of women praying in a congregation of men. This impressed me more than anything else.

"After the prayers were done, a man stood up and read from the New Testament as I later discovered. It was the parable told by Jesus about a son who took his portion and went to a far-off country. When he finished reading he spoke about this parable and how it applied to ordinary people like ourselves. It was so simple that I could not resist it. I wanted to know more.

"To make a long story short, I began to attend their meetings regularly. I joined their brotherhood. They decided that I should be baptized and one day we all went down to the

Vilya and I was submerged three times as a sign that I died with Jesus and rose to a new life. That's how it was."

Nina listened with rapt attention saying nothing. When he finished she looked at him with her big brown eyes which seemed to be moist with tears.

- 5 -

Nina was only half Jewish. Her mother was Russian. Her full name was Natasha but she was called Nina for short. The rabbi did not like the name. He hoped that one day she would marry a good Jewish man and become a pious matron. He encouraged her friendship with Moishe whom he liked. The only pity was that he had lost the use of an arm but he was honest, good-living and unusually kind. He would make a splendid husband for his niece.

As far as the rabbi was concerned, Nina's name was Rokhele - after Jacob's beloved wife. He called her Rokhele, the diminutive for Rachel. Rabbi Shmuel regarded it as a stroke of good fortune that his youngest brother should have returned to his home. In at least one respect the revolution did some good. It brought back a prodigal son.

The ins and outs of his brother's life Shmuel not understand. He did not know that he had been baptized into the orthodox Church and that his name was no longer Nathan but Nikolai. There were a few privileged Jews who were allowed to live in the capital without embracing Christianity so he never dreamed that his brother, who came from such a pious and respectable home would become a renegade. To him he was only a bad Jew. Now he had come back, a man without a position and a widower, and the rabbi tried to forget the past and be as loving as possible. He made no reproaches, asked no questions and did everything possible to make their stay comfortable under the difficult circumstances. His heart especially went out to Rokhele. He thought it a misfortune that she was still unmarried at the age of 23. He had married his Zlate when she was 17, though it was a childless marriage.

The professor, like most suddenly uprooted men of the intelligentsia, regarded the revolution as one does a storm - it blows up and blows over. He could not believe that the change was permanent. Even if the Bolsheviks remained in power they would still need professors of mathematics. He saw himself back at the university within a year, teaching as before. All he needed was patience to wait out the storm.

Nina, on the other hand, was under no illusions. She realized that things would never be as they were. The murder of the Czar and the royal family, meant radical change. Her father was an older man and intimately involved with the old regime. He had little chance of returning to his post. The question was what next? Where does one go? What does one do?

CHAPTER VIII

Moishe’s steady confidence was balm to Nina's soul. She was desperately in need of somebody she could lean on and Moishe was the only man who seemed sure of the future. Her uncle lived in a world of his own and her father was dreaming of the past. "Moishe," she asked one evening when they were alone, “what do you think life is about and what are meant to accomplish?"

The question took Moishe by surprise. He was no philosopher, he was essentially a man of faith; man lived because God gave life, man is here to do God’s will. Moishe’s concerns were extremely practical; to live means to act, to do what is right. He was not troubled by ultimate questions.

"I can only speak for myself," he said diffidently. "As you know, I’m not a learned man. I’m not used to coping with difficult questions. For me, to live means to do good, to help others, to love one’s neighbour as oneself. It’s all in the Bible."

Nina was not satisfied. "Why should I do good?" she asked. "Doing good to others may bring suffering to myself. Is not the law of self-preservation more urgent that the law of love? How can one love one’s neighbour when he is not lovable?"

"That’s certainly a problem," replied Moishe. "One needs the right spirit. It is the spirit of sympathy with the frailty of others. The unlovable can only be cured by love. When I was in Siberia there was a man in camp, Vanka by name, who was disliked by everyone. A real devil of man. The inmates hated him for his arrogance. The guards went out of their way to hurt him whenever they could. He was the most lonely man in camp. One day he and I were ordered to peel potatoes in the kitchen. It was the first time we were alone together and he asked me: ‘what are you in for?’ So I told him I refused to take up arms because it meant killing people. ‘That’s stupid,’ he said ‘You’re a fool. I could kill anyone if I had to’. Then I asked: are you a Christian? and he said: ‘Of course I am, not like you, a damned heretic!’ So I asked him, how can a Christian kill? and he replied: ‘Of course he can, the pope says so, the Czar says so. Who are you to know better?’

"This gave me a chance so I told him about Jesus and the Sermon on the Mount. I told him how Jesus prayed from the cross for his persecutors. I told him how God loves the good and the bad, and many other things. Finally he said: ‘I bet he does not love me.’ I assured him: yes, he does. And he asked, ‘How do you know?’ I said: I know because Jesus died because of God’s love for all the unloved people upon earth.

"After that, Vanka did not reply. We finished our task and went our ways but that night there was a commotion in the dormitory next to mine. We all got up to investigate and there was Vanka grovelling on the floor and crying to God for forgiveness. We couldn’t believe our eyes and from that night on, Vanka was a different man, courteous, humble, always ready to help. The prisoners did not know what to make of it and the guards started calling him the Saint. At first they meant it as a joke but after a while they started to believe it. It was a miracle."

Nina listened and she pondered the story about Vanka for many days.

- 2 -

After a seemingly endless and bitter winter, the thaw finally came. The sun rose higher, the days became longer and warm rains hastened the disappearance of the snow. The fields dried and gentle winds blew across the Ukrainian steppes. Moishe realized that the time had come for him to leave. He could not possibly remain the guest of the rabbi's family. He had been treated as a member of the household but food was scarce, the quarters were cramped and he knew that he had caused much inconvenience. The thought of leaving made his heart ache because of Nina, but there seemed to be no other solution.

Nina had been Moishe's constant companion for months. They sought each other's company and had many deep discussions, usually in the late evening after the older folk had gone to bed. They also went for long walks together. His heart warmed to the girl, but what could he offer her? She was young, pretty and educated. He was disabled, living on charity and without a future. The struggle between his love for Nina and his down-to-earth honesty was too much for him. He knew that he could not hold out much longer and decided to cut the cord and to run away. This seemed to him the only way out of the quandary. The problem was how to part?

As far as Nina was concerned Moishe was a hero. Russians have a native reverence for sufferers and even have a special term to describe them. Moishe had drunk deeply from the cup of affliction which in Nina's eyes, gave him an aura of sainthood. He was not a sufferer by accident but by choice, he was suffering for an ideal. In addition he was still a young man in his late twenties and the first man in her life to form an intimate friendship with her. She had come to accept him as part of her uncle's household and never really thought of him as a stranger who might leave one day. Moishe sensed all this and didn't know how to explain his decision to leave.

One evening when they were sitting alone, they both intuitively sensed anxiety in the other and neither spoke. The last rays of the setting sun fell on Nina's profile and her big brown eyes stared into space. It was so quiet that Moishe thought he could hear the beat of her heart. What would he not give for the privilege of taking her hand and kissing it! She was so lovely, so innocent, so detached from his world, he hardly dared look at her. To tell her of his impending departure seemed to him too cruel for words. He just could not do it; instead he just stood up and left the room.

- 3 -

Moishe was walking along the river bank sunk in deep thought. For the first time in his life he saw no solution to his problem. There seemed to be no way out. He could not leave Nina and he could not stay. He knew that it would be dishonourable to divulge his love without offering marriage. It would mean trifling with her emotions. But what were her feelings towards him?

In either case, he knew his position was hopeless. If she had no feelings towards him, he would be hurt but if she cared for him, it would be even worse for what future could there be for them?

He was like a man trapped in a cage without a door. The only solution he came up with was to run away but how could he just leave without an explanation, without a word of

appreciation to people who had been so kind to him?

He must have walked most of the night because when he looked up, there was already a glimmer of the rising sun to the east of the river. He made his decision. He would confide in the rabbi and seek his advice. With this resolution in mind he went straight to the little room behind the synagogue and fell soundly asleep.

When he woke up it was well after midday. The sun was shining and there was a fresh breeze off the river. Everything looked so simple and natural that he puzzled why human affairs were so complicated and weighted with sorrow. Moishe could not quite decide which was the real world; the one outside, with the sun, the wind, the trees and the river, or the one in which he was living with its problems and tensions and fears.

He was sitting up, rubbing his eyes and trying to collect his thoughts suddenly the door squeaked and Rabbi Shmuel appeared on the threshold.

"Nu, nu," said the old man in his usual fashion. "What is the matter with you? You did not come to breakfast and are sleeping in? Rokhele is very worried about you, and so are we all. Are you alright?"

Moishe was taken by surprise, so he just grunted and looked around vacantly, unsure what to say. The rabbi continued: "Is there anything wrong? You seem to have something on your mind. Can I help?"

These encouraging words put Moishe more at ease so he said hesitantly: "I might as well be frank with you. You are a good and wise man and you have been a father to me these last months. I have no parents of my own and I need advice."

"Nu, nu," said the rabbi, waiting patiently for what was to come.

"You have been good to me," Moishe continued. "I came as a complete stranger and you have taken me in. I have spent the whole winter with you and you treated me as part of the family, even though these are difficult times." There was another pause which allowed the rabbi to blow his nose and to say "nu", this time three times in a row. "Well," said Moishe, after a while, "it cannot continue indefinitely. I cannot stay with you forever. The Spring has come and I must go, but . . ." He blushed, he stammered, he coughed and then he said it - "but there is Nina, I mean Rokhele . . ."

"Nu, what about her?" asked the rabbi.

"Well," said Moishe again, "Nina, I mean Rokhele, she is a very nice girl . . . she . . . she . . . she would make a lovely wife."

"Nu," said the rabbi again, "of course she would."

"But I have nothing, I am disabled, I am unlearned, I am homeless. These are times of war and revolution. What future can there be for us?"

At this the rabbi sat down on the only chair in the room, took his beard in his hands and began to stroke it, lost in thought, while swaying from side to side as is so frequently the habit with pious Jews. Occasionally he wrinkled his forehead, puckered his brows and uttered some indistinguishable grunts. Moishe waited as if waiting for a sentence from a judge. He had the same feeling as when he stood before the military tribunal awaiting the verdict which sent him to Siberia.

At last the rabbi spoke. "You are right, these are not normal times when men can make decisions easily. We have to weigh things from every side and act cautiously and wisely. You

are a good man and we have become fond of you. The position of my brother and my niece is full of uncertainty. The commissar has enquired about him and there are rumours in town that scholars will be rounded up and sent to prison. They may come for him any time. I am too old to flee and I do not mind what happens to me, although I am worried about my Zlate. But they ought to leave the country as soon as possible."

Here he broke off into another reverie. "Nu," resumed the rabbi after some time. "Perhaps you could go and let us know how things are across the border? Perhaps my brother and Rokhele could escape to Poland or beyond? Perhaps, with God's help, her future lies abroad, who knows . . . ?"

Moishe had been unaware of the threat which hung over the professor and Nina but now he realized that immediate action was necessary. His first move had to be crossing the border into Poland as the only door open to the West. He decided to speak to Nina as soon as possible.

- 4 -

Moishe's re-appearance in the late afternoon made quite stir in the little flat. Zlate began to fuss in the kitchen preparing something to eat. Nina was so obviously pleased to see him alive and well that she forgot her usual reserve. "We have been so worried about you," she said. Where have you been all this time?"

Moishe tried to explain while everyone was listening. He expressed his gratitude for all their kindness and his feeling of discomfort for imposing upon their hospitality. He told them he was going to try to get across the border and of his hope to help them should need arise for them to leave. While he was speaking, searching for words and with obvious effort to remain the master of his emotions, Nina's big eyes were fixed upon him, glistening with tears and he knew what he had been longing to know more than anything else, Nina cared . . .

He was elated and that gave him courage and determination. He hardly dared to look at her, but that night, as he was leaving for his room, he did something he had never done before; he took Nina's hand and pressed it to his lips.

- 5 -

It rained the whole day. The sky was grey and foreboding and large puddles gathered in the cobbled streets. The wooden pavements were covered with mud. The town appeared gloomy and deserted. An occasional passer-by splashing along was the only reminder that there were still some people about. It was the day of Moishe's departure. His plan was to get as close to the front as possible and then try for the other side.

The year was 1929, the month was May. From Minsk to the theatre of war were some 70 versts. The military situation was very confused. The Bolsheviks were fighting the Poles, the Poles were fighting the Lithuanians, the White Russians (Ukrainians) were allied with the Lithuanians. Most people were uncertain where their loyalties lay. Religiously, Poles and Lithuanians belonged to the West; Russians and Ukrainians belonged to the East. But at this point, religious loyalties usually gave way to national ambition. Because of the varying fortunes of war the national frontiers were constantly changing. One day a location was declared Polish, the next day Lithuanian and the third, Russian. It all depended upon which

army occupied it at the time. Vilno, the ancient capital of Lithuania, changed hands seven times. At one stage it was governed jointly by the Russians and the Lithuanians, and then re-occupied by the Poles.

At the time when Moishe was headed to his native town, the Red Army was moving westward on a crest of triumph over the Poles. If they moved fast enough he would arrive in the wake of a Bolshevik victory. If the fortunes changed and the Poles advanced, he would have to avoid the fighting zone and somehow cross to the other side.

In April, the armies had been drawn along the Berezina to the south and the Nevis to the north. The main battle front centred upon Maladechna. There was a sudden lull in the fighting as both sides prepared for a second round. In spite of the war and the danger to life there was a steady flow of refugees getting through to the West. Disinherited aristocrats, political suspects,White Russian nationalists, bankrupt industrialists, ruined merchants, plotting counter-revolutionaries were all paying heavily in gold and diamonds for the privilege of getting across. The front varied from day to day and smuggling people to the West was a highly lucrative enterprise for those who knew the way.

- 6 -

From past experience Moishe knew that the Russian army depended largely upon rail transport. He decided to head for the closest station and check out the situation. Nina wanted to go with him so he tried to dissuade her by explaining the difficulties he would be facing and the uncertainty of the journey. He would have to trust his luck and hope for the best. It would be wiser for her to stay away, but she would not hear of it. Finally they agreed that she would go with him but only part of the way to the station. He quickly packed his small bundle, cleaned his worn army boots, put his greatcoat over his arm and said goodbye. The whole family came down to wave him off. The parting was difficult although everyone pretended to be cheerful.

Moishe and Nina walked down the wet and cheerless streets. At last Nina broke the silence: "You have been such a good friend to me. I will miss you so much," she said in a voice thick with tears. "I feel the same," said Moishe, "and I find parting more difficult than you perhaps realize." They fell silent again, each one sunk in thought. They turned the corner and the railway station came into view. Moishe hesitated and Nina stopped: "I will go no further," she said quickly. "Remember us," she added wistfully.

Moishe took her hand and kissed it. His tears fell upon her hand. She looked up at him and began to sob. They stood in the rain, two lonely people, a man and a woman, unable to part and unable to remain together. Suddenly Nina reached up, planted a kiss upon his lips and without a word quickly turned back. Moishe stood, watching her go, his eyes glazed. She turned the corner and vanished from his sight.

He stood glued to the spot for a considerable time. The rain let up and the sky started to clear. The parting rays of the setting sun transformed the puddles into liquid gold. Moishe looked up to the sky and blinked at the sun. There is hope for man, he said to himself and the verse of a Psalm came to his mind:

Out of the depths I cry to thee, O Lord,

Lord, hear my voice!

With a sigh he turned round and went to the station. There was no train there, but there was a meeting taking place in the smoky waiting room. Dusk was falling and the room was unlit, but once his eyes became accustomed to the failing light he could see a crowd of people listening to an orator with rapt attention.

A slight man with a goatee, a big mop of disheveled hair and pince-nez was addressing them. His crystal-clear voice seemed to have mesmerized them. There was complete silence in the hall while he was speaking. Some people stood against the walls and many others sat upon the floor almost on top of each other. Most were army men, but there were some civilians amongst them.

"Comrades," shouted the man, "the struggle is not yet over! We have struck for freedom of the masses and we must complete the job. We are surrounded by enemies on every side within and without. The monarchists, the capitalists, the blood-suckers, the profiteers, the black-marketeers, the speculators, the enemies of the people, have not capitulated yet. They have only gone underground. Their anti-revolutionary allies are the national minorities who are trying to divide and destroy the Russian soviets. They are backed by American and British capitalists. The Poles are only pawns in the capitalist conspiracy against the toiling masses. Let us not be deceived by their offers of peace. There can be no peace while the capitalists still hold power in the rest of the world. The day of reckoning has come. Let us not forget our slogan: *Workers of the world unite*. Already the masses of Germany, Italy and even England are rising like one man with a will to take revenge for the exploitation they have endured for centuries. This is our day, the day of the toiling people, the day of the soldiers, workers and peasants. Let us remain true to our destiny. Down with exploitation! Down with the aristocracy! Down with the capitalists and blood-suckers! Long live the revolution! Down with our enemies!"

Leon Trotski ran out of breath. But he achieved his end. Everyone jumped up and shouted. Like a hurricane the cry rose from many throats: "Down! Down! Down! Long live the revolution! Down with our enemies!"

Moishe got caught up in the crowd and something of the electrifying atmosphere took hold of him. He almost joined in the shouting but Nina’s kiss which still burned upon his lips held him back. He quickly recovered his poise and wondered: how is this spirit of revenge better than the spirit of oppression of the Czarist regime? It left him puzzled and he groped for an answer.

CHAPTER IX

Gradually the crowd dispersed. Trotski was surrounded by officials of the local soviet and militiamen were milling around him. A dilapidated automobile drove up and took him and his entourage away. Only a few men remained in the waiting room. Some were stretched on the hard benches, others on the floor. It was obvious that they intended to spend the night at the station. Moishe was walking up and down the deserted platform wondering what to do next when somebody clapped him on the back.

"Hey, old chap, you are still here!" cried a somewhat familiar voice. It was his friend, the engine driver, who had taken him to St. Petersburg almost a year ago. Moishe was overjoyed. Here was someone who could help him.

Juri was one of those good-natured Russians who celebrated every possible occasion with a good stiff drink of vodka. To meet a friend whom he had not seen for a year was warrant enough for such a celebration. "What a coincidence! Fancy meeting you again," he said to Moishe. "What have you been up to all this time?" A few expletives and a string of obscenities gave eloquent expression to Juri's excitement. He finally came to the point: "Come," he cried, "we must have a drink!"

In those days of scarcity, vodka was a rare commodity. It could only be obtained on the black market but by barter, not for money. Even so, it was not real vodka but a concoction of base spirits of undefinable origin. But as long as it burned the palate and made one drunk it was a tolerable substitute.

Juri took Moishe back to town. After walking along some dark streets and back alleys they came to a run-down house. Juri knocked on the door. A voice from inside responded and on hearing Juri's voice, the door was immediately thrown open. He was obviously a well-known customer. "I've brought a friend," he said. "I've not seen him for a year. We must have a drink," he added cheerfully. The old lady lit a candle and went out. After a while she returned with a bottle.

"Here," she said, "it's the best I have but pay first."

"Pay first!" exclaimed Juri, "how do I know if it's good. Let me taste it."

He filled a quarter of a tea glass, put it to his mouth, shut his eyes, tilted his head and swallowed in one gulp. His face contracted, his eye-brows knit and he smacked his lips.

"Not bad. It burns alright." He turned to Moishe: "Pay her Comrade."

Moishe looked stunned. Apart from his bundle which contained a towel, a crust of bread, an army mug and a bit of soap, he had absolutely nothing he could count his own. "I would be delighted pay," he said humbly, "but I have nothing except what I'm wearing and that's not worth much!"

Juri could hardly believe his ears. "What!" he exclaimed, "I took you to be a Jew and there are no poor Jews in Russia. I have never met a Jew who did not have a piece of gold or a few diamonds!"

"Well," said Moishe, "here is one who has nothing."

"What shall we do now?" asked Juri, turning to the woman, "will you trust us on credit?"

"Not on your life," she said, "you already owe me for two bottles."

Juri scratched his head and looked longingly at the bottle on the table.

She turned to Moishe: "Give me your greatcoat as a pledge. Come back when you can pay but remember, money is no good to me. I only accept jewellery, gold, diamonds. A gold watch will do," she added as an afterthought.

Juri's eyes brightened. He grabbed the bottle, poured half a glass-full with the same dexterity he previously displayed and drank her health. Moishe handed her his coat. The next round was a toast to the revolution. The third round was a toast to Moishe. A few drops went into Moishe's cup but the stuff was so vile he could not swallow. In no time the bottle was empty. Juri bent over the table, buried his head in his hands and fell asleep. The woman retired to an alcove and Moishe was left in the company of snores. Juri remained in a stupor for several hours. When he roused himself it was day again. He woke with the usual Russian expletive and asked for a cigarette. When none was available he unleashed a string of obscenities. "Let's go," he said finally, "we can't stay in this filthy hole for ever."

They left the house and made their way back to the station. The fresh air, the clear sky and the rising sun had a sobering effect upon Juri so Moishe told him about his predicament. "I've been hanging about too long," he said, "I want to go home but to get there I have to cross the frontier. Can you help?"

"This is not my run," Juri explained. "I really have no business being here. I only came to find a girl I used to know in Minsk but I know somebody who runs a transport west to the front. I will speak to him for you."

They waited two days for the transport to arrive and Moishe was greatly tempted to go back to see Nina, but he knew that would be a fatal move. What frightened him most was the ordeal of saying goodbye again. Finally, the transport arrived and yes, it was going west towards the front. Juri's friend was willing to take Moishe along as an additional flag-man. There was nothing really for him to do but the ruse was necessary in case of inspection. He was provided with a battered bag, a red and green flag, and a whistle. Within a few hours they steamed out of the station and heading in the direction of Zaslev, Rakov, Ivenetz and Dzerzhisk. This was not exactly the direction Moishe was aiming for. What he really wanted was the north-west route to Molodechno, Oshmiyany, Smorgony and Vilno. But any direction out of Russia was better than the uncertainty of waiting.

The freight train crept along and made frequent stops. Sometimes they stopped at a small station but most often in open fields waiting for a signal to proceed. On the second day at dawn, the train came to a jolting stop at a small clearing in the forest. Moishe was told to jump off and make for the river. He jumped onto the rails, leaving behind the flagman's bag, the flags and the whistle and even forgetting his bundle in his haste. The train chugged on around the bend and he was alone. The sun was rising over the fields, gilding the river below him. Drops of dew were refracting rays of sunlight in all the colours of the rainbow. There was complete silence except for an occasional bird. It was good to be outside in bright sunshine and the fields. How wonderful, thought Moishe, is God's world. Why is man so vile? He recalled Trotski's speech a few days ago. He was preaching hatred, he said to himself. Vengeance, revenge, war, exactly the same spirit as before. War! War! War! Why must we kill each other? Why can't we live in peace? Then he was startled out of his reverie by a volley of gunfire across the river. "Here it goes," he muttered to himself, "they're at it again!"

The sun had risen in all its glory and the day advanced bright and beautiful. Then it got hot and Moishe began to be plagued by thirst. He tried to divert his mind but to no avail. He was tired, hungry and thirsty and there was not a soul around. What was he to do?

He decided to leave the clearing and go into the open, come what may. He began to walk down the hill and had hardly walked ten yards when he became aware of some rustling in the grass behind a bush. Moishe hesitated. He stopped for a moment but quickly decided to walk on. As he was passing the bush a hand reached out, gripped him by the leg and pulled him to the ground. Before he realized what was happening he was gagged and unable to produce a sound. His captor, dressed as a peasant and with a knife at his side, was going through his pockets. They were completely empty except for a battered photograph of Nina which she had given him as a kind of a joke some months before. That was all he had. The man ungagged him after a while and whispered in Russian: "Who are you?"

"I am a disabled soldier trying to get home."

"Where is home?

"I was born in Vilno."

“Do you have any documents?"

"No."

"How is that? Every soldier has a document to prove his identity."

"I lost everything in the war."

"Where did you come from""

"Minsk."

"How did you come here?”

"By train."

"What kind of train?"

"A military transport."

"There is no station here."

"They let me off."

"Why did they do that?"

Moishe hesitated. He did not quite know how to explain the circumstances of his presence but it was enough for his captor. "You will have to wait till nightfall. We will cross the river in the dark. You will co-operate fully, or else . . ." and he threatened Moishe with the knife. "We will soon find out whether you are telling the truth. Now stay still!"

Moishe was lying in the shadow of the bush deep in the grass for a long time. Finally, he could not bear it any longer: "I’m terribly thirsty," he said.

"You will have to wait," was all the man had to say.

Mercifully, exhaustion took over and he slept. It was a heavy and troubled sleep, with dreams of food and banquets. Nina was there. It was a wedding but she was not the bride. There did not seem to be a bride. Nina was serving the tables and kept bringing more and more food. Moishe was eating as much as he could. Each time Nina passed him he asked for a drink and each time she said the same thing: "in a moment."

When Moishe awoke the sun was setting. The man with the knife looked at him searchingly: "You must be very thirsty by now," he said softly. Moishe just shook his head, unable to respond. The man reached into his pocket and produced a flask, the kind soldiers

carry with them: "Here, have a drink, but don't drink all of it. We will need it later."

Moishe grabbed the flask with a trembling hand and put it to his mouth. Never had ersatz coffee tasted better. After a while the man took the flask from him. "That will do," he said, "in a couple of hours we'll be moving."

Gradually the evening deepened and the stars appeared.

"The moon rises after midnight," said the man, "so we will have to cross before then. Can you swim?"

"No, I have only one good arm, as you can see."

"Well, the river is not so deep," said the man. "We will manage."

They lay there for another couple of hours without speaking. Finally the man stirred.

"This is it," he said quietly, "let's go. We'll go down to the river as quietly as possible. I go first, you follow. And no tricks, please. I will use the knife if I have to. When we reach the water don't splash. If it gets too deep don't panic, I'll keep an eye on you. If you hear shots, duck under the water and keep moving in a zig-zag. A moving target is more difficult to hit. Don't leave the water until the shooting dies down. Once out of the water take cover."

They moved like shadows from hillock to hillock and depression to depression. Most of the time they crawled on all fours. Each time they heard a suspicious noise they took cover and waited. Moishe was as keen to get across as the man was to get him there. When they were within yards of the river, hidden in a bush, the man took out the flask, took several mouthfuls and handed the rest to Moishe. All was quiet.

"Now we go," he said in a whisper. He crawled into the water and Moishe followed. The river was cold but shallow and they crawled on their hands and knees. Slowly they moved away from the shore and the water got steadily deeper. Moishe started shivering from the cold. The current increased as they moved along. When they reached midstream, the bottom dropped from under Moishe's feet and he was caught in the current. "Help!" he shouted and reached out for the man's coat. Immediately a shot rent the air. Moishe has no memory of what happened next. When he came to he was on the other side of the river lying in the grass behind a willow bush and shivering. The man was standing over him, grinning.

"Well, that was close," he said. "A bullet grazed my arm but no harm done. We were lucky. A good thing you passed out. It was easier just to drag you."

When Moishe had recovered sufficiently to walk they made their way along a narrow path, cold and soaked. Eventually they reached a hut and were given a hot drink and straw to lie on. In spite of the discomfort they were soon asleep.

BOOK II

CHAPTER I

Moishe was the first to wake. As he looked around he saw soldiers were sprawled all over the floor, snoring. Outside the narrow windows he could see a guard walking up and down and he could hear cannon fire in the distance. He started thinking about the recent events. Why did the man bring him across the river? Why was he dressed as a peasant? Who are these soldiers? These were the thoughts going through his head when a smartly dressed officer appeared in the doorway. He looked round the room and went straight over to Moishe's captor who was snoring heavily. The officer bent over him and began to shake him awake. The man sat up, rubbed his eyes and looked up. A moment later he sprang to his feet, stood to attention and began to speak in a language only faintly reminiscent of Russian. It was then that Moishe realized he was in the hands of the Polish army. The man turned to Moishe and spoke in perfect Russian, "Get up. We have to go now."

The three of them left the room. After a short walk they arrived at a large country house which apparently served as military headquarters. Moishe was given black coffee and a crust of coarse bread. He was still shivering with cold and his clothes were wet and crumpled. The officer scrutinized him carefully before the interrogation began. First he was asked some personal questions, then questions pertaining to the Russian army. It soon became apparent that they had got hold of the wrong man. Moishe was neither a spy, nor a Bolshevik, nor a member of the Red Army. But how did he get to the place across the river and why was he dropped from the train? How could they make sure that he was a war veteran returning home? It was at this critical stage of the interrogation that an elderly man in military uniform entered the room. He listened carefully to the questions and the answers in silence. But when the officer paused, he turned to Moishe: "What is your name?" he asked.

"Moishe Litvak."

"Do you have any brothers or sisters?"

"One brother."

"What is his name?"

"David."

"Is he married?"

"Yes."

"Do they have children?"

"When I left home six years ago, they had one boy."

At this Pan Komarski, who was serving as a volunteer in the Polish army, turned to the interrogator: "I am prepared to vouch for this man. I know his brother. It's a strange coincidence. David Litvak was working for the P.P.S. for a while and is a respectable citizen. With your permission I will take the prisoner under my personal care."

The staff officer was only too glad to get rid of the prisoner as it became obvious that he could furnish no useful information regarding the disposition of the Russian forces.

Moishe was very fortunate. Pan Komarski proved to be the most considerate of men. He took Moishe to his own quarters where he could wash and relax. He provided him with a change of clothes, new army boots and other luxuries. Komarski even provided him with more recent information about his brother, sister-in-law and nephew and their last address. All this was so unexpected that both regarded their meeting with sheer amazement. Komarski was a deeply religious man and a bond of spiritual affinity developed between them. Moishe felt free to tell him his story and Komarski was deeply moved by the remarkable signs of God's providence in this simple and direct man. He had never met a Jew who acknowledged the messiahship of Jesus and it was a startling discovery. It had never even occurred to him that a Jew could be a Christian from conviction.

Moishe remained behind the lines of the Polish army for a whole week. Behind the front nothing moved except the army. There were no trains, few roads, only dirt tracks and burned out villages. Most of the civilian population was in hiding or had fled west; only the old and the crippled were left behind. Fields were left untilled and farmyards deserted. The only evidence of life seemed to be an occasional stray dog in search of food. But when the lull ended and fighting resumed, he decided to move on in the direction of his home town.

Moishe parted from Pan Komarski with promises to look him up at his home when the war ended. In a good pair of shoes and with renewed strength after a week of rest he set out towards Vilno. He spent the first night in a derelict barn and the following morning he started early in search of food. This was his greatest problem. There was plenty of water but nothing to eat. By midday he came to a forest and heard the sound of wood being chopped so he headed that way. Presently he came to a clearing where soldiers were bivouacked. At first he hesitated but hunger forced him to approach them. He went up to the commanding officer and explained his presence. The officer happened to be a Jew. He looked Moishe up and down and quickly recognized his origin. "Give the man some food," he said to the cook who was ladling out soup.

After Moishe had eaten the officer took him aside. "I would like to help you," he said, "but the situation here is critical. The Russians are advancing and if our retreat continues they will soon take over this position. I can supply you with food for a few days, but they are bound to overtake you if you move on foot. There is nothing else I can do for you."

Within an hour the company formed up and moved east. Again Moishe was left alone walking in the opposite direction. At least he had some food which he strictly rationed to make it last as long as possible. And so he plodded on and after a couple of days he came to an inhabited village. Peasants were working in the fields and life looked almost normal. Because the weather had broken and rain had set in he decided to remain there until the weather cleared but it grew steadily worse. One night he woke up to the sound of horses galloping through the village. A peasant ran into the barn where Moishe was lying on a heap of straw: "The Russians have come back, the Poles have fled," he announced breathlessly. Once again, Moishe was under Bolshevik rule. Despite all his efforts he had not got far; he was still in Russian hands.

The Red army swept westward without much resistance. Within a couple of weeks they were again in the outskirts of Vilno. To prevent the fall of Vilno into Russian hands, the Poles offered it to the Lithuanians who had signed an armistice with the Russians only a few days before. Moishe was not left to himself for long. In the wake of the army, a commissar arrived in the village to organize the peasants. Moishe's presence was too conspicuous not to be noticed. The commissar listened to his story with suspicion: "What are you returning home for?" he asked impatiently.

Moishe explained that he was a stranger and longed to rejoin his family. But the commissar was not satisfied: "Tell me honestly," he said, "which side are you on, theirs or ours? Do you hold with the bourgeois or the proletariat?"

Moishe said he was non-political, that he took no sides but this infuriated the Russian. "Only cows are without politics," he shouted. "In revolutionary Russia no one dare be neutral. I will send you back to school again to learn politics. You, a disabled soldier, ought to know better."

Moishe was crushed. The last thing he wanted was to go back to Russia, He took the commissar's words as a threat but he was mistaken. The next morning a horse and cart drew up in front of the cottage. The commissar had already gathered several peasants who he thought should be re-educated. Moishe was ordered to climb in and off they went east again. But they did not go far. On reaching the little town of Gorodek they drove up to a small wooden house with large red letters on the door: *REVKOM* - Revolutionary Committee. There they alighted and so began a period of indoctrination under the guidance of an illiterate, rough-spoken, middle-aged man whose knowledge of revolutionary theory consisted solely of the constant recitation of a few slogans.

The peasants were taught by rote: God is the invention of the people's enemies. The clergy are blood-suckers. Russia is for the people and the people are for Russia. Religion is the opium of the masses. Work is strength, workers are therefore the only rulers of Russia. Those who do not work shall not eat, etc. etc. At first Moishe tried to demur, but he soon realized the futility of it. There was no point in arguing. The man in charge was unable to sustain a reasonable discussion. He would flare up and use obscene words instead of reasoned argument. The only reasonable response was to submit to the process of brainwashing.

Meanwhile the war went on. The Red Army was now in the ascendency. The news soon came that Vilno was about to fall into Russian hands and that Lithuania and Russia were again negotiating a peace treaty. Moishe asked to see the chairman of the Revkom. He explained his position and his desire to return to his hometown. He was told that his request would be put before the local soviet. By the time he received a positive answer allowing him to leave a couple of weeks had elapsed. But this time he was an illegal traveller no more. The local soviet furnished him with an official document:

Comrade Moishe Litvak, a disabled soldier, born in
Vilno, is herewith authorized to return to his native town.
Signed: Ivan Pavlov (Chairman of the Revkom in
Gorodek, the Province of Minsk), July 10, 1920.

Once again Moishe was on his way.

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Gorodek was close to the railway line. Military transports were moving in both directions all the time and Moishe waited on the little platform. At midday a freight train pulled in and Moishe showed his document to the train leader. The train was destined for Smorgoni but on reaching the junction of Molodelschna it was re-routed northwest towards Polotzk. Moishe consulted the train leader and decided to get off at Vileyka to avoid going too far out of his way. But they never reached Vileyka. When the Poles attacked the Lithuanian garrison near Vievis, the railway system broke down completely and all trains stopped along the line. No one could say when they would move again.

Moishe was too impatient to sit and wait with no food on a hot summer day so he decided to walk. Beyond Vileyka the country-side was infested with soldiers of the three armies - Russians, Poles and Lithuanians, all mixed up. There was no way through towards Vilno. The only route open was northwest in the direction of Kovno. He eventually reached the town of Gluboka but rather than stay there, he decided to push on as the opportunity arose, mainly in search of food. Peasants in their horse-drawn carts were moving along on the dirt-roads between villages, and each time he met a cart, Moishe asked for a lift. The drivers were only too pleased to oblige. In this way he reached the town of Komai and from there he got to Swetsiany, a much bigger town where there was a Jewish community and several synagogues. Moishe soon found shelter there with a friendly family. The paterfamilias was always on the lookout for a husband for his daughter who was now past her first youth so he treated Moishe as a possible candidate for a son-in-law. Moishe was too naive to tumble to the designs of the good man. But after a week when he was about to leave, Solomon took him aside: "Why must you go?" he asked. "There is fighting all over the country but here you have shelter and food. We will gladly look after you. You know I have a daughter of marriageable age. Rivka is lovely girl and well domesticated. Why not stay and join the family?"

Moishe was taken by surprise. It never even occurred to him that there was an ulterior motive behind their hospitality.

"Well," he said to Solomon, "that is kind of you. But what kind of a son-in-law would I be? I am disabled. I have nothing to offer and I am a complete stranger to you. You hardly know me."

Solomon’s answer was quick and to the point: "All Jews are brothers. A Jew trusts a Jew. My daughter is no longer young and one has to take the risk. Think it over."

Moishe decided to leave the house as soon as possible. But where could he go? The only way open was to Kovno and so to Kovno he went.

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The American Joint Distribution Commission, known among Jews as *Joint*, is a charitable agency concerned with relief for Jewish people the world over. When the plight of the East European Jews became known in the U.S.A., Joint was quick to respond. By the

time Moishe reached Kovno, Mr. S. B. Kaufman, the representative of Joint was already there organizing relief for the starving Jewish community.

Moishe was advised to go to Joint headquarters and it happened that he met Mr. Kaufman in person. Kaufman was an affable American, sympathetic and eager to help. The two men became friendly at once. For Moishe it meant a complete change of clothing, sleeping arrangements and food. He discarded every military garment and became a civilian again. His crippled arm was the only remnant of his military past. Mr. Kaufman was glad to make use of his services and he became an unpaid Joint official. He was given many tasks: meeting people, answering requests, unpacking cases of food, sorting clothing.

Meanwhile the political situation grew even more complex. The Poles regretted the loss of Vilno and started a military campaign to regain it. Under general Zeligowski they set up the Central Lithuanian Government controlled by Warsaw in opposition to the Lithuanian government with its seat in Kovno. Vilno fell to the Poles early in October. The position of the Jews in the city became desperate as the Poles vented their bottled-up hatred against them. A flood of assaults was let loose upon a defenceless population. Only a small number managed to escape to the Lithuanian side. News of the deplorable conditions in this great Jewish centre soon reached Mr. Kaufman. He decided to go to Vilno himself, in spite of the fact that there was continual fighting between the two opposing armies. Moishe, as a native of Vilno, offered to join him. Since there was no other means of transport they set out in Mr. Kaufman's old Ford. It was no ordinary undertaking, though the distance was barely a hundred Russian versts. Roads were unpaved and rain turned them into rivers of mud. Bridges were broken down as a result of hostilities. The fighting between the two armies kept shifting from place to place. It was mainly due to Kaufman's typical American optimism that they set out on the journey against the advice of those who knew the hazards involved.

There were three of them in the car: Mr. Kaufman at the wheel, Moishe and E. J. Harrison, the former British vice-consul who was acting as the correspondent for a London newspaper. Moishe served as guide and interpreter. Instead of the direct route via Vilkomir they had to make detours to avoid the front. The journey took them via Preny and Alita passing the last Lithuanian outpost at Orony. Fortunately, the Lithuanians respected Mr. Kaufman's American passport and E. J. Harrison's International Press documents and let them pass. The Poles were not so amenable. They searched, questioned, investigated and kept them waiting for several days. The situation looked hopeless and every day the investigation started all over again. Moishe was the main problem. He had no proper documents and no convincing reason for crossing the line. Then unexpectedly a young officer turned up. He asked Moishe his name:

"Litvak."

"Do you have family in Vilno?"

"Yes, a brother."

"What is his name?"

"David."

"Is he single or married?"

"Married."

"Children?"

"When I left home, they had one boy."

"I happen to know your brother," the officer said. "I will speak to the Commandant for you."

The young officer's name was Bogdan Romanowski. This was the second time David's association with P.P.S. proved to be a godsend to his brother in time of need.

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They were finally sent on their way and arrived in Vilno late at night. The city seemed deserted. There were no civilians in the streets. The only footfalls on the cobblestones were those of the Polish militia. Windows were curtained, doors were barred, gates were barricaded. Only an occasional glimmer of light from a window indicated that there were people indoors. Moishe suggested that they make for his brother's house in the centre of the city.

They passed the railway station, through the narrow gate of Ostra Brama, down the main thoroughfare of Zawalna as far as Jewry Street. There they turned left into a narrow twisting lane and were suddenly confronted by a shouting mob trying to break down a gate. A motor car was an unusual sight in those days and the crowd immediately surrounded the little car and people began pushing each other in order to peep inside. Moishe was able to speak to them, but only in Russian.

"Speak Polish!" someone shouted, "who are you?"

"We are guests, just arrived," said Moishe.

The leader of the mob, with a rifle over his shoulder, pushed the crowd aside and opened the door of the "Are you Jews?" he asked grimly.

"One of us is an American," said Moishe, "and the other is an Englishman." Moishe wisely did not explain the identity of the third passenger.

"Why don't you speak Polish?" was the next question.

"We will have to learn the language." said Moishe.

"Only Bolsheviks speak Russian."

"If we were Bolsheviks we would not have been allowed across the frontier." Moishe explained. That seemed to satisfy them so the man with the rifle said, "All right, then, you may proceed."

The crowd stepped aside and the car began to move. It had hardly covered a few yards when voices were raised within the crowd: "Why did you let them go? They are Jews all right. They are enemies! They are spies! After them!" They began to run after the car.

Moishe shouted to Kaufman at the wheel: "They are after us! Go!"

Kaufman stepped on the accelerator but not quickly enough. The street was dark, narrow and twisting. The first of their pursuers caught up with them and began to pommel the car with sticks. Kauffman had to stop to avoid running them over. As the crowd increased they began to rock the little car trying to overturn it. It was at this critical moment that the militia arrived.

"What's going on?" shouted the commandant. "Step aside!" he ordered.

"They are Jews in disguise! Bolsheviks and spies!" someone shouted. Followed by more

shouts: "Death to the Jews, our enemies! Down with the blood-suckers!"

It took some pushing and shoving before the commandant could get to the car. Meanwhile the militiamen surrounded the car and kept the mob at bay. As there was so much shouting that nothing could be heard, the commandant climbed onto the running board and ordered the driver to move along. While the militiamen were dealing with the mob, the commandant directed Kaufman to police headquarters. By the time they arrived there it was about three in the morning.

- 7 -

Georgovski Prospect, as it was known under the Russian regime, was the most beautiful avenue in the city. It was a wide boulevard lined with trees, and was at the centre of the government offices. The large buildings used to be occupied by the government bureaucrats, law court officials and other civil servants. Under the new regime the police headquarters was located there in a large, grey, three-story building. When the commandant brought in the three travellers he found the offices closed and only the guards on duty. After a few words with the chief warder the doors were unlocked and the three men were pushed into a large hall full of people.

Men were everywhere, leaning against the wall, on the floor and on the wide window-sills. Some were sitting, some lying, some stretched out upon a very large table; the only piece of furniture in the whole room. The air was thick with sweat and groans and the stench took one’s breath away. For Mr. Kaufman and Mr. Harrison it was a gruelling experience. To find themselves in such a place, where there was literally no room to stand, tired from the journey, without food, their nerves on edge, hardly recovered from their last experience with the threatening mob, was a trial they could barely endure. After looking around for a while they decided not to put up with it. "We are not going to be treated like pigs," said Mr. Kaufman, "I will demand that they phone the American legation in Warsaw at once!" And he began to pound on the door with his fists. After about ten minutes the warder finally appeared.

"What do you want?" he shouted at the top of his voice, "who dares make a row like this in the middle of the night?" He made straight for the American but Kaufman was not cowed. "What do you think you are doing," he said in English, "treating us like animals?"

The warder looked at him in astonishment hearing the unfamiliar language. Moishe came forward and explained: "This man is an American official," he told the warder, "his companion is the British vice-consul, you had better let them out."

"How can I?" said the warder. "It is not for me to make such a decision. I only obey orders."

At this point a little Jew spoke up. He spoke in Yiddish.

"Give him a fiver and you will be surprised."

Mr. Kaufman reached in his pocket, took out a five-dollar bill and slipped it into the warder’s hand. The man’s attitude immediately changed. Smiling he turned to Moishe: "Of course, one can see at once that these gentlemen are foreigners and not just ordinary people. One must treat them carefully." He bowed, opened the door wide and let them out. Moishe was left behind.

Kaufman and Harrison were taken to a separate room where there were two bunks and they were reasonably comfortable for what remained of the night. The next morning they were interviewed by a police officer who examined their documents and then released them with apologies that the whole incident was a misunderstanding. Mr. Kaufman asked about Moishe. The officer explained that his case was different. They would have to wait a day or two before he could be allowed out.

- 8 -

Unlike his companions, Moishe was not dismayed by his surroundings. His past experience had hardened him to discomfort. When his eyes had grown accustomed to the dim light, he started to look for a spot to lie on. Instinctively he made towards the large window where some rays of light came from the street below. It was a bay window reaching almost to the ceiling with a protruding platform on which several people were stretched for the night. The advantage of the window was that it let in some air. It was cooler there and the air was fresher. Moishe pushed himself in between two babies and with his hand under his head was soon fast asleep.

It was about six in the morning when Moishe was awakened, partly by the noise around him and partly by the two bodies on either side of him coming to life again. He sat up, rubbed his eyes, yawned most audibly and as usual, uttered his customary exclamation: "oi paskudnie!" The phrase, common among Lithuanian Jews means something like: Oh, how filthy, bad, hopeless! But the way Moishe said it was peculiar to himself, expressing humour, despair, irony and courage all at the same time.

At that, two big brown eyes stared at him in utter astonishment. Moishe opened his mouth but could not speak. Neither could the other man. They looked at each other in bewilderment, the kind of look as if one is confronted with somebody from beyond the grave. It took quite a while before the other man was able to speak: "Is it you, Moishe, or am I dreaming?"

"David!" shouted Moishe, "who would have thought we would meet here?"

At last, after six long years, almost to the day, the two brothers were together again!

CHAPTER II

While the Russians, the Poles and the Lithuanians were squabbling over who was to possess Vilno, the population was dying of starvation. Food became so scarce that people began to eat grass and stinging-nettles. As a result of the fighting, the peasants who were the chief suppliers of victuals, were prevented from entering the town. But they themselves had little to sell after the requisitioning of the various armies. Since money had lost all its value, all trade depended upon barter. But after years of war, the population was so impoverished that it had nothing to barter with. As a result of political turmoil, the peasants hung on to what little they had. In order to survive, many people went to work on the farms in return for food.

When the situation became desperate, David decided to go to a village where he knew a farmer who might be willing to let him have some potatoes. Hayyim, who was now a youth of twelve, insisted on going with his father. The village was 25 kilometres distant and the only way to get there was on foot. They set out at in the morning with a dozen boxes of matches, Hannah's silk blouse, a few needles and some thread to offer in exchange for the potatoes.

It was dark when they left. By the end of September, the sun did not rise until well after five. The exit from town was uneventful. They soon crossed the bridge, passed a small forest and found themselves on the deserted highway surrounded by fields. Gradually the darkness faded and the first rays of the sun appeared on the horizon. Below the highway a ground mist was hanging in the air. The air was still and except for the barking of dogs in the distance, there was nothing to disturb the peace. Hayyim, hungry though he was, was enjoying the walk. Like most city boys, sudden exposure to the wonders of nature had an exhilarating and mystifying effect upon him. He could not remember ever seeing a sunrise before. The sun rose rapidly, a large red ball, and the mist lifted, revealing the crags and twists of the river. They walked in silence most of the time. At about 9 o'clock, they sat down by the wayside for a rest. David had a piece of bread which he divided into four parts; one piece each for breakfast and the rest for lunch. They rested for about a quarter of an hour when they heard the rumbling of a cart in the distance; it looked like a peasant cart on the way to town. It was only when it came nearer that they were able to discern that the men were in uniform. It would have been futile to hide in the open field so they decided to wait and trust their luck. It was a military police patrol.

"Who are you?" shouted the leader as he jumped from the cart.

"Father and son from Vilno," said David quietly.

"Where are you going?"

"To buy potatoes in a village."

"Show me your documents?"

"We don't have any."

"You're travelling without a special pass?"

To this David had no reply.

The leader turned to his companion: "Search them."

In Hayyim's pockets they found a few pebbles, a piece of string and a rusty pocket knife.

In David's pockets they found the whole arsenal: matchboxes, needles and a red silk blouse. They paid the most attention to the matchboxes.

"Why so many matches?"

"To buy potatoes," said David

"Who buys potatoes with matches?"

"Money has no value anymore, peasants refuse to take it."

"And why a woman's blouse?" he enquired, "is it to disguise yourself in order spy on the army?"

"I am an innocent civilian" said David.

"Why is the boy with you?"

"He is my son."

While the officer was interrogating David, his companion was opening the matchboxes in case there was some contraband in them. The last question decided the issue: "You are Jews, aren't you?" asked the leader. David nodded. "You will have to come back with us to Vilno."

They confiscated all they had found on David, pushed him and Hayyim into the cart and drove off. This was the week before the two brothers met.

- 2 -

With all the American prestige behind him, Mr. Kaufman called at the police headquarters. He wanted Moishe freed. There was some haggling. The official raised objections but twenty dollars and an American food parcel had its effect. Within two days Moishe was free. He promised that he would get his brother out and Mr. Kaufman was quite equal to the task. In fact he called the following day to intercede on David's behalf but was too late. Typhoid had broken out in that overcrowded room devoid of all hygiene. The authorities became frightened of an epidemic and sent everyone into quarantine. But quarantine meant the county jail usually reserved for criminals.

The transportation took place by night so as not to alarm the citizens. They were moved in lorries, twenty at a time. On arrival their heads were shorn, their clothes removed, they were showered and sent into the cells. For the first time in his life David became acquainted with a real prison. No distinction was made between the untried civilians and the incarcerated convicts. Once the prison administration had taken over, everyone was treated alike.

David and Hayyim were in a cell with twenty men. Most were convicts but the rest were innocent victims of adverse circumstances. The division between the two groups was a natural one. The convicts were at home there; they knew all the rules, the ropes, the tricks. They looked down upon the pale innocents who did not even know what they were in for. At first they would not speak to the newcomers but gradually the strained atmosphere eased, mainly because the newcomers were better off. They were allowed to communicate with their families and from time to time would receive food parcels. Cigarettes, the most desired commodity and the most difficult to obtain, made an appearance in the cell. When one of the newcomers first lighted a cigarette, an old convict looked across from his bunk with tears in his eyes and said plaintively: "What I wouldn't give just to have one puff, brother!"

The young Jew handed him a cigarette and there was complete silence in the cell. All eyes were turned towards the old man. He did not light up at once. First he smelled it, then he

fondled it, then he put it in his mouth, then took it out again, then repeated the process. This went on for quite a while until he finally decided to light it. The bliss on his face as he drew in the first puff made the inmates explode with laughter. The man felt so good that he turned to his benefactor with the greatest offer he could make: "You may have my portion of bread tomorrow!"

October 1920 was a beautiful month. As occasionally happens in Eastern Europe, late Autumn produced some magnificent weather. The summer heat was gone. The trees were turning. The sun was shining in a blue sky from morning to night. There was not a cloud in sight. At night the harvest moon was large and clear. In the cell there was one tiny window covered by iron bars. They took turns looking out to the barren prison yard. Beyond the prison walls there was a huge elm tree. Hayyim with his good young eyes would watch longingly as pigeons alighted on the very top of the tree and when they flew away again, tears would come to his eyes. "Oh how wonderful it is to be free," he said to his father.

After six weeks the quarantine was lifted and without an apology or explanation all the civilians were sent home. David and Hayyim were free again so they returned home but without potatoes.

- 3 -

Moishe's association with Mr. Kaufman saved the family from starvation. As an official of Joint he received a small salary. David also found employment with the agency and life for the Litvaks began to look more normal. The political situation was somewhat improved. Hostilities with the Russians ended with the Peace Treaty of Riga. The Lithuanian claim to Vilno remained unresolved and officially the two countries maintained a state of war although actual fighting had come to an end. As the Poles became masters, the Jewish population began to feel the pinch. Under the constitution they were citizens, the same as all other minorities, but in practice they were treated as pariahs. The revolutionary slogan: *For your and our freedom* proved to be a false promise.

Mickiewich in his prophetic vision of Poland's struggle for independence looked upon it as a messianic effort for freedom on behalf of the oppressed nations of the world. In those years of national humiliation he called upon the Polish "pilgrims" scattered all over Europe not to forget the lesson they had learned in exile:

> "Pilgrims . . . in foreign lands you have been deprived of the protection of the law so that when you return to your land you should say: the outsider shall have a share in the law together with me."

But those were the days of Poland's anguish. Now that the Poles were the victors after more than a hundred years of humiliation, things were different. Victors are motivated by different rules. Of all the minorities the Jews were the most vulnerable. Culturally, religiously and historically they were outsiders. Yet they had lived in the land for centuries. They had paid taxes and served in the army and fought for Polish freedom. They could have made an invaluable contribution to Poland's reconstruction but history does not work that way. It soon became obvious to the Jewish population that the change from Russian to

Polish domination brought no relief to them. They were still an unwanted and persecuted minority.

- 4 -

One afternoon as David was walking across the fish market he came face to face with Berel Katz. They had not seen each other since that memorable meeting of the Bund executive during the German occupation. Berel spoke first: "It's David Litvak, if I'm not mistaken."

"That's right. I remember you too - Berel Katz."

"Things have changed since we last met, haven't they?"

"Indeed they have."

"For the better, I trust?"

"Well, it has not worked out that way."

"Why not? Has the P.P.S. changed its philosophy? Does it not stand for universal justice and human rights? What happened to their promises?"

David hung his head in shame. He had to confess his mistake. His only defence was that neither was the ideology of the Bund an answer to the Jewish problem.

Berel flared up: "Have you a better idea?"

"I think I have," David said hesitantly "there is no room for Jews in Europe. We must emigrate."

"And where will you go, may I ask?"

"There are all sorts of possibilities. Some people think Palestine is our best choice."

"So you have become a Zionist have you? That's the counterpart to P.P.S. ideology?"

"What other choice can there be for Jews?"

"Universal revolution!" spat out Berel Katz and he walked away.

David came home in a distraught mood. He was obviously upset. "What happened, David?" asked Moishe, "you are not yourself tonight." David recounted his meeting with Berel and the conversation they had. "What is one to believe?" he asked, "where are we to go? What future is there for our children?"

Moishe had no answer but he was determined to seek one. The questions David raised occupied him for weeks. Though he was uneducated, he was intelligent and he began to realize that the Jewish problem could not be isolated from the wider human problem. He remembered his conversations with Nina. How sure he was then that all men's problems were ultimately religious in nature. Now he was not so sure. At the thought of Nina his heart beat faster. If only he could see her again! There was no postal service and even if there had been there was little he could offer in the way of encouragement. Poland was not a country to flee to for refuge. Poor dear Nina, he thought.

One day he met an old Baptist friend he had known before the war. It was an unexpected meeting and they caught up on events and recounted their adventures during the war years. Gottfried Schmoelke invited Moishe to come to his home the next Sunday and he gladly accepted the invitation.

The Schmoelke family lived by the river on same narrow street where Pan Komarski had his villa. Herr Schmoelke was a market gardener and his small estate adjoined that of the

Komarskis. They were not only neighbours but good friends although the Komarskis were Roman Catholics and the Schmoelkes German Baptists.

When Moishe arrived he found the family at dinner. The Komarskis were there too. He was introduced to Mrs. Kormarski and their daughter Isabella who had lost her husband in the war. Pan Komarski politely rose from the table and stretched out his hand. "Mr. Litvak, I am delighted to see you. It is strange that we should meet again. You will remember our first meeting under quite different circumstances?"

For a moment Moishe was taken by surprise. The casually dressed gentleman looked somewhat different from the man in battle-dress some eighteen months ago. But he soon recognized his good Samaritan. "What an unexpected pleasure!" Moishe exclaimed and when he had been seated Komarski affably remarked: "It is nice to have a man of the Old Covenant join us at the table." He used the phrase Old Covenant deliberately in order to avoid the term Jew which always carried a pejorative note to the Polish ear.

"But," interposed Herr Schmoelke, "brother Litvak is man of the New Covenant, he is a member of our community and was baptized some years ago."

Pan Komarski apologized: "I'm sorry, I ought to have known better. Pan Litvak told me himself that he was a believing Christian. It's just pure prejudice that makes it difficult for us to associate a Jewish face with Christian belief."

"There is nothing strange about a Jew being a Christian," observed Herr Schmoelke. "After all, Jesus was a Jew and so were his disciples."

"One never thinks of it that way," admitted Komarski. "We are accustomed to think of Jews as enemies of our faith."

"Unfortunately, the Jews think the same of Christians," said Moishe.

"Not Christians," corrected Herr Schmoelke, "but only pseudo-Christians. True Christians cannot hate anyone."

"In that case there are hardly any Christians in Poland," observed Moishe, "since all the priests and their followers are Jew-baiters."

Komarski's face darkened. He pushed his chair from the table, crossed his arms took a deep breath and said with great solemnity: "I must be honest with you. I am a disappointed man. I owe your brother David an apology for misleading him. I tried to persuade him that a regenerated Poland would be a land of freedom for all its sons without distinction. I believed that the Church and the Party were strong enough to eradicate the evil. I believed that people who had been in slavery would treat others with respect and as equals. But it is not working out that way either in the Church or in the Party. I am afraid we have not learned our lesson. I am ashamed of the Church and of our people. Pan Litvak, you must believe me; I say it with sorrow and with shame."

There was silence in the room and for a while no one spoke. It had grown dark and Frau Schmoelke rose to light the lamp. When light flooded the room Moishe asked the question which had been tormenting him: "What hope is there for us?"

"You mean for the Jews?" asked Isabella.

"No for us," said Moishe with emphasis. "I am one of them."

"So you are," said Herr Schmoelke, "your Christian faith must not separate you from your own people."

This remark surprised even Komarski. He could understand a Jew becoming a Christian, but remaining a Jew at the same time seemed strangely contradictory.

"How can you be both Jew and Christian?" he asked in a tone of honest curiosity.

Moishe was about to explain when Schmoelke intervened: "Of course he can be both. I am both a German and a Christian; you are a Pole and a Christian; he is a Jew and a Christian. It is only because of the novelty that we find it so difficult to understand."

"Precisely," said Moishe, "there is something else we have to take into account. My baptism did not change my love for my people and my sense of belonging to them. How could it? Therefore their problems are my problems. David is still my brother. It was he who first asked me the question about our people's future."

"What about Zionism?" asked Komarski. "Is there not a solution in your return to Palestine?"

"But what of the Arabs?" asked Moishe. "Palestine is such a little land, already inhabited. How can there be enough room for millions of Jews as well?"

"There must be a Christian solution," suggested Schmoelke. "I will ask our Pastor about it."

With this the party broke up and Moishe returned home.

- 5 -

The next Sunday Moishe was at the small Baptist chapel. There were few of the people he had known some ten years ago. In those days the service and the sermon were in Russian. Now they all spoke German. The pastor was young man trained in Germany. Most of the congregation were young people. They looked with suspicion upon the Jewish newcomer. The only person to speak to him was Schmoelke. "As promised I asked our Pastor about the Jewish problem," he announced cheerfully.

"What did he say?"

"He thinks there is no solution for the Jews, not even conversion will help them. He says they are meant to suffer. But I disagree with him."

Moishe stood aghast. The service closed with the hymn: *Liebster Herr Jesu* but Moishe only heard Herr Schmoelke's words: "no solution . . . no solution . . . they are meant to suffer . . . they are meant to suffer." As he reached the threshold of David's home he stopped, looked up to heaven and cried in a loud voice: "Why?"

- 6 -

At the Zionist Headquarters in Zavelna Street a speaker was addressing a meeting. The point he was making was the very foundation of political Zionism - there is no room for the Jewish people among the nations. The solution to the Jewish problem was not a matter of law. Legal equality would not alter the attitude of Christians towards Jews. There was only the radical and obvious solution: return to the Land of the Fathers, to Eretz Israel.

The hall was crammed with young Jewish men and women. After his speech the speaker invited questions. As usual the routine questions were asked: What about the Arabs? How could there be enough room in Palestine for all Jews? Who would finance mass-emigration? The speaker had a reasoned answer to all these questions. He had obviously heard them

before.

At one point Moishe raised his hand: "Mr. Speaker, I want to ask you a more general question: We have lived in this country for centuries. We have bled and struggled here. Some have fought for the freedom of Poland. What is the cause of anti-semitism? Why do they hate us?"

"Why indeed!" echoed some voices in the audience

The speaker did not answer at once. First he wiped his face, for it was hot in the hall. Then he took a sip of cold water. He unbuttoned his jacket and put his hands in his pockets. Finally, he was ready.

"Why? That's a good question. There are many causes. But it is mainly because we are not Christians. In other words, we refuse to assimilate. But from our point of view anti-semitism is not a curse but a blessing. It keeps us separate and together. We would have disappeared long ago except for the fact that the nations have rejected us. We are a stubborn people and the more they press us the more we refuse to give in. Don't you see, where cultural assimilation is at its highest as in Germany, Jewish consciousness is at its lowest. We must thank God that the goyyim hate us!"

At this there was laughter in the hall. A few clapped their hands but Moishe was not yet through. "I have one more question," he said hesitantly. "Why is it important for us to persevere as a people?"

Silence fell in the hall. All eyes were fixed on the speaker. He went red in the face, his eyes bulged as he sought for an answer. Finally he blurted out: "That's a stupid question!"

The chairman adjourned the meeting.

His question unanswered, Moishe returned home more puzzled than ever. He recounted to David all that had transpired. When he came to the point when he asked why Jews should survive, David listened carefully. When Moishe finished, David told him about Pan Komarski and his short association with the Polish Socialist Party and about Hayyim's experience at the soup kitchen. "Was Berel Katz right after all?" David wondered. "What is the solution to our problem? How can we cease to be what we already are? How can we forget the centuries of humiliation, the agonies and the sacrifices for being Jews?"

"Indeed we can't, humanly speaking," said Moishe. "There is too much pride in us to deny our Jewish values. But if those values are genuine then they must have universal application. Is there a real difference between being a real man and being a Jew? Perhaps we could do better for the world and ourselves if we were more human and less Jewish."

"Every nation is what it is," said David. "It is no good pretending. We are Jews, this is our destiny. Even if we tried to be something else they would not let us. As for me, I am convinced more than ever that Palestine is the only answer. Of course there is no room for all of us but at least let some of us live in freedom."

The next Saturday evening Moishe and David went to the Zionist meeting together. David paid close attention and after the meeting ended he made enquiries about his chances of emigrating. There was a long waiting list and unmarried men and women were given preference but he was encouraged to wait his turn. Waiting is a Jewish speciality so David joined the waiting multitude.

CHAPTER III

Mr. Kaufman had to go to Warsaw on behalf of the Joint. He took Moishe with him to run errands and to call on some of the local distribution stations. This was Moishe's first visit to the Polish capital. In comparison with St. Petersburg, he thought, this was only a provincial town. What impressed him was the large number of Jews. The sight of Hasidic Jews in their long caftans, little black caps and side locks was a curiosity he knew only from hearsay. Even the Yiddish they spoke was different and strange to the ear of a Lithuanian Jew. As he watched the Jews mill through the streets of the Jewish quarter the question he had raised at the Zionist meeting came to his mind: Why is it important for Jews to survive? What purpose does the Jewish people serve?

He walked along the streets engrossed in thought until he realized that the area looked different. There were few Jews; the majority of the passers-by were Gentiles. They looked different, they were differently dressed, even their walk was different. The streets were wider, the houses tidier, the shops larger. A different world.

"These are two worlds," said Moishe to himself, "and who can bring them together? By language, tradition, history, religion, custom and self-consciousness they have nothing in common except their common humanity. But is this not enough? Why can we not build upon this foundation a society which is different yet united? I suppose I am not educated enough to understand these things. Perhaps Mr. Kaufman could enlighten me."

In the evening he supped with Mr. Kaufman. They went to a small but pleasant restaurant not far from the Jewish ghetto. Mr. Kaufman occasionally liked non-kosher food. The place was dimly lit and there were few customers. A waitress in the usual white apron and cap presented the menu. While Moishe tried to explain to his companion the various dishes the waitress watched him with wide-open eyes and a strange expression on her face. When she left Mr. Kaufman remarked: "That girl seems to know you."

"How could she?" asked Moishe. "This is my first visit to Warsaw. Why do you say that?"

"Didn't you see the way she looked at you?"

"I didn't notice," answered Moishe.

The next time she appeared he had a good look at her though it was not easy in the dim light. She reminded him of Nina but that was impossible! It must be somebody like her he thought to himself. The waitress presented the dishes and left without a word.

After the meal when she returned, Mr. Kaufman said to Moishe: "Tell her that we enjoyed the meal." Moishe tried his best to express it in Polish. The waitress looked straight into his face and in an almost inaudible whisper she uttered: "Moishe!" Her voice electrified him. He jumped to his feet, stretched out his good arm and hugged her crying, "Nina! Nina!" while Mr. Kaufman looked on in amazement.

- 2 -

The situation in Minsk had gone from bad to worse. There was hunger, there was disease, there were daily arrests. Thanks to a Jewish friend in the militia, the rabbi was warned that his brother was next. As an intellectual of the Czarist regime he was suspected of counter-

revolutionary activities. Attention was drawn to him when he made application to the technical college offering his services as a teacher in physics and mathematics. It was discovered that he owned a small estate outside St. Petersburg so he was not only an intellectual but a landowner.

After a short consultation within the family it was decided that Nina and her father must leave. But where were they to go?

"Go west," said the rabbi, "no matter where. You can even claim Polish citizenship as you were born in Warsaw."

This fact the professor had completely overlooked. Having spent so many years in St. Petersburg he thought of himself as a Russian.

The time was propitious for emigration. The Poles and the Russians had just signed the peace treaty of Riga and Polish born citizens were allowed to leave the country. The professor decided on bold and open action. He and Nina went to the town-hall to request a permit to leave the country. There was as yet no coordination between the police and the passport authorities. Administration was chaotic and every official acted according to his whim. The professor had no documents to show that he was Polish-born. But this was no difficulty. Half a dozen diamonds and few gold coins paved the way and within a fortnight they were furnished with travel documents.

Thousands of Poles crossed the border and among them were Nina and her father. They made their way to Warsaw where they had some cousins. The professor, now an old and broken man spent his days remembering the past. In order to earn a living, Nina became a waitress.

- 3 -

This was the third time Moishe and Nina had met in unusual circumstances. Providence was obviously on their side since such unexpected encounters rarely happen in the ordinary course of life. Moishe, who had a childlike faith, looked upon their meeting in the restaurant as a visible sign of God's ordering. Mr. Kaufman, at first a silent observer of a human drama, gradually got to know the story behind these two people. He respected Moishe for his integrity and was deeply sorry for him because of his physical handicap. He watched the unfolding romance with much sympathy and wondered how to help the lovers.

There was nothing permanent in Moishe's employment. Relief for the Jewish communities was gradually diminishing and would soon stop altogether. But a solution came unexpectedly. Nina had a friend at Berlin University and through his efforts the university invited the old professor to become an occasional lecturer. This sign of recognition gave new life to the old man. Naturally, Nina would be going with him but this created a problem for Moishe. He was convinced that their destiny was to marry and after much hesitation he told Nina so. To his surprise and joy she did not demur. But what was he to do in Berlin? It was at this point that Kaufman stepped into the picture. There was a liaison between the American Agency and the *Jüdische Hilfskomite* of Berlin. Mr. Kaufman recommended Moishe to the committee in Berlin and suggested that he would be useful there as someone who was intimately familiar with conditions in the East. Meanwhile Moishe returned to his native town waiting for the outcome. Those two months of waiting were the hardest in his life but at

last a letter of appointment reached him and within another couple of months he had the necessary papers to travel to Germany.

- 4 -

Moishe arrived in Berlin on Sunday June 25th 1922 to find the city in turmoil. The previous day two young Germans had assassinated Walther Rathenau, the Minister for Foreign Affairs. He was condemned to death by the extreme nationalists for his Jewish origin and his republican views. In protest, thousands of working people from Berlin and the surrounding districts were walking through the streets waving red flags and shouting: "Away with the murderers!" It was not a good day to arrive. Nina was supposed to meet him at the station but she was not there. Outside the station all traffic had stopped, blocked by columns of people walking down the middle of the street. There was only one thing to do; sit down and wait.

Moishe must have waited a long time. Tired from the journey and confused by all the activity he dozed off. When he opened his eyes Nina was standing in front of him smiling. "I'm sorry I wasn't here in time," she said softly, "a tragedy has happened. The foreign minister was assassinated yesterday. The whole city is in an uproar and the crowds were so thick there was no way of getting through."

Moishe stood up quickly. She took his hand and he looked down at her. She looked so young, so frail, so beautiful, too precious to touch. He smiled.

"It's difficult to stay fresh on a long train journey," he said self-consciously.

"You couldn't have slept much with the train rattling through the night."

"No, as a matter of fact I hardly slept at all, I was too excited to sleep."

She looked at him warmly. "Let's go," she suggested. "After a good rest you will be your old self again."

They walked out of the station hand in hand to find the crowds gone and so they were able to hail a taxi.

- 5 -

Berlin in 1922 was an unhappy place full of war casualties, orphans and widows. People were downhearted, confused, and smarting after Germany's defeat. Most of the population was out of work. The economy had almost totally collapsed. The German Mark had become valueless. Men and women walked the streets listlessly. Many of them were refugees; Germans who had fled from the Eastern parts of Europe. They were shiftless, homeless and in search of food.

The old Berliners were resigned; the young ones were in revolt, in search of a scapegoat for Germany's calamity. Political agitators were on the street corners offering panaceas. Some preached communism, others called for the restoration of the monarchy. There were the federalists and the pacifists, the conservatives and the revolutionaries, all confusing the people with their different programmes. The main division was between the two extremes - right and left. The choice was between nationalism or total revolution. On street corners, in market places, in cafes, in homes, people were discussing Germany's plight and seeking solutions. As always in such cases, somebody had to bear the blame. International

conspiracy, Jewish finance, England's perfidy, French greed, it was all summed up in the Treaty of Versailles. But the real culprits were the Jews. They were blamed for inflation, the economic collapse, the idle industries. It was not so much the Jewish neighbour next door, but "international Jewry" whatever that might mean.

But Jews were not only blamed for the economic chaos, they were also held responsible for the political anarchy. The nationalists blamed them for the rise of communism in Germany. The communists in turn blamed them for the capitalist system. The rest blamed them just for being Jews.

It was not a pleasant experience to be a Jew in Germany at any time, but never more so than in post-war days. It was even more difficult for a foreign Jew from Eastern Europe. But Jews were not without friends, especially among the working classes whose pro-Jewishness was an expression of their revolt against German militarism. The Eastern European Jew was no enemy of the working man. He was as oppressed and exploited as was the German labourer. There was a sense of comradeship between poor Jews and poor Germans since their lot was similar. So Moishe found lodgings with a family in the working-class district of Berlin. He found them to be friendly, courteous and helpful.

- 6 -

Having been brought up to speak Yiddish, Moishe found no difficulty speaking German, except for grammar and pronunciation. Living with a German family was a great help in learning the language. Moishe's work took him to different parts of the city and he soon discovered the intricacies of that large and fascinating metropolis. He spent his free time with Nina, in the Tiergarten, on the Unter den Linden or at concerts. Nina was an accomplished musician and was giving piano lessons to augment their income. They were also discussing the subject of marriage.

Nina was only half Jewish and had been brought up in the Greek orthodox tradition. Moishe was a full Jew but estranged from rabbinic Judaism and baptized in the Baptist Church. Who should marry them?

Moishe's baptism was a particular problem. He felt himself a Jew, proud of his origin and employed by a Jewish charitable agency. But he had little sympathy for traditional Judaism and was equally averse to traditional Christianity. His experience with the German pastor at the Baptist chapel at home made him wary of the Baptists as well. But he was still in love with Jesus and the Sermon on the Mount. His Christianity was a private affair which he understood in terms of loyalty to the Master. He was no theologian and did not quite grasp the division between Jews and Christians regarding the Messiahship of Jesus but he was deeply convinced, more now than ever, that men neglect the teaching of the New Testament at their peril.

One day while walking through the streets of Berlin he was intrigued by a sign which read: *Berliner Judenmission*. He had heard of Christian missionaries to Jews but had never met one. It occurred to him that they could help him solve the problem regarding his marriage. The next time he passed the house he decided to call. He walked up the few steps and rang the bell. A German fräulein opened the door: "There are no meetings till Saturday," she said abruptly.

"I have not come to attend a meeting, replied Moishe. "I want to talk to someone privately."

"What about?" she asked.

Moishe blushed and did not answer. He waited.

"Come back in the afternoon when der Herr Pfarrer will be here."

Moishe apologized and left. It was not a hearty welcome, but he decided not to take offence. The fräulein was probably only a housemaid or some other domestic.

In the afternoon he was at the door again. The same fräulein opened the door. This time she was more friendly. "I am sorry, Herr Pfarrer is not here yet. But you can come in and wait. He is expected any time."

Moishe was taken to a room with one large window looking out to the back garden. The room was large and square with book shelves reaching to the ceiling. In the middle of the room was a large table covered with journals and newspapers. An enormous book sat on the end of the table. Moishe went over and opened the cover. He read the big red letters on the title page: Die Bibel oder die ganze Heilige Schrift das Alten und Neuen Testaments nach der deutschen Ubersetzung D. Martin Luthers.

He had not seen a German Bible before. The only bible he knew was in Russian. He sat down and opened the first page: *Das erste Buch Mose. Am anfang schuf Gott Himmel und Erde . . .*

It occurred to him that this would be a useful way to improve his German. He must get himself a German Bible. He had scarcely read half a page when the door opened and a short, round German entered. He was dressed in black and had gold rimmed spectacles,

"Guten Tag," said the gentleman affably. "I did not expect a visitor."

Moishe rose and returned the greeting. He apologized for intruding. They sat down and began to talk.

"So you are a Jewish Christian!" exclaimed the pastor. "How wonderful! To which church do you belong?"

"I belong to no church," said Moishe. "I was baptized in a Baptist chapel."

"To no church," exclaimed the pastor. "How is that possible?"

"I do not understand the way of the churches. I have had no opportunity to study other churches but I know something of the Russian Church. There they believe in war. The Roman Church teaches Jew baiting. None of them seem to know what Jesus taught in the Gospel.

The pastor sat up. "What did Jesus teach?" he asked, as if it was a school examination. Moishe went on: "He taught us to love our enemies, to pray for those who persecute us, to love God and man as the torah says. But the Gentiles only fight with each other, no matter whether they call themselves Christians or not."

The pastor's face reddened. "You are right," he admitted. "We have prostituted Christianity and made it into a laughing stock. But how can one be a Christian without belonging to a church? We need the encouragement of other believers."

Moishe replied by telling of the incident with the German Baptist who regarded the Jews as a God-forsaken people and proved it from the Bible. "This is no encouragement to me," he said with feeling.

"Ja, ja, I can see what you mean," acknowledged the pastor. "I hope you find Berlin a more friendly place. Why not come to our church next Sunday?"

- 7 -

The next Sunday morning, late in October, the sun was shining and the leaves falling from the trees, Moishe made his way to the Lutheran church. He did not know what to expect and felt doubtful about the adventure but he was determined to keep his word.

As he was crossing the small square the church bells began to ring and the strong, clear sound had an invigorating effect on Moishe's sagging courage. He quickened his pace and soon was in front of the rather gloomy building. The doors were wide open and a few elderly women were on the porch. They looked Moishe up and down with cool and indifferent stares. As he walked out of the sun and into the body of the church he felt trapped as if in a tomb. Only gradually, as his eyes became accustomed to the dimness of the church, was he able to distinguish the outlines of the building.

At the far end was a table covered with a white cloth and on each side were large candlesticks, with the candles emitting a yellowish, flickering gleam. Above the table there was huge crucifix. Jesus hung on the cross, his head bent to one side, with a crown of thorns. His side was pierced and a few red drops of blood trickled down his body. A loin cloth covered his thighs and his feet were held together with a single iron nail.

There were only a few people, mainly women, scattered in the pews. Moishe sat down in empty pew at the very back. The bells stopped ringing and the organ took over. At first there were only few hesitant notes as if to say, be ready, more is coming. Then other notes followed in quick succession, chasing each other. Then the notes began to rise in volume filling the Church, hitting the roof, rattling the windows, reverberating in all directions and gradually dying away while new waves of sound took over. Moishe had never heard anything like it before. Though untrained and with no musical knowledge, he felt himself caught up in the magnificent sound. He shut his eyes and began to enjoy each swell of the music. He felt himself transported into a world of magic consisting of air and light and a kind of sad joy which he could not explain. Suddenly the music stopped. There was a moment of silence and Moishe opened his eyes. In the distance he saw Herr Pfarrer dressed in a long black garment reaching to his ankles with a white frill around his neck, facing the congregation.

"In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost," he intoned in a sing-song voice. The congregation answered, "Amen." After some more prayers and responses the hymn was announced: *O Heiliger Geist kehr bei unst ein.* The organ started again but this time slow and lugubrious and the congregation droned seven long verses, off-key.

After some more prayers the Herr Pfarrer climbed into the pulpit. Again he began: "In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost . . . Beloved in the Lord, my text today is to be found in St. Matthews Gospel, chapter 22, verse 21: Render therefore unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things are God's."

As soon as Moishe heard the text he sat up. He saw himself again in that large, austere room in Russia before the military court. The Russian pope with a big book in his hand on the dais, the military tribunal, the two portraits on the wall, the Czar on one side and the Czarina on the other, both looking past him, the priest citing the text: Give unto Caesar what

is Caesar's and unto God what is God's . . .

The Herr Pfarrer spoke for a long time, perhaps half an hour, but Moishe hardly heard anything. Except for an occasional phrase, he could not concentrate. His mind was going back to that fateful day in his life which changed his destiny. He saw himself led by the guards to the prison cell, the journey to Siberia, the labour camp. He remembered that summer night on the bunk, his mobilization, his first night on the front, the hospital in St. Petersburg and the night when he first heard Nina's voice.

At the thought of Nina he woke from his reverie. He heard the Herr Pfarrer pronounce the blessing: The Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you . . .

Then the congregation droned out in dirge-like fashion:

Alle Menschen müssen sterben,
Alles Fleisch vergeht wie Hau . . .

After the service the pastor came up and spoke to Moishe. "How did you like the sermon?" Moishe blushed and he hesitated. The pastor's face clouded but Moishe quickly recovered. "I tried to listen," he said truthfully. "That text has bothered me for many years. I would like to know more about it. Perhaps one day you could explain it to me in private?"

"Certainly, with pleasure," said Pfarrer Biebermann, and they shook hands as Moishe left the church.

In the street he noticed two middle-aged women who had been in the congregation. As he passed them he overheard one say to the other: "There's the Jew that was in the church." The other replied, "There's no hiding from them, they are everywhere."

- 8 -

During the following week Moishe could not free himself from the sight of those two women. Wherever he went and whatever he did his mind constantly returned to the two middle-aged matrons: There's the Jew that was in the church . . . There's no hiding from them. They are everywhere . . .

As he passed people in the street he instinctively watched their faces: Are they Jews? Are they Germans? He began to feel self-conscious about his looks. Do they know that I am Jewish? he kept asking himself as he passed other pedestrians.

The next Sunday he stayed home, trying to keep out of sight. He did not want to be "everywhere". He went to see Nina later than usual so as not to meet too many Germans.

The following week he received a note from Pastor Biebermann. An invitation to come to his home for an evening meal. Moishe accepted the invitation with some reluctance.

Herr Pfarrer Biebermann lived close to the Jewish Mission. When Moishe arrived there on Saturday he was greeted by a typical blonde hausfrau. "Ach, Herr Litvak. How nice, please come in."

He was taken straight to the pastor's study. Pfarrer Biebermann was dressed in a house jacket and slippers and seated comfortably in a big chair, smoking his pipe. He greeted Moishe with real warmth and made him welcome. They began to talk and gradually the conversation veered to the church service two weeks ago. "You did not favour us on Sunday,"

said Herr Biebermann gently.

"No, I did not want to intrude."

"Intrude? What do you mean? The Church has open doors for everyone. No one is a stranger."

Reluctantly Moishe told him of his experience in the street after the service. The pastor looked visibly pained.

"I am sorry," said Herr Biebermann. "Those women are bigots. Nothing will cure them, not even The Lord himself. You must not take any notice of them. They are not the Church. The Church is greater and more big-hearted than they are. I will tell you something in confidence," he said with an air of secrecy, as if he had been guilty of a crime. "I am of Jewish origin myself."

Moishe stared at him in amazement. Only now did it occur to him that Pfarrer Biebermann was not the typical German type. He was short, heavy-set with curly hair graying at the temples, and had brown eyes with heavy eyebrows.

After long pause Moishe asked: "Do your parishioners know about it?"

"Ach, nein!" said the pastor. "They would not understand. To them I am just Pfarrer Biebermann an ordinary German like everyone else."

"But why would they not accept you as a Jew?" asked Moishe hesitantly.

The pastor did not answer for quite a while. Finally he said: "That's a long and complicated story. No nation likes strangers in their midst. Jews are different people and we have so emphasized our differences that we can hardly adjust anymore. I am trying to overcome my Jewishness and be a German among Germans. My family has lived in this country for centuries. It's time for us to assimilate and become part of it."

"But what if they will not have you?"

"What do you mean, if they will not have us? We were born here. So were our parents and grandparents and great grandparents. Where else would we go?"

At this point, Mrs. Biebermann appeared at the door to ask them to dinner. As the two men rose Pfarrer Biebermann whispered to Moishe: "Let's not talk about this subject at the table. My family would not understand."

CHAPTER IV

Nina and Moishe were married in a Registry office. It was a very quiet occasion. The professor, in frock coat and white tie, was the witness for the bride, a friend from the Jewish Committee was the witness for the groom. After the brief ceremony the four of them went to a restaurant for dinner after which the newly-weds went straight home to their flat in a large rooming house near the university. The professor, who was now teaching on a more permanent basis, was going to live with them. This came about when Moishe's work at the Agency came to an end. By good fortune there was a vacancy for a janitor at the rooming house. Moise's remuneration was the rent-free flat and a small salary. Between the three of them they made ends meet.

Living in Germany in the mid-twenties was like living on a volcano. The depression, the unemployment and the social unrest created great distress. Political programmes and parties multiplied like mushrooms. There was agitation everywhere particularly for young people who roamed aimlessly around the countryside in search of a cause. All sorts of movements sprang up, mainly of a para-military nature. The main rift in the nation was between the political left and right, with nothing in between. The Communist party made tremendous strides and there were constant clashes between the old guard of the monarchy and the leftists. As usual the Jews were caught in the middle. Both sides looked upon them as enemies. To the nationalists they were Bolsheviks, to the communists they were capitalists.

Then suddenly, a new party made its appearance: the National Socialists. Young men in uniform with the insignia of the swastika began to parade in the streets. A man named Adolf Hitler attracted public attention. On August 11th 1922 he addressed a large demonstration organized by the *Vereinigte Vaterländische Verbände* on the Königsplatz. *Der Völkischer Beobachter* became the organ of the new party spewing anti-Semitic propaganda with every issue. The Jewish situation in Germany became increasingly perilous. Anti-Jewish riots were started by university students. There were fights in the streets between Nazi youths and communist workers. Many Jews, especially the wealthy began to leave the country. But Pastor Biebermann thought nothing of it. He regarded the unrest as a passing phase, the aftermath of war. "Germany will soon settle down to orderly life, for we are a cultured people," he said to his wife, who looked apprehensive and frightened by the new developments.

One day Pastor Biebermann met Moishe on the staircase in the house where he was working. Biebermann had been calling on a parishioner. This unexpected meeting took both by surprise. Not knowing how to react to the encounter, Moishe invited the pastor to meet his wife and thus their friendship was renewed.

- 2 -

Pastor Biebermann looked tired and not so self-assured as usual. Moishe quickly noticed the change.

"Life is difficult these days," he said turning to Nina who was preparing a cup of coffee for their guest. Nina looked up at him with her big eyes, but said nothing. There was a moment of silence in the room. Then the pastor spoke. "That new party which calls itself

National Socialist and pretends to speak on behalf of the German people, is neither national nor is it socialist. They are introducing reign of terror. The man whose home I visited upstairs is ill in hospital after being assaulted by the strong men of that party."

Moishe knew the family well. Herr Brückner was a very friendly German who always shook hands with him when they met. He was sorry to hear it. "I did not realize there was something wrong with the Brückners," he observed.

"It only happened last night," said the Pastor. "They beat up an innocent man."

"Why did they do it?" asked Nina.

"He is a journalist, and wrote in defence of the Jews."

Nina and Moishe looked at each other and turned pale. It was at this moment that the door opened and the professor entered the room looking worn and frightened. Seeing a stranger he began to apologize. Pastor Biebermann quickly rose from his chair. "Herr Biebermann, this is my father, Professor Borman," said Nina.

The pastor clicked his heels, bowed and stretched out his hand. "I am very pleased to make your acquaintance. I have heard about you from your son-in-law. Forgive the intrusion, I'll be going in a moment."

"Not at all," said the professor. "It is I who is intruding. I did not know there was a guest."

Nina took his coat and pulled out a chair. The professor sat down heavily.

"What's the matter," asked Nina, searching her father's face.

"Troubles, troubles," sighed the old man. "Nothing but troubles. We will talk about it later."

"Father, said Nina, "Herr Biebermann is a clergyman and at home in Berlin. He may be just the right man to discuss your problem."

Professor Borman looked at the guest with a new curiosity. To his experienced eye the man before him was obviously Jewish. A Jewish clergyman, he puzzled, and not a rabbi, how odd . . .

After some moments of hesitation Professor Borman said in a voice not quite his own. "I have been fired by the rector of the university."

"Why?" asked Nina and Moishe simultaneously.

"Why? Because I am Jew, of course," said the professor.

"Father, you are a Christian," exclaimed Nina, "a member of the Greek-Orthodox Church."

"That makes no difference; what counts is my nose, and my nose is Jewish. The rector was most apologetic; he did not give a reason for my dismissal. He only explained that I was not on the permanent staff and that my term of service had come to an end."

"So why do you blame your Jewishness for your dismissal?" asked Biebermann.

"Why, because the students have been agitating for weeks to have me fired. I did not tell you about it because I thought it would pass," he said, turning to Moishe and Nina.

They both stood their eyes fixed upon the pastor.

Pastor Biebermann's face turned pale, his lips were contorted and his eyes tired. He sat for long while. Then he suddenly rose, bowed to Nina and left the room.

- 3 -

Professor Borman was permanently at home. He tried to write, but could not concentrate. Most of his time was spent reading the daily press and the more he read the more despondent he became. He sat brooding for hours. Nina tried to cheer him up but the old man would not be comforted. He spoke frequently about the past, about life at St. Petersburg, about the good old days in Czarist Russia, about Nina's mother and their married life. Nina realized that he did this to escape the realities of the present. His health began to fail, he became indifferent to food and lost weight rapidly. Nina called a physician. The doctor examined the patient, asked a few questions and prescribed some medicine. Privately, he explained to Nina that the problem was more mental than physical. What the patient needed was a happy and cheerful atmosphere.

Nina tried her utmost to surround her father with loving care but the old man remained listless and detached. He sat for hours looking vacantly into the distance. The only sign of life he gave was an occasional sigh. Moishe felt deeply for Nina and for his father-in-law and voiced the possibility of a return to Warsaw. But Professor Borman would not hear of it. "There is no where to go," he sighed. "The world has gone mad and is falling to pieces. I am best out of it."

One morning when the professor was sleeping longer than usual, Nina tiptoed into his room to see what was the matter with him. She found her father lying peacefully and motionless. When she put her hand to his forehead it was stone-cold. On the table by the bed there was an empty bottle and a note: Nina forgive me. It had to be. I have gone to Mother. Love. Father.

She sank down at his bedside and sobbed bitterly.

- 4 -

Pfarrer Biebermann was mistaken. Things did not improve. Germany did not settle down to normal life. On the contrary, things got worse. The anti-Jewish campaign grew in fury. Voices in the church were raised against pastors of Jewish origin. His own congregation, always small, was so diminished that hardly anyone was left. One day a letter arrived from an erstwhile parishioner: Please delete my name from your congregational list. I am not a believing Christian anymore, Christianity is a Jewish religion and is racially inconsistent with the spirit of new Germany. Heil Hitler!

Pfarrer Biebermann was stunned. He read the letter again and again, each time wondering if he was dreaming or awake. It seemed like a nightmare.

While he was still sunk in meditation his 12 year old son, Jürgen, came home from school and bounced into the room: "Heil Hitler!" he cried. "Look what I've got, Father," pointing to his arm. "I am now a member of the *Schülerbund* and Adolf Hitler is our Führer!" the boy shouted with glee. The father looked dismally upon his son who was sporting a swastika on his left arm.

That night Pastor Biebermann spoke to his wife: "Clara, we must leave the country. I do not want my children to be mixed up with the Hitler gang. We are Christians, our Führer is Jesus. Look what is happening to Jürgen. He is already being brainwashed . . ."

"Aber was!" cried Mrs. Biebermann. "We are Germans! This is our Fatherland. What do you mean leave the country? Where would we go? Of course we are Christians but we are German Christians, always Germans, whatever else we might be!"

Pastor Biebermann couldn't sleep that night. Clara's answer gave him no peace. The phrase was stuck in his mind, repeating in an endless loop . . . we are German Christians, always Germans, whatever else we might be . . .

- 5 -

Not long after Professor Borman's death, Moishe was called into the office of the building where he served as janitor. He was met by the administrator.

"I am sorry to inconvenience you Herr Litvak," said Herr Stübel, "but I am under pressure to give you notice. The proprietor needs your flat and wants to make other arrangements. I am sorry."

Moishe looked at the man in stunned silence. He could see that Herr Stübel was upset by the unpleasant task he had to perform.

"How soon must we go?" He finally asked after regaining his voice.

"As soon as you can, although you have a month to make other plans." Moishe bowed and walked out in silence.

To Nina the news was not unexpected. She had already heard grumbling from some of the tenants that they were being served by Ostjuden when there were so many Germans out of work. She had known for some time that they were going to have to leave and the time was now. The atmosphere was so tense with malice and uncertainty that to leave Germany would be a relief. So she took the news calmly and they decided to return to Poland.

- 6 -

On Monday, January 30th, 1933 at 5 o'clock in the afternoon, Hitler presided over his first cabinet meeting as Chancellor of the German Reich. This became the hour of destiny for millions of people. What followed affected millions more. But Hitler's first victims were the Jews. By a succession of laws beginning April 7th, 1933, the purge of Jews and those of Jewish descent was initiated. Journalists, actors, musicians, radio announcers, civil servants, and officers were summarily dismissed. Those who were active in politics found themselves in concentration camps. A few were murdered without trial or accusation. Soon the purge reached the Church. A new species of Christianity arose called Deutshe Christen.

German Christianity was understood to be Judenfrei. Jesus was declared an Aryan and the Gospel was adjusted to suit the ideology of the Nazi Party. Gradually the non-Aryan pastors were dismissed from their posts. Pfarrer Biebermann's former professor of theology at Tübingen wrote a tract, *Die Judenfrage*, in which he explained that a Christian of Jewish origin could not be a pastor or an elder in a German congregation. The Jewish Christian, he allowed, remains a Christian brother but in the political sense he is an alien and therefore cannot be a German brother.

Pastor Biebermann read the tract so many times that he almost knew it by heart. The more he read the deeper grew his confusion. He could hardly believe Gerhard Kittel, his teacher and friend, could write something so different from the man he thought him to be.

But there it was in black and white: "Assimilation is sin and trespass of God's stated will to the nations."

"But I, Ferdinand Biebermann, have been doing exactly this. I have identified myself completely in faith and culture with the German people," he said to himself. "Have I sinned by following the teaching of the Church? Did not the Apostle say that in Christ there is no difference between Jew and Greek? That we are all one."

The pastor spent restless nights in anguish struggling with the new reality. He was so preoccupied with his own problem that he failed to notice the change taking place in his family. For weeks his wife, Clara, had been avoiding him. When they spoke she looked away so their eyes did not meet. The children hardly spoke to him at all. They were solemn and withdrawn. Most of the time they were at school or party meetings. Even Clara was hardly at home. He was left brooding at his desk, staring vacantly out of the window mulling over Gerhard Kittel's tract.

- 7 -

The inevitable happened. Subconsciously the Pastor expected it although he would not admit it, even to himself. Before him lay the envelope clearly marked: Reichsbishof's Office. He stared at it for a long time before he could open it. With trembling hands he took the knife and split the envelope. Inside was a short note: Please attend the office next Thursday at 10 a.m. This was only prolonging the agony.

He picked up the phone and called Martin Niemöller. When Niemöller answered he said quickly: "I need to see you." There was no need to explain. Niemöller knew immediately what was wrong.

They met the next day. Niemöller said: "Don't resign. They will cajole you. They will threaten you, but do not give in. This is a life and death fight. The very existence of the Church is at stake. We must stand together for as long as we can."

Before Biebermann left, Niemöller gave him a copy of Hans Ehrenbeg's publication: *Seventy-two Theses on the Jewish-Christian Question*. He felt infinitely better after the visit with this great German fighter for the truth.

At home he studied Ehrenberg's theses carefully. The more he read the more deeply he felt that the cause for which they were fighting was greater than his own personal safety. He prayed for strength to persevere.

The next day, the postman delivered the theological journal *Theologishe Existenz heute* edited by Karl Barth. Six short paragraphs spelled out the fundamental issues at stake. One sentence struck Biebermann as of special importance and he underlined it in red: ". . . the German-Christians affirm the German nationhood, its history and its contemporary political situation as a second source of revelation, and thereby betray themselves to be believers in 'another God'." After reading it Pastor Biebemmann was ready to face the Nazi Bishop at his headquarters.

- 8 -

Biebermann knocked on the door of the Bishop's office as the clock struck 10 on the church tower across the street. He was received by a minor official and shown into large

room. The man at the desk did not rise.

"I am Pfarrer Biebermann, you asked me to come in."

"Ach, ja, Herr Biebermann," said the man at the desk, putting the emphasis on the *Herr*. "Yes, please sit down."

The two men faced each other across the desk. Neither spoke. Ludwig Müller, a former naval chaplain and later an army chaplain, had the air of a typical Prussian junker. Lean face, clean shaven, short hair, though sparse at the top, he sat bolt upright. Biebermann was sitting against the light so he could not clearly see the eyes of the man opposite him but he felt his persistent gaze and knew he was being measured. Suddenly, Bishop Müller's face broke into a smile, his eyes narrowed and in an almost friendly voice he addressed his visitor.

"There is as yet no law against non-Aryan pastors holding office in the Church. But you realize the change that has taken place. This is a new Germany. Neither Niemöller nor Barth will make a difference. The Führer's will is supreme. We have a Jewish problem which will be solved one way or another. I'm sure you understand. I thought I would speak to you personally to avoid unpleasantness. It would be wise for you to start looking around, perhaps you should emigrate . . ." Müller hesitated for a moment, then added, "Palestine or the U.S.A. would be safe places."

Still smiling, he rose from his chair and moved towards the door. Biebemann rose to his feet. On the opposite wall was a large portrait of Adolf Hitler. His stern eyes, his unsmiling face and his moustache made a sinister impression upon Biebermann. He felt a shiver creep up his spine. He roused himself and faced the door. At the door Müller stretched out his arm and pronounced the Nazi slogan: "Heil Hitler!" At that moment, Biebermann looked straight into the bishop's eyes and laughed in his face. It was his revenge but he would soon have to pay for it.

The next Sunday passed quietly. The church was as empty as ever. Neither Clara nor the children attended the service. There were only a few old women and a young man who obviously was uncomfortable because he fidgeted all the time. After the service Biebermann was alone. By the time he reached the main entrance everyone else had gone. He disrobed and made his way home but Clara and the children must have gone out and the house felt empty and neglected. The sense of foreboding he felt when he looked at Hitler's portrait returned. He found something to eat and went into his study where he sat in his chair brooding. Eventually, he fell into a deep and troubled sleep. He awoke with a start when there was a mighty crash at the front door. He opened his eyes to see two Gestapo men standing in front of him. "Get your hat and your coat and come with us," one of them ordered.

He wearily rose to his feet, rubbed his eyes and made an effort to move but his legs would not respond. This earned him a vicious blow to the head, he fell to the floor and he lost consciousness. When he came to, he was lying on a hard bunk in a cell at police headquarters.

The journey to Oranienburg concentration camp was routine. Biebermann was taken in a truck at night with group of other men, some Jews, some Gentiles. They were shorn, showered, inspected by a doctor and then interned in a dark hall lined with wooden bunks. They were given prison clothing each carrying a number on his back. Life in the camp was

dull, tense and cheerless and one by one they were taken away for interrogation, usually at a time when the others were at work. Some never returned, others came back but were silent and apprehensive. Biebermann's turn had not yet come.

CHAPTER V

Biebermann had lost count of the days but about two weeks later, he was called to the office. He prepared for the worst but to his surprise Clara was waiting for him. There was a flicker of sympathy in her eyes as she saw him coming, haggard, shorn and in prison rags. But it only lasted a moment. Her face set, her eyes hardened. She greeted her husband coldly and came right to the point. "I understand that there is way out from your present situation. Some of my friends are willing to exert their influence to get you out but there is a condition attached. You will have to leave the country. It would be better for me and for the children if you left. Perhaps when life becomes more settled you could return. Are you willing to go?"

Never had a man felt more lonely and broken. Here was his wife, the mother of his children, his companion for nearly twenty years, addressing him as a complete stranger. It took him a long time answer. Finally he said, "Yes, I will go." He abruptly turned to the guard and motioned to be taken back to the camp.

- 2 -

The plight of non-Aryan Christians soon came to the attention of concerned churchmen abroad. The Bishop of Chichester raised the issue at the Life and Work Committee, an ecumenical gathering at the Novi Sad Conference in 1933, but public opinion was not easily roused. The Germans did their best to smother sympathy and some church leaders in Germany were duped by Nazi assurances. Professor J. Witte of Berlin calmed fears abroad with an article which appeared in ecumenical journals: "The new religion is not a serious menace to the Church," he wrote reassuringly. "The new German State wants Christianity; of that there is no doubt . . . many of the deutshe Christen are dead earnest about their Christian faith."

Professor Witte was a sincere man and the irony was that he believed what he wrote. He failed to realize the real goal of the plotters against the Church.

While Professor Witte was telling Christians abroad about the new life that had come to Germany through the German Faith Movement, Prevost Grell was addressing the Synod of Brandenburg on behalf of the "German Christians". Dressed in full Nazi uniform and looking more like a Prussian junker than a Christian minister, he advised the assembly that what the country needed most was a new German faith in a German god. He concluded his rousing speech with the Nazi salute: Heil Hitler!

A crucial issue for the Church was the presence of Jews in the ministry and in the congregations. The disruption within the Church turned on the position of non-Aryan Christians. The doctrine of a German faith in a German god allowed no room for men and women of Jewish blood. The German Christians pressed for the Aryan clause and they were fully supported by the State. It was only the Confessional section of the Church that was opposed because it realized the implications of such a clause. On the question of the racial theory they knew there could be no compromise. The German Christians defined their position in no uncertain terms:

"By Christian baptism nothing is changed in the racial peculiarities of a Jew, nor in his national characteristics or his biological being. The German Evangelical Church has to preserve and support the religious life of fellow Germans. Christians of Jewish race have no room and no right in it."

As the pressure mounted, life within the Church for non-Aryans became impossible. At this stage the *Paulusbund* was formed which united non-Aryan Christians for mutual aid and comfort. But even that was forbidden except to those who could boast more than 50% of non-Jewish blood. Pastor Biebermann was a full-blooded Jew. For him there was only one solution, to flee the country. It was on this condition that he was freed from the concentration camp. He pinned his hope on the International Committee for German Refugees chaired by the Bishop of Chichester.

The Confessional Church had appointed Probst Robert Grüber of Berlin as the guardian of non-Aryan Christians. On leaving the camp, Biebermann went straight to Grüber's office. While he was there a letter from England was delivered carrying the news that he had prayed for. The English committee was offering hospitality to twenty non-Aryan pastors. Probst Grüber read the letter to him as tears streamed down his face.

- 3 -

The journey out of Germany was no pleasure trip. They travelled at night to avoid insult. Even so they were met with hostility from the train crew and the railway police. At the Dutch frontier they were detained for 24 hours after being interrogated and searched but finally they were permitted to cross. Some of them travelled with their families but Biebermann was alone. He was a decorated war veteran but he left the Vaterland with a joy that surprised him. His companions felt the same way because on leaving Germany they all started to sing Luther's famous fighting hymn:

Eine feste Burg ist unser Gott,
Eine gute Wehr und Waffen.

The journey through Holland was like a dream compared to the gloom of Germany. The quiet country-side, the friendly faces and the smiling children made it seem as if they had entered another world. When they arrived at the quayside they were met by representatives from the Dutch Church. How different they were from the stiff and stodgy dignitaries of the German Church! The pastors and their families were received with sympathy and concern and they were cheered and heartened to know they were still regarded as members of the human race.

The journey to Harwich was uneventful. The sea air, the friendly crew and smiling passengers added to their growing exhilaration as they neared the British Isles. When they arrived, disembarkation was quick and easv. Officials were polite and understanding and representatives from the Inter-Aid Committee were there to welcome the new-comers. Language was a problem, but most of the pastors knew a few English words and the rest they managed with hand gestures and smiles. Their greatest joy was to be in a land where Jude was not a pejorative.

- 4 -

While the pastors made their way to England, Nina and Moishe were travelling in the opposite direction, to Warsaw. They settled in Cracow, the ancient capital city of Poland. From a distance Poland seemed to be a haven of refuge far removed from German ideology and Nazi brutality.

Cracow housed an ancient university of international repute and was an important cultural centre. Nina hoped to utilize her musical talent and perhaps take a degree in music at the Academy. Her father had friends who promised to help, but Nina looked Jewish and bore a Jewish name and by the time the Litvaks arrived conditions had changed.

The couple who put them up were indigenous Poles, proud of their liberal tradition, and who regarded racial discrimination as most distasteful and contrary to the true spirit of Poland. They would not even admit to themselves that educated Poles could become guilty of such barbarism. To the Michalskis the origin of their guests posed no problem. The old professor read the daily press and knew about the growing agitation against Jews but he put it down to a small coterie of troublemakers. True Poles would never stoop to such baseness. It ran dead against the spirit of traditional Polish hospitality. It was with these ideas fixed in his mind that the old professor made his way to the Academy of music to appeal on Nina's behalf.

- 5 -

The Dean of the Academy was a well-known musician both at home and abroad. Professor Michalski and Bogdan Jurkiewicz had been friends for years and had frequently stood together in the battle for academic freedom. To ask a personal favour posed no difficulty for either of them. This time it was Michalski's turn to make a request. "I want you to admit a talented young woman to the Academy," he said. "She is my guest and a recent new-comer to Cracow."

"Of course," replied Professor Jurkiewicz with a smile, "there should be no problem. What's her name?"

"Nina Litvak," answered Michalski.

The smile left Jurkiawicz's face.

"That sounds like a Jewish name. Is she Jewish?"

"What difference would that make?" asked Michalski, "it's talent that counts."

"Not any more, my friend. Nothing infuriates our students more than Jewish talent. They complain that Jews receive special treatment and are pushed ahead of others."

"But this would not prevent you from giving her a chance, would it?"

"Unfortunately, yes. I am tired of the constant battles here and at the university. We have tried to protect Jews but we have given up. They are hounded and we are called traitors of Polish culture. It would be sheer folly to add another Jew. I'm sorry, Jan. It cannot be done. Not at this time."

Jan Michalski left the Dean's office distraught. He could not believe that it had come to this at a Polish academic institution. What would he say to Nina? He remembered the great kindness her father had shown him when he was a student at St. Petersburg and now he was failing his daughter.

- 6 -

When Professor Michalski returned home, Nina immediately noticed the change in him. She knew he had failed and the reason why but the professor avoided the subject for several days. Eventually Nina decided to broach the subject herself. One evening after supper she gently said to her host: "I know you were unable to find a place for me at the Academy." The old man blushed and fumbled for his handkerchief. "I apologize for keeping you in suspense but yes, the Dean refuses to admit you," he said.

To his relief, Nina took the news calmly. "Thank you for trying to help me," she responded. "I know these are difficult times, especially for us. You did your best and we are grateful. I just hope Moishe gets a job so we can move on."

The professor was relieved by Nina's reaction but he still was determined to help his guests. He spent several sleepless nights wondering what to do when he remembered an old Jewish friend, a leading merchant in the city. Soon after breakfast he phoned Pan Mandelbaum and told him about the Litvak's plight. Could he help?

Mandelbaum did not commit, but promised to keep them in mind. A couple of days later the merchant called and spoke to Moishe: "There is no future for Jews in this city," he explained, "but we must hang on for as long as we can. The Poles are hurting themselves as much as they are hurting us. A flood of anti-Semitic propaganda is pouring across the frontier from Germany and is poisoning the air."

"How long will it last?" asked Moishe.

"It looks as if we are nearing the ultimate crisis. By fastening attention upon the Jews the Germans are hiding their real intentions for Poland. Mark my words, in a couple of years at the most and Cracow will be in German hands again. It happened before. Do you know the proverb?"

"Which proverb?" asked Moishe puzzled.

This time Mandelbaum spoke in Polish: "A Pole becomes wise after suffering loss."

"You mean when it's already too late?"

"Exactly!"

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Pan Ignaz Mandelbaum decided to employ Moishe for one particular reason. He was determined to sell his business and move from Cracow to Warsaw. Warsaw was a large Jewish centre and seemed to offer greater protection. Selling the business was a delicate operation and he did not want to arouse suspicion and upset his customers. He needed a man he could trust and Moishe seemed ideal. His job was to pack and invoice merchandise and run errands. Moishe was both reliable and willing and soon Mandelbaum treated him as trusted friend.

Secrecy was needed to maintain the value of the property, but no Jews were prepared to invest in a business at a time of upheaval. Finally a Polish buyer was found but Mandelbaum sold at a loss.

One day, Moishe had to call at the residence of Mandelbaum's lawyer. While waiting in his study he noticed a book on his desk: *A Jewish-Christian's Memories, Tears and Thought*s, by Gabriel Jehuda Ibn Ezra. Moishe was consumed with curiosity. The lawyer, Pan Josef

Melinski noticed Moishe's gaze fixed on the title: "I see you are interested in that book."

"Well, it is a rather unusual title," replied Moishe. "Who is the author?"

Melinski stood up, came close to Moishe and said quietly: "I am the author."

Moishe was stunned. How was it possible that this man, an advocate, counsellor, politician and Roman Catholic was a Jew? He sat in silence.

The lawyer was the first to speak: "My family originally came from Spain. I am descended from a long line of famous rabbis. I became a Christian when I was at university but it's hard to be a Christian Jew in a land like Poland. Few of my friends know my real origin and few would understand my motive. I published the book using my family name but I wanted Christians to know what it feels like to be a Jewish-Christian in an anti-semitic land. Hence the title."

Moishe left the lawyer's house with a copy of the book in his pocket. "What a strange world," he said to himself.

The Litvaks were ready to leave the city. Life in Cracow grew worse every day. Anti-semitism was evident everywhere. Shops put signs in their windows that read: CHRISTIAN FIRM, meaning the proprietor was not Jewish. A large sign over a brewery proclaimed in red letters: CHRISTIAN BEER. Moishe wondered how beer could be Christian and when he got home, he told Nina about it. "It must be especially strong!" she said.

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When Mandelbaum had completed the wind up of the business in Cracow he offered Moishe employment in Warsaw. So they packed their belongings, paid their bills and purchased their tickets. They were ready to leave but one task remained. They wanted to call on the Michalskis to thank them and say goodbye. The day before the journey, they made their way to the Michalskis' flat. To enter the building one had to ring the janitor's bell. A new man appeared at the door, looked them up and down and gruffly asked what they wanted.

"We want to call on Professor Michalski," said Nina.

"No hawkers allowed in this building," said the janitor.

"We're not hawkers, we're friends of the professor."

"The professor does not associate with Jews," answered the janitor and he slammed the door in their faces.

"Exactly as in Berlin," Nina remarked bitterly.

They had to leave without saying goodbye but they wrote from Warsaw to explain why.

- 9 -

The journey to Warsaw was uneventful. After enduring Berlin and Cracow they were looking forward to the freedom and more relaxed air of the Polish capital. They remembered the life they had experienced there before going to Germany.

They were met at the Central Station by Nina's cousin, Rebecca Grossman. She lived across the River Vistula in Praga, a suburb of Warsaw with her husband, Zygmunt. They were quite prosperous and were trying hard to identify with Polish culture. They read Polish literature, visited Polish theatres, enjoyed Polish art and spoke only Polish at home.

The cousins embraced after years of separation. Rebecca apologized for her husband's absence and Nina introduced Moishe. Rebecca hailed a doroshka and they all climbed in. It was a beautiful Saturday morning in early autumn. The sunshine was mellow, the air soft and clear and not a cloud in the sky. It was one of those typical autumn days so peculiar to Poland.

"There is nothing like autumn in Warsaw," remarked Rebecca contentedly looking up at the blue sky. Nina smiled with obvious pleasure as the doroshka began to sway from side to side, gently rocking the passengers. Moishe was absorbed watching the passersby. Only those who have experienced a drive in a doroshka will know the exhilaration felt by the passengers responding to the rhythmic beat of the horses' hoofs and the clatter of the wheels.

They left Nowy Swiat and turned onto the wide expanse of Krakowskie Przedmiescie. On one side was the monument to Copernicus, seated with a globe in his lap. On the other side, a little further on, the large figure of Jesus bearing the cross, in front of the parish church. A few hundred yards on they could see the large iron gates of the university campus. They had hardly passed the monument when a crowd of young men, wearing white caps with red stripes, rushed from the church entrance and ran across the road halting the traffic. They waved sticks in the air and shouted at the tops of their lungs: "Beat the Jews!"

In front of the iron gates were fifty or so young men ready to parry the attack. For a short while they stood their ground, but as the attackers bore in upon them they broke ranks and began to retreat inside the gates. Then they were separated and attacked in small groups, beaten with sticks and pelted with stones. From the raised seats of the doroshka the battle could be seen in every detail. The women closed their eyes and bit their lips in anguish but Moishe watched attentively from his perch admiring the courage of the Jewish students who tried to mount a spirited defence though hopelessly outnumbered. But he also noticed the attitude of the police outside the gates, looking on with complete indifference while citizens were being beaten up. A bad omen, he thought, exactly like Germany.

It took a good half hour before traffic could move again. They drove on past the university and the Bristol Hotel, and turned down the hill towards the river. The Vistula flowed towards the sea bathed in sunlight, as majestic as ever. As they crossed the bridge, Nina looked at Moishe and smiled reassuringly. His brown eyes lit up and his troubled brow began to ease.

The following day was equally beautiful. The Grossmans lived in one of the new houses on the east side of the river. It was a quiet neighbourhood and there was a delightful view from the breakfast room overlooking the Vistula. Since it was Sunday, breakfast was a leisurely meal and the conversation naturally turned to the incident on the previous day. Zygmunt Grossman did most of the talking. He was a well-informed and highly intelligent man.

"I just read the editorial in the *Nash Przeglad* on yesterday's events at the university," he said to Moishe.

"What paper is that?"

"The progressive liberal paper for those Jews who stand for cultural assimilation and seek accommodation with the Poles."

"What did it say?" asked Rebecca.

"It sees the most significant aspect of the incident in the behaviour of the police."

"We watched them standing idly by while hooligans were beating up innocent men," remarked Nina.

"Exactly," said Zygmunt. "They refused to interfere under the pretext of extra-territorial rights enjoyed by the university."

"What hypocrisy," exclaimed Rebecca.

"Make no mistake my dear," said Zygmunt, "If the police had wanted to stop the fight, they would have phoned the rector of the university and got permission to enter. The fact that they did not is an ill omen. It means that we are in for trouble and Germany is behind it."

Nina and Moishe exchanged a knowing glance as they realized that Warsaw was no different. The disease had preceded them; it was the same story all over again.

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Zygmunt Grossman was a realist. His work, upbringing and origin, had trained him to look ahead. He had been watching the crisis grow since 1933 and he was convinced that the political situation was only going to get worse. He was determined to leave the country before the storm broke.

Grossman held an important position in the Polish export trade. He had many friends among the state bureaucrats but none of them seemed to be worried about Poland's future. They knew that Germany was busily building up the armed forces but thought the Polish forces were strong enough to resist. After all, Poland had allies, surely England and France would not allow Poland to fall. "Let them come," boasted a colonel, "we can handle both the Russians and the Germans. We will scatter them like chaff in the wind."

The internal unrest was another matter. The prevailing view was that anti-Semitic agitation was just a political game. The extreme nationalists wanted to embarrass the government but they wouldn't succeed. The Jews would have to cede some of their trading power but once the economy stabilized, things would settle down again. There was no cause for worry.

Grossman wasn't convinced. Although the press played down the mounting tensions between Germany and Poland, he could read between the lines. He also knew that the foreign press was presenting quite a different picture. He was at the point of decision.

One day, soon after the Litvaks' arrival, Zygmunt broached the subject to Moishe: "I have been preparing to leave the country, family and all."

"Oh no!" said Moishe, obviously surprised.

"There is no future here. Once Germany takes over, Poles will suffer but Jews will die. The old story is repeating itself; the vultures are in the air. Mark my words, both Germany and Russia are sharpening their claws getting ready to tear the country to pieces. It won't be long now."

Moishe listened in stunned silence as Zygmunt proposed that he and Nina remain in the house and look after the property. The Grossmans would go to Switzerland, ostensibly for a holiday, where they would await developments.

CHAPTER VI

The Grossmans spent the winter in Switzerland. In early summer Zygmunt returned to attend to some business matters but Rebecca and the children remained abroad. By that time Zygmunt had transferred his headquarters to Amsterdam and rented a house there. He stayed in Warsaw until July and then left again.

In central Europe the political situation went from bad to worse. Hitler had taken over Austria and Sudetenland and was now raving about Danzig and the Polish Corridor. Then the inevitable happened. On Thursday August 31 at 9 p.m. the Germans staged an "incident" at Gleiwitz near the Polish border. A dozen men dressed in Polish army uniforms attacked the radio station in a ploy to convince Germany and the world that the provocation was a result of Polish militancy. Within minutes tanks began to roll towards the Polish border. At a few minutes after five the following morning, Friday, September 1, 1939, German planes swooped out of the morning mist, dropping bombs and machine gunning the cities of Gdynia, Cracow and Katowice. The war had begun.

- 2 -

German planes appeared over Warsaw from the very start. Outside the airport the driver of a doroshka was sitting on his perch fast asleep. As a bomb came crashing down he awoke, rubbed his eyes and exclaimed, "what was that?" A man passing by reassured him, "it’s only the Germans." The driver settled himself for another snooze. At first, Poles took the bombing light-heartedly. A British journalist reporting from the Polish capital wrote: "Warsaw is calm, determined, full of courage and in high spirits."

England and France declared war on Germany and large crowds gathered outside the embassies to cheer. The journalist found himself carried shoulder-high by young men shouting, "Long live England! Long live King George!" But the raids persisted: first the airfields, then the bridges, then the railway stations. On September 4th, government institutions were evacuated to Lublin. On September 5th the Eastern Railway Station was attacked while thousands of refugees were waiting for transportation. By September 6th 70% of the Polish airforce had been lost in defence of the capital. Soon the first German tanks appeared at the outskirts of the city. The main assault by the 4th Panzer Division began the following day. By that time, bombing of the city had become routine. On September 10, Warsaw withstood 17 air attacks. The next day German artillery began to bombard the centre of the city from three directions. Warsaw was in ruins, the granaries in the suburbs were set on fire and men and women were dying in the streets. The bombing continued with unabated fury. The main attacks centred on the Jewish quarters. Warsaw was doomed. On the 15th, Hitler arrived in the suburb of Praga, on the eastern side of the river. He watched the fall of the capital from a church tower as the city was crushed by the third German army under the command of General von Küchler.

The city was given 12 hours to surrender but the Poles refused. As a result, much of what remained of the city went up in smoke. The electric works, the gas works, and everything else necessary for survival was levelled but still the Poles tried to hold on to sections of the capital. It was a futile sacrifice. On September 28th at 1 p.m. General Kutrzeba signed the

surrender of Warsaw but not before 12% of the city lay in ruins. 10,000 civilians had been killed and about 60,000 wounded. More than one hundred thousand men laid down their arms and were taken into captivity.

- 3 -

Praga, on the right side of the Vistula experienced its first air-raid early in the siege. Bombs fell on the industrial area but the villa where Moishe and Nina were staying was unharmed. The situation quickly grew worse, with bombs and shrapnel falling from all directions. Moishe knew it was time to retreat. In the dead of night, while there was a lull in the fighting, he and Nina slipped out of the house and made for the station two miles away. They were fortunate, there was a train waiting but it was crammed with refugees going east. They pushed themselves inside an already overcrowded carriage just in time.

The Russian-German plan to dismember Poland was hatched on August 23rd. The so-called *Secret Additional Protocol* contained a detailed description of the frontiers agreed upon by von Ribbontrop and Molotov. On the night of 16th-17th of September, Russia declared the Polish government non-existent and ordered its troops into Polish territory. Within a few days the Russian and German armies faced each other across the River Bug at Brest Litovsk. By that time Nina and Moishe were already in Vilno, now Russian occupied territory. Moishe had returned to his starting point although it had proved to be a circuitous journey.

All organized Polish resistance ended by October 9th. An independent Poland had been swallowed up again by its two rapacious neighbours.

Stalin and Hitler were too cunning and rapacious to co-operate for long. Bargaining over the stolen lands began early. Stalin demanded not only half of Poland but the three Baltic States as well. Hitler cast envious eyes towards Ukraine and all that went with it. The truce between them did not last long. On June 22nd, 1941 Germany invaded the eastern territories held by Russia and the Russo-German struggle began in earnest.

The moment Russia found herself at war with Germany, the exiled Polish government became her ally again but the Germans proved invincible and swept across eastern Poland and deep into Ukraine. Vilno fell early to the German war machine and the Jewish ordeal began.

- 4 -

Moishe and Nina arrived in Vilno while it was still in Russian hands. It was a different city now. Russian was again the official language. Nationalist Poles and bourgeois Jews were being rounded up and sent into exile. The underground communist minority surfaced and acted as the intermediary between the authorities and the indigenous population. Scores of old grievances were being settled but it was the communists who were doing the settling. The prisons were full of innocent men and women and people trembled at the very sight of a commissar.

After an absence of almost twenty years, Moishe felt like a stranger in his native town. No one was left in his family. Old friends had died or emigrated. He knew no one at the house where David had lived. Moishe and Nina needed a place to stay and Moishe wondered

if Pan Komarski was still alive. They went to Komarski's old residence and found him there, still in the same house but only a shadow of his former self. Still upright, but haggard, gray, with sunken eyes barely able to see. Now over eighty, he was living by himself since his wife had died some years before. Isabella, his only child, had been exiled to Russia and he had not heard from her for long time. His only contact with the world was Bogdan Romanowski who came to see him at odd times.

It took a while for Pan Komarski to recognize his friend but once he realized who Moishe was he was overcome with joy. He took to Nina at once, kissing her hand and stroking her face. Once he realized their need, he offered them lodging. There was plenty of room in the house for both of them and he could use the help. There was the garden to dig and wood to cut and a hundred other things to be done. In fact it was he, Komarski, who was the beneficiary. "What a godsend you are!" he exclaimed.

For the Litvaks it proved to be a wonderful refuge. A comfortable house, set in a big garden, hidden behind trees, close to the river and away from the harassment of the political commissars was more than they had dared hope for. They settled in happily and soon felt at home.

Herr Schmoelke had died some seven years before but Mrs. Schmoelke still lived with her widowed daughter at the adjoining property down the street. She called in on Komarski every day and was so pleased to see Moishe again. Like the old man she took to Nina at once. After Berlin, Cracow and Warsaw, it seemed like paradise with clean air, simple but wholesome food, mainly home-grown, and away from oppressive anti-Semitism. But it only lasted a short while.

Since the outbreak of hostilities between Russia and Germany a shadow had fallen over the occupied land. The population had become deeply divided. Germans looked for a Nazi victory, Lithuanians were undecided, Poles secretly hoped that both would destroy each other and Jews trembled at the prospect of Nazi rule.

It soon became evident, that the war was going badly for the Russians. Thousands of Jewish refugees were crowding into the city on their way east. Rumours soon reached the town that the Russians were preparing to evacuate. Moishe had to make a quick decision and he consulted his host. Pan Komarski enjoyed the presence of his guests and found them both useful in the house. Not realizing the danger, he was loath to part with them. Mrs. Schmoelke regarded the rumour that Jews were being persecuted as mere war propaganda. "Ach, was!" she exclaimed indignantly, "how could one even think of such a thing?" Her German pride was deeply hurt when Moishe broached the subject. The Litvaks were too comfortable and happy with Pan Komarski not to be persuaded.

- 5 -

The moment the Germans entered the city their attention was turned towards the large Jewish community. By a law promulgated on October 16th 1941, all Jews were required to live in the ghetto. No one could go outside its walls without a special permit. By the same law it became a capital crime for Poles to harbour or assist Jews. The process of liquidation began immediately. It has been estimated that of the 250,000 to 300,000 Lithuanian Jews,

about 190,000 perished. Jews who survived the German occupation were those who managed to disguise their origin or live in hiding.

It soon became apparent that not only were Moishe and Nina in mortal danger, but also Komarski himself. Mrs. Schmoelke felt deep remorse for her misguided advice. After a council of war it was decided that Nina would dye her hair, dress as a servant and live with the Schmoelkes. Moishe would keep out of sight as much as possible and spend his nights in a well-camouflaged cave underneath the house which had previously been used by Polish revolutionaries in the struggle against the Czarist regime.

Nina visited her husband frequently and they all had many meals together. In their isolated location they hardly ever saw a German, even from a distance. The new routine worked well and although they were aware of what was happening in the city, the Litvaks felt secure.

- 6 -

One night, after spending the evening at the Komarskis, Nina was saying goodbye. She was already at the door when, by some strange intuition, Moishe decided to see her out. He remained on the porch and watched her walk down the dark, deserted and silent street. She had walked about halfway when a big German soldier lurched out of the darkness and shone a torchlight on her face. Both she and Moishe froze in fright.

"Ach was!" said the soldier. "A Jewess. How nice!"

He was staggering, obviously drunk and he came close to Nina and put his hand underneath her blouse. Nina immediately pulled away and the German caught her hand, pulled her towards him and tried to kiss her. She struggled mightily to free herself and managed get away because of his unsteadiness. She started to run towards the Schmoelke's house and the soldier chased after her. At that point, Moishe rushed in to help but he was too late. He saw a flash and heard a bang and watched her fall. He looked round for the attacker but he had vanished as suddenly as he had appeared. Moishe lifted Nina up and carried her back to the house. She seemed to be bleeding slightly but was unconscious.

- 7 -

By the flickering light of a small candle Moishe could barely see the wound in Nina's back. He washed away the trickle of blood and applied a bandage. It didn't seem to be serious but, as the night wore on her occasional groans turned into a steady moan and her breathing became more laboured. Calling a physician was out of the question. A German doctor could not be trusted, by law he would have to report the case, and no Jewish doctor was available. All that Moishe could do was hope. He sat by the bed and held Nina's hand, praying to God for a miracle. As the hours wore on and the candle burned out, Moishe's desolation grew but despite his anxiety he drifted into a troubled, restless sleep.

He awoke with a start. Someone was standing in front of him and it took him a moment to realize it was Bogdan. Bogdan gently put his hand on Moishe's shoulder and said, "Moishe, I'm so sorry. She's gone." Moishe looked at the bed. Nina's hand hung lifeless, her face was ashen, her eyes half open. "No! No!" he cried out. "It can't be!" Overcome with

grief Moishe collapsed by the bedside, bitter tears coursing down his face.

- 8 -

Disposal of the body created a problem. Nina could only be buried on the premises so Bogdan chose a site under an old apple tree. To divert attention both men went into the garden carrying spades. Moishe pretended to be working in the garden while Bogdan dug the grave. In the dark of night they took Nina's body and gently laid her in the grave. Moishe could handle no more. He left Bogdan to complete the interment and as he heard the first shovel-full of earth fall, something broke within him. "They will pay for this," he said, under his breath and grinding his teeth.

Bogdan was equally shaken by Nina's death. Moishe was surprised to find him so deeply affected. He walked about aimlessly, refusing to eat, chain-smoking home-grown weed and muttering under his breath the traditional Polish curse: "Psia Krew!"

Moishe stayed in his hide-out for a whole week in complete seclusion. On Sunday evening he finally emerged, pale and shaken. He sat down at the table with Bogdan in silence, staring at nothing. Finally Bogdan broke the silence: "What do we do now?" he asked. Moishe looked at him with a vacant stare but said nothing. After a while he got up and returned to his hovel.

Three days later Moishe emerged again, even more haggard than before. "Bogdan," he said, "I have been rethinking my life in light of what happened. We can't allow the Germans to continue killing us in cold blood. I want to resist although I doubt it will make any difference."

"So you've given up your Christian principles about non-violence?" asked Bogdan with obvious bitterness.

Moishe did not answer immediately, then he said: "I now realize what Jesus meant when he said, 'don't throw pearls before swine'; there has to be a balance between justice and crime. Nina's life must be avenged. The torah says: an eye for an eye and a life for a life." To his surprise he said this without passion or pathos, as if it was the most natural thing in the world to say. It was his lack of emotion that convinced Bogdan. "There is much you can do and I can help you," he replied, as he lit a cigarette and left the house.

Two days later, Moishe found a note on the kitchen table: *Jan will call tonight. B*. Moishe spent the day wondering what it meant.

- 9 -

Bogdan Romanovski's activities were certainly not haphazard. Behind the facade of careless existence was a carefully laid plan. He was at the centre of a clandestine organization dedicated to the defeat of Nazism. In the underground, his real name was unknown; he was known simply as *Stary* - the boss.

The men and women of the underground were anything but an homogenous group. They came from all walks of life and included communists, socialists, Zionists and anarchists. They were Poles, Russians, Jews and Lithuanians, all united in a common purpose - the defeat of Hitler's Reich. Their activities were spread over the occupied territories but each

cell remained ignorant of the actions of any other. Bogdan was responsible for the Vilno region.

Pan Komarski was very frail and he went to bed early so Moishe usually was alone in the house in the evenings. There was a tap on the window and Moishe ignored it thinking he had imagined the sound. It came again and this time he went outside to investigate. At first he saw nothing but as his eyes grew accustomed to the darkness he noticed a slight movement near a bush. He walked towards it and a young man emerged. "I'm Jan. Are you ready to go?"

"Let me get my hat and coat," Moishe replied.

He was back out in a moment, feeling quite exhilarated; he had not been outside in the city for months. They did not speak, the young man walked ahead and Moishe followed at a distance. They crossed a few streets until they came to a large building surrounded by a high wooden fence. Half way down, Jan stopped, looked around and passed through the fence by pressing on some loose boards. Moishe followed. Jan waited for Moishe to catch up and then opened a door on the side of the building. The door led to a long corridor in the cellar. It was pitch black, the only guide being the walls on either side. They came to a halt and Jan tapped out a code on the wall. A hidden door opened revealing a dimly lit cave and a huddled figure guarding the entrance. "It's Jan," Moishe's guide said, and they passed on.

They walked some distance in the cave and all the time, the dampness was increasing with puddles of water on the floor. Moishe felt water seeping into his boots. Finally, Jan stopped and opened a trap door. He turned to Moishe and said, "This is the last leg. From here we are walking in the main sewer under Zavalna Street."

If the air was foul before, it was now nauseating, the puddles thick with slime. "Be very careful said Jan, you really don't want to fall."

They halted a third time and then climbed up another iron ladder and emerged in a cellar. It was a relief to leave the sewer. A flight of stairs led to a room with no windows or doors. The only entrance was from underneath the floor. Two men were sitting at a table - Bogdan and Berel Katz.

"Thank you Jan," said Bogdan, as Jan withdrew to a corner of the room.

The Boss introduced Moishe to Berel.

"You are Moishe Litvak?" asked Berel

"Yes, that is my name."

"Do you have a brother named David?"

"Yes, I do."

"It's a strange world. Some years ago I crossed swords with your brother on an ideological issue and now I'm working for the party I once rejected."

Moishe sat down and Berel came to the point. "The Jewish remnant in Vilno is in dire peril. Hundreds, if not thousands, are being liquidated daily by the Germans. We are completely cut off from the other communities. If we are to rise against our persecutors we must do it together. That requires planning and preparing for the day. We need somebody to act as a courier between Vilno and Warsaw. "The Boss," here he pointed to Bogdan, "thought you might be the man."

"I would like to do what I can," said Moishe, "but I look Jewish and the distance between

the two cities is considerable. How can it be done?"

Again Berel pointed to the Boss. "That's where he comes in. Your Jewish looks are no problem. We can disguise you and the Boss will provide documents and travel permits. If you accept you will have to prepare yourself and study your role. You will be a *Volksdeutscher* from Riga in the Baltic States named Hans Müller and invalided by the Russian army in the First World War. You will be blond, clean shaven; you will say things like: Donner Wetter! and Donner und Blitzen! And you will walk about like a free man, Verstanden?!" shouted Berel in the sound-proof room.

Moishe's head was in a whirl. He almost backed out of the venture but then he remembered Nina and his vow. He clenched his fists, clicked his heels and replied "Jawohl," with such gusto that Bogdan and Berel burst out laughing.

Moishe crept back into his hole at Pan Komarski's well after midnight. He was about to start a new chapter in the story of his life.

BOOK III

CHAPTER 1

Moishe spent the rest of the winter rehearsing his part. He went frequently to the Schmoelkes and insisted on speaking German. He listened carefully for colloquialisms and he tried to change the cadence of his voice from its habitual Russian and Yiddish lilt to German. Fortunately he was musical enough to hear the difference. His purpose was not to imitate the German as he heard it spoken in Berlin but to affect the accent of Germans in Eastern Europe. German settlers in Lithuania had acquired a peculiar accent of their own as a result of Polish and Russian influence. He decided against impersonating a Baltic German; he was going to be a German whose family had been settled in Vilno for generations. Hans Müller was a common name. Many Germans in this neighbourhood were market gardeners. He would use the Schmoelke family as a pattern: a Baptist, a gardener, a German settler, a war veteran, a Volksdeutscher.

Every day he rehearsed his phrases, spoke to himself and thought in German. He altered the pitch of his voice and even began to walk differently. The gait of Germans, he remembered, was different from that of Slavs or Jews.

Pan Komarski was failing visibly. He was now almost totally blind. He felt the cold bitterly and stayed in bed all the time. His face was drawn and pallid and he became as thin as a skeleton. Molshe spent the winter days near his bed because he needed constant attention.

The winter months dragged on uneventfully except for an occasional visit by Bogdan. The Boss came to see Pan Komarski but also to instruct and advise Moishe. Preparations were going well and by early Spring they would be ready for the next move.

January and February were bitter months. The frost was exceptionally hard. Winds howled down the chimney and the timbers of the house creaked with the heavy frost. But by March the sun was visibly gaining strength. Slowly the snow began to melt, each day the sun rose higher on the horizon and Spring was on the way.

One morning, at the end of March, Moishe crept into his host's room to see how he was, as he did every morning. At first glance it seemed normal. Komarski lay peacefully on his back with his mouth open and his hands folded. But when he drew nearer Moishe saw the glazed, immobile eyes. He touched his forehead - it was stone cold. Franciszek Jozef Komarski had gone to a better world.

Neither Moishe nor Bogdan could attend the funeral without drawing unwanted attention. Mrs. Schmoelke understood Moishe's absence but kept wondering why Bogdan was not there. Komarski had many friends, mainly old comrades from the P.P.S. He was also well-known in church circles so there was quite a gathering around the grave. Some of the mourners went back to Mrs. Schmoelke's for the traditional meal. Those were lean years and all she could offer was coarse brown bread with home-made jam and linden tea. The men spoke of the good old days, their experiences in the war under Pilsudski and the bravery of the deceased. The women chatted about food shortages, the long queues and domestic problems. No one wanted to talk about the political situation, although it was uppermost in

their minds - a traitor was possible in any gathering. Afterwards they gradually drifted back to their homes.

The next morning Mrs. Schmoelke called at the Komarski's house and found Bogdan there but Moishe had disappeared. Bogdan explained that Moishe had to leave for safety reasons but he had made arrangements for the deceased's nephew and his wife to occupy the house. Pan and Pani Kazimierz Wyszynski would be moving in the next day.

- 2 -

By the end of April 1942 Moishe was ready. He was blond, clean-shaven and short haired - a typical German. He wore a nondescript tunic and heavy army boots. In his breast pocket was the document which meant freedom:

Name: Hans Müller
Place of birth: Vilno
Date of birth: October 22, 1896
Address: Vilya Strasse, Vilno, Lithauen
Race: Aryan
Citizenship: Volksdeutscher

Affixed were a photograph and his finger-prints. In his trouser pockets he had some German currency, a train ticket and a travel permit. He was ready for the journey.

The days before his venture were full of tension. As the departure time drew nearer his self-assurance seemed to weaken progressively. It was only the thought of Nina that kept him determined to proceed at any cost. He decided to have one last look at her grave before he left. It was an unnecessary risk but he could not resist it.

- 3 -

By now he knew the route from his city hide-out to the outskirts by the river. He groped his way through the main sewer, the trap doors and the cellars. He knew the password to get past the last exit. Finally, he emerged from the secret wooden door into the open at the corner of Vilya Street. As usual there was no one in sight and Moishe made his way to the Schmoelke's garden from where there was easy access to the Komarski property. He wanted to avoid passing the house so as not to arouse suspicion. It was a clear, quiet night and there was still a glimmer of the fading moon. He walked cautiously along the soft flower beds, stepped over the fence and stopped in front of the old apple tree. It was in full bloom, covered in white like a canopy of snow. There was a small wooden cross a few yards from the tree and by the cross a jar filled with fresh lilac. Tears filled his eyes and he knelt by the cross and cried bitterly. He poured out all the sorrow of his life, of his people and all the fears and hopes of his heart there.

He stayed in that position for a long time but when he rose he felt renewed. A fierce resolve flooded his soul and he feared no more. He would keep his promise; Nina would be avenged. He walked out of the orchard to take one last look at the house where he and Nina had spent their happiest days. He would never see it again.

- 4 -

Trains in occupied territory were mainly reserved for the army but Volksdeutsche were allowed to travel by special permit. Poles had to show good reason for travel. Unless it served the war purpose or was in the interest of the economy they were denied the privilege. Jews could not travel at all. The travelling population consisted mainly of soldiers on their way home on leave. Many of them were war casualties. Trains were irregular and infrequent and priority was given to military transports. Hans Müller had to wait a long time at the Central Station before a train arrived. He sat in the patched-up waiting room eating a piece of sausage and a hunk of brown bread. Nothing indicated a privileged person more than bread and sausage. It meant that he was on full rations.

When the train arrived it was already crowded to overflowing. Hans pushed himself into the crowded carriage and squeezed into a place by the window. He seemed to be the only civilian in the carriage. Standing through the night was a real ordeal. As the hours wore on more and more soldiers sat on the floor. Military gendarmes appeared at the end of the corridor but with bodies lying all over the place they could not proceed. At the next stop they left the train.

Halfway through the night a soldier lying at Hans' feet woke up, rubbed his eyes and saw Hans standing. "Comrade, take my place," said the soldier. Hans hesitated. The soldier struggled to his feet and stood by him. "Please do, it will do me good to stand for a while."

Hans thanked him, "Danke schön," he said and sat down. It was anything but comfortable. He was wedged between two other soldiers who were snoring loudly, but weariness of body and the stale air overcame him and he fell asleep.

The train jerked and Hans Müller woke up. It was daylight and most of the men were up on their feet. He also rose. The soldier who had given him his seat on the floor was next to him. "Did you sleep well?" he asked in a friendly tone.

"Yes, thank you. It was good of you to give me your seat," said Hans. "Where are we?"

The soldier looked at his watch. "It's 6:30 now. We are supposed to arrive in Warsaw at 8:45, but in war time one never knows."

"No, indeed," replied Hans.

At this moment there was a tremendous bang which caused the train to shudder. It slowed down.

"Die verfluchte Russen," said the soldier. "Their planes are bombing the line."

"Donner und Blitzen!" said Hans as the train stopped.

- 5 -

There was a long delay. Soldiers jumped off the train to relieve themselves. Some sat on the sleepers by the edge of the embankment, others walked up and down to stretch their legs. Hans was tempted to walk out into the fresh air, but he decided to stay by the window. The friendly soldier came back from his walk. He opened his knapsack and produced bread and sausage. He broke off a hunk of each and offered them to Hans. "Here, comrade, have some."

Hans was happy to accept. They drank some bitter ersatz coffee from the same flask. The soldier wiped mouth on his sleeve, blew his nose and said for the sake of conversation:

"It looks like a nice day."

"Yes, indeed."

"Where are you going to?"

“Warschau."

"Ach so. Volksdeutscher?"

"Jawohl," replied Hans with obvious pride.

"I thought as much," said the soldier. "Polish swine do not travel on trains these days."

"No, indeed not," agreed Hans.

After a delay of about three hours the journey resumed and the train eventually arrived at Warsaw East after midday. There was a general stir and the men began to leave the train.

"Heil Hitler!" said Hans.

"Heil Hitler!" cried the soldier.

"Aufwiedersehen."

Hans Müller had arrived in Warsaw, the stricken capital of Poland.

- 6 -

In May 1942 Warsaw still retained something of her former grandeur in spite of the gaping holes and the heaps of rubble. Soon after the surrender of the city, work started on clearing the streets and patching up houses. But the danger was now from the East. Russian planes visited the city sporadically, dropping bombs upon military targets. As is always the case, many bombs fell on homes and streets, killing civilians.

German plunder began immediately after the take-over. They emptied the museums, stripped the art galleries, removed libraries, scientific equipment and machinery. They were determined to strike at Polish culture. Monuments were ordered to be broken down, universities and schools were closed. The historic buildings were taken over and the great and famous homes were requisitioned for German cultural use.

When Hans arrived in Warsaw, he found the railway station badly damaged, the great Poniatowski Bridge collapsed in the river, the castle in ruins and many dwellings reduced to rubble. Yet life went on in this sad and broken city.

Even the Jewish ghetto which covered a considerable part of the northeastern section of the city was showing signs of activity. Behind its high walls which enclosed it in a restricted area, half a million people were milling about in the streets. The reason for this, as Hans later discovered, was the incredible overcrowding. According to German reports there were 110,800 persons to the square kilometre in the ghetto compared to 38,000 in other parts of the city. It meant that there were fifteen people crammed into one dwelling containing two and a half rooms. The people inside the ghetto were prisoners. The exits were guarded by police day and night and leaving without a permit was a capital crime. The result of overcrowding and malnutrition was appalling. By the time Hans came to Warsaw one hundred thousand Jews had died of disease and hunger.

The most celebrated part of the city which contained two famous parks and long wide avenues with beautiful homes, was reserved for the exclusive use of the German invaders. The centre of the city and across the Vistula was occupied by Poles. But there too, hunger, disease and daily executions were decimating the population.

The city was tense with fear and suffering. The Poles were retaliating for their humiliation with daily of acts of sabotage; tearing down placards and blowing up ammunition dumps, military establishments and communication structures. The Germans responded by hanging and shooting men and women in open squares and behind trees. But it was the Jews who suffered most terribly. Gesia Street 24 became the most hated and feared address within the ghetto. Thousands of Jews were executed there behind the prison walls. At the same time while Poles and Jews were dying within the city, thousands of others were being transported for extermination to concentration camps. Others, especially the young, were sent to Germany as slave labourers. A new word entered the Polish language - *lapanka* - "snatching". Men and women were literally snatched from streets, restaurants and homes. They were crowded onto trucks and taken away, some to camps, some to be executed, some to be slave-labour. This was the city Hans Müller encountered at the beginning of May, 1942.

Volksdeutsche were Poles of German origin whom propaganda claimed as partners in the *Drang nach Osten* (Drive to the East). They were encouraged to take over Polish properties and businesses, to settle in annexed territories and to join the German forces. These men and women were offered special privileges and were being stuffed with German Kultur, which meant Nazi propaganda. There were special clubs and hostels to cater to Volksdeutsche. Hans Müller stayed in such a hostel run by the deutsche Kulturring at the southwest end of Siegesstrasse. This was the main thoroughfare renamed to commemorate the triumphal march before the Führer on Adolf Hitler Platz.

The following morning, Hans walked through the entrance between the thick coils of barbed wire separating the German quarter from the Poles. He bought a newspaper and went into a small coffee house for his breakfast. The official paper of the German propaganda bureau was full of directives from the office of the governor, SA Brigadeführer Dr. Ludwig Fischer. It carried information about recent executions of "bandits" who attempted sabotage; a notice from SS-Sturmfürer Dr. Ludwig Hahn, the head of the police; and the usual anti-Semitic vituperations.

Hans Müller put down the paper and stared through the window from which he had a splendid view of the pedestrians. He had sat there for about half an hour when a man tapped on the window. After five minutes the man returned and tapped again. Hans paid his bill and walked out. The man stayed about twenty yards in front of him and Hans followed at a leisurely pace. They walked through side streets, climbing over piles of rubble. The character of the city changed when they turned into a twisting narrow street with a church at one end and old, narrow houses adjoining each other in a long wall. After several more bends the high, ugly barricades of the ghetto came into view. Close to the ghetto was a very old building. The man he was following ducked into a hidden entrance and disappeared. Hans walked on, turned a corner, and found himself almost face to face with two militiamen guarding the gate to the ghetto with machine guns at the ready. Hans shouted "Heil Hitler!" and walked away in the opposite direction. He came to a public park, turned left again and found himself in the same street where he saw the man disappear. He walked up to the building, turned round to see if he was being followed, found the entranceway and walked through.

The building at the corner of Swietojerska and Walowa was one of the many factories where Jews laboured for their German masters. For this they earned the privilege of travel outside the ghetto. This was their means of survival, since food could only be obtained outside their prison walls on the blackmarket.

From a niche in the dark entrance, Hans heard a voice say, "Wisla." He stopped to see where the voice came from but it was too dark. He moved on a few steps and whispered into the void. He felt somebody take his hand and pull him in. They walked down a dark corridor into a cellar. A trap-door opened and Hans found himself in yet another dark passage at the end of which was a flight of stairs. By now he was used to moving about in pitch darkness using the walls on either side as a guide. They did not walk for long. Another trap-door, another flight of steps, a long corridor, what was obviously another cellar and they could hear voices coming from the outside. The man turned and said in Yiddish: "We are now in the ghetto."

The man continued to lead him through corridors, passages and flights of steps, until they came to an attic. It was early afternoon and the sun was shining through the window. Hans Müller's guide walked over to a table where two men were engrossed in conversation. "Here is your man," he said, pointing to Hans. Both men rose. The younger one stretched out his hand in greeting, "I am Zygmunt," he said, "we have been expecting you for some time. I am glad you arrived safely."

He introduced the other man, "This is Karol." Hans was astonished to see that he was in German uniform. They shook hands, studied each other for a moment and burst out laughing - Karol was the German soldier who had befriended him on the train. He was a German by birth, a native of Saxony who served as a driver in a battalion stationed in Warsaw. He was a committed communist and had managed to establish contact with the Polish underground. As a driver, he had almost unlimited mobility and so he was invaluable for smuggling in arms and for distributing subversive literature. He also acted as a courier between revolutionary groups.

Arms remained the greatest problem for the insurgents. The depots were well guarded and the disarming of individual Germans was widely practised but very risky. Fortunately the Nazis had enemies even in their own ranks. Arms surrendered by the Poles were stored in what the Germans called Beutelager - booty-stores. Some of the men in these stores were either secret communists or amenable to bribery. Smuggling of arms had become the most lucrative and risky enterprise of the war.

Obtaining arms for the ghetto was even more difficult. Without the co-operation of the Polish underground it would have been impossible. Karol's and Hans' visit to the ghetto was to supply and coordinate information on the state of arms in various regions. Another driver in the German army, was a Viennese who went by the name of Anton Schmid. He was the chief organizer of arms-smuggling for the two large Lithuanian ghettos - Vilno and Bialystok. Schmid was a friend of the Jews who rendered invaluable service in maintaining contact between the ghettos. It was part of Hans' task to arrange meetings between Anton and Karol.

Bringing Anton and Karol together was no ordinary undertaking. The danger of detection, the possibility of betrayal, the problem of timing so that both men would be free on the same

date, required much planning and patience. It took weeks to arrange such a meeting.

After receiving careful instructions from Zygmunt, Hans was left to exercise his own ingenuity. He decided on a meeting in the German Club. The two men arrived almost simultaneously. Hans was already at the table. They behaved as if they had known each other all their lives. They spoke loudly so that everyone could hear. Shared experiences from the front, made fun of Poles and Jews, and behaved as full-blooded Nazis should. After the mid-day meal they went to the part of the city reserved for Germans.

They agreed that Hans would remain in Warsaw while Anton conveyed the reasons for his stay to the leaders in Vilno and decide with them on a date for a concerted uprising. 1942 was a critical year and it was essential to do everything possible to embarrass and impede the German war effort. It was also hoped that this would also slow down the mass deportation of Jews to concentration camps.

Hans had arrived in Warsaw in the nick of time. Within a month Reichsführer-SS Himmler gave orders to remove the whole Jewish population from the ghetto. The large scale "resettlement" action began on July 22nd and continued uninterrupted until the beginning of October. Here is a report of an eye-witness:

> "People were dragged from streets, houses, cellars and attics with the swish of the whip and under the crack of shots. They were being loaded into cattle-trucks and sent into the unknown. Children were torn away from their parents, wives from their husbands. They were left in terrible conditions of over-crowding and without bread and water. The young and the old, the healthy and the sick, in wild disarray and complete chaos, were herded together for a journey without an address, and alas, without hope of return."

Hans was assigned the hazardous task of staying outside the ghetto as the contact man for smuggling of arms. Gradually he was admitted to the innermost circles of the conspiracy. He got to know some of the most important men in the underground although he never knew their real names or their whereabouts. But Hans came to know one man particularly well. Beneschek was the key figure in the plan of co-operation between the P.P.R. (Polska Partia Robotnicza) and the ghetto underground. He was a German from the Sudetenland and a fugitive from the Gestapo. Living under an assumed name and with false documents, he managed to become the director of the textile combine in Warsaw working for the army. With Beneschek’s help it was possible to establish a direct line of communication between the ghetto and the Polish underground. He employed a number of Jews in his works and provided members of the Jewish underground with "work-documents" (Arbeitskarten). But his main achievement was smuggling arms into the ghetto and smuggling Jews out to join the guerrilla fighters in the forests. He employed Hans as a clerk in the factory and Hans soon became his right hand man.

1942 began with a proliferation of resistance groups all over the country. As resistance grew so did German brutality. In mid-January the Poles blew up the large military stores on Jagiellonska Street. The Gestapo retaliated with increased arrests and executions. They adopted the practice of advertising the names of those executed in order to intimidate the

population. But they did not count on Polish tenacity. The greater the brutality the fiercer was Polish resistance.

Resistance in the ghetto also grew in ferocity. Jewish fighters made a daring attack on police headquarters and assassinated Jozef Szerynski, the head of the militia appointed by the Gestapo.

Later in the year the Poles set fire to the aeronautic works on Kamedulow Street and burned two hangars full of equipment. A concerted effort on the part of seven groups resulted in the destruction of all the railway junctions leading out of Warsaw and greatly affected the outcome of the battle of Stalingrad. Cinemas where troops were being entertained were set on fire and German clubs were bombed. The printing works of the German propaganda newspaper *Nowy Kurier Warszawski* was destroyed and so was the main restaurant *Mitropa*.

While this was going on, smaller groups were organizing terror raids on individual Germans, mainly by throwing acid in their faces. The Germans retaliated with renewed executions and heavy fines laid upon the city of Warsaw. The partisans attacked the bank on Traugutta Street and retrieved most of the money extracted from the Poles.

By the end of December the underground parties coordinated their efforts of assistance in the Jewish ghetto. The aim was to provide money, documents and medicine. The committee also smuggled out children. It was obvious that the struggle in the ghetto was coming to a head.

CHAPTER II

In mid-January 1943, the Germans showed their hand, The Judenrat within the ghetto was still trying to persuade Jews that their best policy was to submit to "evacuation" willingly. But by this time too many people knew the truth. The Jewish fighters were prepared to resist to the last by retaliating man for man.

Outside the ghetto the tension was mounting to breaking point. Polish partisans blew up the Labour Office in Mazowiecka Street. They now dared to engage in open street fighting. Collaborators, both Poles and Jews, were shot out of hand. The large SS stores on Nalewki Street were set on fire. More than twenty prisoners who were being transferred to another prison were liberated by Polish partisans in an open street attack. Beginning with Kurt Hoffmann, the head of the labour Office in Warsaw, a number of high German officials were assassinated. Guerrilla warfare grew in ferocity daily. Within the ghetto, Jewish fighters attacked and killed the German soldiers guarding the forced labour gangs. Thus the stage was set for the final struggle.

On April 19th at 6 a.m. the Germans mounted their Grossaktion - the liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto. This date marks the last chapter of the great tragedy of Polish Jewry. The final agony had begun.

- 2 -

Mordecai Anielowicz was the acknowledged leader of resistance within the ghetto. He was dedicated to the task of avenging his people and seemed absolutely fearless. Hans Müller got to know him well. They would meet at Beneschek’s workshop regularly for consultation and planning. Mordecai had a legally stamped work permit thanks to Benesehek’s good offices. In case of an emergency he could always prove his legitimate presence. But for safety he kept out of sight as much as possible, preferring to use the underground passages. By mutual agreement, Hans kept out of the ghetto altogether.

Two nights before Grossaktion, Hans appeared in Mordecai’s secret quarters. The moment Mordecai saw him he knew there was trouble.

"I must talk to you at once," said Hans, without even a word of greeting.

"What’s the matter?" enquired Mordecai.

"The Germans have decided to blow up the ghetto. We only found out about it this afternoon."

"Any idea when it will start?"

"In two days time."

"Is there any plan of action from the outside?" asked Mordecai.

"Yes, we are promised help as much as possible. Monter himself, (Colonel Anton Chrusciel) has given his word that our Polish comrades will do their utmost to intervene."

"That’s good news!" said Mordecai through clenched teeth. "Now that we have nothing to lose we will fight to the last man. At least let them know that we can hit back."

The news was not unexpected. There had been rumours about the liquidation of the ghetto some months before. Apparently Krüger, the SS commander-in-chief of the Warsaw district, had received a document from Himmler himself ordering the destruction of the

Jewish quarter. Ferdinand von Sammern-Frankenegg, his second-in-command, made a start in January but the action fell flat when it was met with organized resistance from the ghetto. But everyone knew that the Germans had the means and the will to accomplish the task. Mordecai thus took the news more calmly than Hans had expected.

He turned to Hans. "Stay here overnight and go back tomorrow. I must alert my men."

"I'm not leaving," said Hans in a matter-of-fact tone.

"What are you planning?" asked Mordecai in surprise.

"I've been waiting for this moment for a long time. This is my chance to settle some private accounts as well as to avenge our people. I want to stand with you and fight."

"How can you? You are disabled, with only one good arm and a left one at that."

"You will be surprised what I can do. I have my own weapon - a light machine gun."

"That's fine with me, " said Mordecai as he left the room. "We can't have too many fighters."

- 3 -

The next day brought almost unbearable suspense. The German intentions had to be communicated as widely as possible so that people would be prepared for the worst. So as not to arouse suspicion, the work gangs appeared at their usual places, ready to be taken out of the ghetto by the guards. But behind the apparent calm there was feverish activity. Later in the day, Karol transmitted via Beneschek the frightening news that an attack on the ghetto was imminent. By nightfall Mordecai had met all his lieutenants and discussed strategy. Tasks were apportioned and positions assigned. Hans was put under Zygmunt's command. As the owner of a machine-gun he was placed at a strategic point, on a roof close to one of the ghetto gates. He pressed himself close to a chimney, camouflaged his weapon and stretched himself flat. As the night wore on an unnatural stillness enveloped the ghetto. Only the occasional footfall of the guards outside the wall betrayed a sign of life. Hans looked up to the sky, it was clear and blue with a million twinkling stars in every direction.

"What a magnificent world," he sighed. "O God! We are as mad as dogs! How will it end?" The sky grew paler. Hans felt the chill of the early morning. He wrapped himself more tightly in his greatcoat and dozed off . . .

"Nina, dear! Stop banging, you will waken our neighbours." Nina turned towards him. She smiled at him, eyes sparkling. She stretched out her hand and he grasped it. It was cold and hard. Hans jerked awake; he was holding the handle of the gun.

Bang! Bang! Bang! came from the street below.

He sat up and then flattened himself down on the roof and peeked over the edge. German tanks were rolling up the street followed by armoured ears. The defenders were throwing bombs from roofs and windows. Soldiers were crouching in doorways and shooting up at the houses.

Bang! Bang! Bang! The sound of glass falling on the pavement, of bombs exploding, the bark of the guns and the shriek of human voices had a peculiar effect on Hans. He watched with strange fascination as if mesmerized. It all looked so unreal, so inhuman, so contrary to reason, that he thought he was still dreaming.

Suddenly, one of the tanks caught fire. It stalled. The hatch opened and several soldiers

ran for cover. Han gripped the handle of his gun and pulled the trigger. Soldiers fell on the pavement.

"That's for Nina, you dogs!" cried Hans.

The tanks began to withdraw and the firing died down. Hans looked over the edge of the roof. Twelve uniformed men were sprawled on the pavement.

There was another respite for the ghetto. All was quiet. But it was a weird quiet, heavy with suspense. Haggard men and women looked at each other like frightened animals, asking: "When will they be back?" They did not have long to wait. By 8 a.m. German tanks were storming the ghetto again, this time with SS Brigadeführer Jürgen Stroop himself in charge. He decided to destroy the ghetto block by block.

As the pressure mounted so the ferocity of the defenders grew. Their slogan was: a German for every Jew. When the Germans brought in aeroplanes and artillery to help subdue them, the desperation of the Jews reached the point of madness. Their aim was not to survive but to kill. From roofs, from windows, from basements, with fire, axes, sticks and spades, they met their enemies. The Polish partisans were trying to ease the pressure by attacking from the rear. But their strength was not equal to the task. In the end their assistance proved futile.

The bulk of the Polish population remained uncommitted. The sight of the burning ghetto had a peculiar effect upon them. Their latent anti-Semitism, an endemic trait of the Polish people, released a sense of elation. "Look! Look!" they shouted to each other, "how the Zydki (little Jews) burn!" Little did they realize that their turn was coming.

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The agony of the ghetto continued without abatement. To help the Jewish fighters, Polish partisans managed to penetrate the ghetto. They brought food and ammunition with them. But German ferocity only increased. They set fire to houses, flooded the sewers and shot women and children on sight.

Brigadeführer Stroop reported to Himmler on May 8th, 1943:

> "The subhuman bandits and terrorists are still holding out in their bunkers in which the burning heat is already unbearable. These misfits well realize that there is nothing left to them but to stay in hiding or else to appear on the surface in order to wound or kill our men of the SS, the police and the Wehrmacht . . . I am determined not to conclude the Grossaktion until the last Jew is exterminated."

It was not till May 16th that Stroop could report to Himmler the end of the ghetto:

> "Exterminated 180 Jews, bandits and subhumans. The once Jewish quarter of Warsaw is no more. The Grossaktion ended with the blowing up of the Warsaw Synagogue at 15:15 p.m."

With frightening precision in true German style Stroop added to his report:

> "The definite number of prisoners and exterminated Jews amounts inclusively to 56,065 . . ."

- 5 -

The Germans did not have it all their own way. Miraculously, a small number of Jews managed to escape. Hans Müller was among them. He fought furiously and almost without respite. Unkempt, dishevelled, unwashed, with occasional snatches of sleep and gulps of water when it was available - the Germans cut off the water supply early in the siege - he dragged himself and his gun from roof to roof and attic to attic.

Bullets whizzed round him like fiery darts, one bullet even passed right through the top of his cap, but he remained unharmed. He courted danger by taking up the most exposed positions and staying at his post to the very last moment. But he seemed to bear a charmed life and so did his gun. Occasionally it would become so overheated that there was danger of the ammunition exploding. His hands were sore, his fingers burned, his eyes shot with blood from the strain and lack of sleep but he would not give in. His fury was such that the Germans singled him out for special attention. They called for a plane to bomb the house. The bomb dropped accurately but it fell right through a hole in the roof and exploded in the cellar. But by some incredible miracle Hans was unhurt and even before the dust had settled he managed to crawl down a staircase and take up a position in another house.

By the beginning of May organized resistance was broken. On May 8th Hans shot his last bullet. There was no ammunition left. The underground passages were blocked, the sewers flooded and mountains of rubble filled the streets. The ghetto had been burning for almost three weeks. A huge pall of smoke hung over the city. The acrid smell of burned flesh filled the air. There seemed to be no escape and Hans was crouched in a corner waiting for the night. As darkness fell he crawled out of his hiding place and came face to face with Zygmunt.

"I've been looking for you. I have orders to abandon our positions and to take cover. We must escape to carry on the fight outside the ghetto."

"Whose orders?" asked Hans, in a tired voice full of resignation. He was too tired to move, let alone to fight. All he wanted was to lie down and sleep.

"These are the orders of the P.P.R. We are now under their command. Mordecai is dead, his bunker at Mila 18 was betrayed."

Zygmunt slung Moishe's machine gun round his neck and took a revolver out of his pocket.

"Follow me," he said to Hans.

They crawled on hands and knees through rubble, mud, soot and dirt. Hans just wanted to lie down and never have to rise again but each time he stumbled Zygmunt helped him up and urged him on. They crawled into a hole which seemed to lead nowhere. Zygmunt opened a trap door which opened to a damp-smelling passage. "Watch your head," he whispered, "it's rather low here."

They crawled further until they came to some steps and another entrance to a larger

space. Hans could hear muffled voices but in the darkness he could see nothing. He became aware of the presence of men and women who were whispering to each other. Somebody was smoking a cigarette and the glow was visible like a spark suspended in the air.

"Comrades," said a voice somewhere in the distance, "as far as the ghetto is concerned the fight is over. That does not mean that we have given up. If we have to die, let us at least die fighting. The P.P.R. is trying to arrange our escape. If they succeed we will join their ranks and continue the struggle. If they don't . . . well, let each one decide for himself . . ."

Hans was too exhausted to think or even to understand the meaning of the speaker's words. He crawled into a corner and sat down on the floor. There seemed to be a body next to him. He snuggled up to the snoring object for warmth and fell into a deep sleep.

Hans must have slept for a long time. When he woke he was stiff, shivering and his throat so parched he could not speak. There was a faint light corning from somewhere in the cave. He looked round; men and women were huddled together on the ground. There were rifles scattered beside them. Next to him was a young woman. He could not quite discern her features. She looked at him and shook her head. "You are cold," she said gently. Here have something to drink." He gratefully took the flask she offered him and put it to his mouth. The liquid was strong and warmed him all over. He felt better but then realized he was very hungry. He could not remember when he had last eaten. He turned to the woman. "Do you have any bread?" he asked. She opened a bundle and took out a crust of bread. "Here, have mine, your need is greater." He ate the bread in bad conscience but could not resist it.

"My name is Judith," said the woman after a long pause. "I'm Zygmunt's wife. He is trying to arrange our escape."

As she was speaking there was a stir at the entrance to the cave. Three men entered and Judith jumped to her feet to greet her husband. There was jubilation on every side. The two other men were Polish partisans who brought in food, drink and ammunition.

After everyone had some food, Zygmunt explained the escape plan scheduled for the next day. It was audacious but at this point only the utmost daring would have a chance of success. What transpired on May 10th is best told by Stroop in his official report to Himmler:

> "Today at 9 a.m. a truck drove up to a man-hole on so-called Prosta Street. A man from the truck exploded two hand grenades. This was a prearranged signal for the already waiting bandits in the sewer. Bandits and Jews - there are still some Polish bandits amongst them - armed with carbines, revolvers as well as with a light machine-gun, jumped into the truck and escaped in an unknown direction. The last man of the band who was keeping guard and whose task it was to close the sewer was apprehended. It was he who supplied the above information . . . The immediate pursuit after the fleeing truck yielded no positive result."

The escape from the sewer on that May morning was one of the most daring in the long struggle. The secret of its success lay in its utter audaciousness. It was accomplished in broad daylight and in full view of passersby. The hero of the drama was a young man named

Wladek. His cool self-control and quick thinking saved the situation.

WIadek first made a dash for the bridge across the Vistula but he found the approach to the bridge blocked by military traffic. He instantly turned in the opposite direction and drove up along the river. A few miles outside Warsaw he was stopped by a military patrol. With guns at the ready, three soldiers went to inspect the truck and they were surprised by the occupants and shot. They were stripped of their uniforms and all their possessions and left by the side of the road. Without identifying marks it was not clear who they were. Wladek drove on to the next village and left the main road. With the cooperation of Polish peasants the escape was successful. The escapees were passed from village to village until they reached the forests where they split into two sections. With a chance to rest and equipped with arms they engaged German patrols and gradually fought their way to the Lublin region where they joined the main partisan force. Hans Müller was now in German uniform and fully armed.

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In mid-November three Russian armies mounted a counter-attack on a huge front north and south of Stalingrad. Within five days twenty-two German divisions found themselves trapped between the Volga and the Don. This was the beginning of the end. The outcome of the war was just a matter of time. Already by December 1943 the Germans were preparing anti-aircraft shelters in Warsaw. But it was not until June 1944 that the Russian armies came within sight of the capital. The Poles, counting on an imminent Russian attack rose in armed revolt against their ruthless enemy.

The Warsaw rising began on August 1st 1944 at 5 p.m. Hitler immediately gave orders:

"Every citizen is to be shot. No prisoners taken.
Warsaw is to be levelled to the ground."

The last chapter of Warsaw's agony began.

On September 10th the 47th Russian army received orders to move forward. By September 14th it occupied Praga - the suburb across the Vistula. It was only a matter of crossing the river to relieve the Poles but the partisans miscalculated Stalin's cunning. The Russian forces remained poised on the left bank of the Vistula watching the demise of the capital city. For the Polish brigades under Russian command this was both a humiliating and agonizing experience. They watched helplessly as their comrades in arms literally bled to death. In the end the insurgents - the remnants who survived - capitulated and the Germans began the systematic destruction of what was left of the capital.

The Russian assault on Warsaw began on January 16th 1945 at 7.55 a.m. By 1 p.m. on the same day, Russian scouts managed to cross the river and by nightfall the 1st Army was on the left bank of the Vistula. The following morning the Polish standard was raised on top of the mountain of rubble of what was once the Central Railway Station.

When Hans Müller joined the partisan force, he shed his disguise and became Moishe Litvak again. He attended the ceremony and as he looked round upon the utter destruction of the once proud city, he thought of the day when he first met Nina in the little restaurant. How hopelessly stupid is the human race! cried a voice within him, and his stomach turned with nausea and bitterness of heart.

CHAPTER III

Once the Russians were across the Vistula there was no holding them back. They fanned out on a wide front driving towards the Oder. The Germans put up their last great effort to stem the tide but not for long. In March the American and British armies crossed the Rhine and the Western front began to crumble. By April 11th, American forces had reached the Elbe reducing the distance between them and the Russians to a mere one hundred miles. About two million men of the Wehrmacht were in Allied hands. The Germans made a desperate effort to hold back the Russian advance upon Berlin. But the Russians under Zhukov and Koniev were invincible. By April 9th they had occupied Königsberg, the capital of East Prussia, and Vienna fell four days later. On April 16th the Russian forces broke through the defences on the Oder and set the stage for the final battle - the capture of Berlin.

The offensive against Berlin opened on April 17th on a double front, from the Oder and the Neisse. The Russians brought up their heaviest artillery and shelled the city for four days without pause before storming the approaches to the capital. First Tegel fell in the north, then Pankow, then Reineckendorf. To the south the Russians crossed the Teltow canal. All the while the Americans were advancing eastwards. By April 25th the Americans and the Russians had met at Torgau on the Elbe. Within a few days the suburbs fell to the Allied forces one by one - Döberitz, Lichterfelde, Zehlendorf, Treptow, Wannsee. Berlin was enclosed by an iron ring of armour trapping a quarter of a million men.

By Hitler's command there was to be no surrender. The order was to fight or die but because of the tremendous loss of men on both fronts, the defenders of Berlin were a motley lot. Remnants of the once proud Wehrmacht, some old men and even children of the Hitler Youth were thrown into the battle. Hitler entrusted the command to SS General Obergruppenführer Steiner, instructing him to use every means to break the Russian stranglehold on the city. He hoped for a miracle to the very last but the tremendous sacrifice in life and property proved abortive. On April 29th Russian tanks appeared at Anhalt Station and in Potzdammer Platz. On the last day of April the Russians reached the Reichstag and the Ministry of the Interior. Soldiers were surrendering by the tens of thousands. The city was an inferno of burning houses, twisted steel and huge craters. On May 1st the Chancellory fell in a crescendo of high explosives and roaring flames. By that time Hitler was already dead. He had shot himself on Monday April 30th, 1945 at 3:30 p.m. Beside him died Eva Braun, whom he had married the night before. The city was officially surrendered on May 2nd and on May 7th General Jodl and General Friedeburg signed the unconditional surrender of all the German forces at Rheims. The war in Europe was over.

- 2 -

Moishe Litvak was in Russian uniform for the third time in his life. This time he joined voluntarily. Officially he was not a fighting soldier. His name figured in no register. After the Russians reached his hideout in the forests of Lublin, he simply attached himself to a company by making friends with the sergeant-major. He was given the uniform of a fallen soldier and made himself useful in the field kitchen. His Siberian experience of peeling potatoes and doing menial chores proved an asset. Being a friendly man and always ready

for a joke and laugh endeared him to the soldiers. He was known as our Litvak, and even men outside his own company called him by this name.

Moishe followed the company with its kitchen transport from village to village and town to town. He saw the Russians break through defence after defence. The regiment was removed to the rear when they reached the Elbe and was not brought forward until well after the fall of Berlin. They moved into the barracks of Wilhelmstadt in the southern part of Spandau in July 1945. The Russian soldiers had never seen such luxury and they began to dismantle everything that was moveable, from water taps to built-in cupboards. After a couple of weeks at the barracks where vandalism and chaos reigned, Moishe decided to end his war venture. The question was: what next?

He was at a cross-roads. He could go back to the east or move westwards. For a while he was tempted to make for his native town of Vilno but there was no one there for him any more. His brother and family were in Palestine, Nina was no more, even Pan Komarski was only a memory. He shivered when he thought of the garden by the river and the little cross underneath the apple tree. He could not face the past and its sorrows any more. He decided to move in the opposite direction, into the unknown.

- 3 -

Only those who have seen Berlin in the summer of 1945 will appreciate the shocking experience which awaited Moishe Litvak as he left the barracks in Spandau that early morning at the end of July. He went to the corner of Wilhelmstrasse and hailed a military transport going east towards the capital. He had heard about the destruction of the proud city but could not visualise what it was really like. As they neared the centre of the city, the heaps of rubble grew into mountains on both sides of the road where the army had cleared the main thoroughfare.

At the junction of Bismarck Strasse and Berliner Strasse the truck stopped and Moishe alighted. He was in front of what was once Berlin’s show-place - the Tiergarten. He used to walk there with Nina amidst trees and flowers and twittering birds. Now it was a wilderness of twisted wire, burned stumps and scorched earth. Continuing along Charlottenburger Chaussee he saw from distance the gutted Reichstag on his left. But this was not what he was looking for. He turned to the right down Wilhelmstrasse and finally reached his objective - Hitler’s Chancellory.

The great building was an empty and desolate shell. The windows were blown out, the heavy doors fallen, the walls charred, the roof sagging. Deep and gaping holes like giant wounds revealed the frightful nakedness inside. Only the balcony, where Hitler had announced to the world the birth of the Third Reich which would last a thousand years, was intact - a silent witness to human folly.

Moishe stood in the middle of the road as if hypnotized. It seemed to him that he was back in Warsaw. This could not be the Berlin he had left twelve years ago. He eventually he roused himself and did what his people have done for centuries when confronted with God’s righteous judgements: "Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, the true Judge." he murmured in Hebrew.

- 4 -

Moishe wandered through the heaps of endless rubble. As he passed ruin after ruin, high chimneys, mighty pillars, desolate walls, he repeated the words of Isaiah the prophet: "Fallen, fallen is Babylon and all her idols and gods are dashed to the ground!"

The sun was setting and he was footsore and hungry. In a clearing behind a heap of rubble he noticed a wooden shack. There were people inside. It turned out to be a make-shift coffee stall for the army. He walked in and sat down at a little table. A white haired woman in a worn dress came to ask what he would like. He looked at her and their eyes met. She blushed. Somewhere deep down in his memory something stirred. Where have I seen that face before? Moishe wondered as he waited to be served. He could not place her and thought he was imagining it when he heard a rough voice from behind the partition call out "Frau Biebermann, come here!" Immediately Moishe remembered - Clara Biebermann, the pastor's wife!

When Clara appeared again Moishe stared at her in bewilderment, not knowing what to say. She felt his gaze and blushed again. "Do I know you?" she asked hesitantly.

"Yes, I think so. Are you not Pastor Biebermann's wife?"

Clara looked at him in amazement. "Did you know my husband?"

"My name is Moishe Litvak. I used to call at your home."

Clara turned pale and held on to a chair. There was a pause, then she suddenly fell to the floor in a dead faint. The thud of her fall turned all faces towards Moishe. Fritz, an old man in a grubby apron, ran out from behind the partition. "What happened? What happened?" he kept asking.

A soldier picked Clara up and sat her on a chair. Somebody sprinkled water on her face. She opened her eyes in bewilderment at the people surrounding her, then looked at Moishe and began to sob. Then Fritz helped her walk back behind the partition.

Moishe sat with his coffee in front of him, staring into space. After about ten minutes Clara returned. Her face pale, her eyes red, but she smiled weakly at Moishe.

"I'm sorry to have made such scene. It was all so unexpected. You brought back so many painful memories. I would like to speak to you privately. Could you come back later after we close? Then we can be alone to talk."

Moishe promised he would, finished his now cold coffee, took his bun with him and walked out.

- 5 -

Behind the partition there was a primitive stove heated by propane gas, a table where food was prepared, two broken chairs and a cot. This was where Fritz lived. Behind the shack there was a kind of lean-to, more a woodshed than a habitation, which was Clara's living quarters. Moishe arrived after 9 p.m. and the old man was already asleep. Clara was waiting for him in front of her shed. It was a quiet summer night and they sat down in the open on one of the many large slabs of stone which were lying about. Clara was quiet and solemn. She spoke in a whisper as if to avoid waking someone.

"I desperately need to talk to somebody," she began. "You knew me before the war. You seem a kindly man and were friendly with my husband. Then I was a proud hausfrau, now I

am a poor servant. Jürgen is dead, he died on the eastern front somewhere in Russia. My daughter disappeared in one of the air-raids. Her house collapsed from a direct hit and we have not seen her since. For all I know, she may be lying underneath tons of rubble. Poor Elsie, she was not even granted decent burial." Clara buried her face in her hands. There was a long pause.

"Do you think my husband is still alive?" She asked unexpectedly. "I behaved disgracefully. I do not deserve to be his wife. He was a good and noble man. Hitler poisoned us all with his hatred and then left us to perish."

Again she buried her face her hands and began to sob. Moishe sat by her side in silence. He may have imagined it or he may have been dreaming, he could not tell, but suddenly above the sky he saw a luminous cloud floating down over the ruins of the stricken city. Out of the cloud appeared a shining figure with thorns on his head and a cross in his hand.

"It is Jesus," he whispered, "it is Jesus . . ."

Clara looked up and shuddered. "What did you say?"

"Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ," murmured Moishe, pointing to the sky while Clara knelt in the rubble and buried her head in her hands, crying quietly.

All the accumulation of bitterness miraculously left Moishe. He hated no longer. He bent down to Clara, took her hand and kissed it.

"You must go in," he said, "it's getting late." They rose to their feet. Clara wiped her eyes. The moon suddenly appeared from behind the clouds and Moishe thought he saw a strange light in her eyes which seemed to spread all over her face.

"You have forgiven me?" she asked in a whisper.

"In the presence of Jesus no one dare judge anyone," said Moishe .

"Do you think my husband will forgive me?" she asked again. "But how could he after the way I treated him?"

"If he really believes in Jesus he can do nothing else."

"You have brought me great comfort - thank you. Maybe God sent you to me and with His help I will start life again."

Moishe took her hand, kissed it, and said goodnight.

- 6 -

The walk through the ruined city by moonlight was a ghostly experience. The ruined homes, the piles of rubble, the charred trees, even the bomb craters were somehow transformed in the soft, mellow light. Moishe found himself again in the vicinity of the Tiergarten. He was too tired to walk any further so he entered an empty house which did not seem too badly damaged. He found a couch in the corner of what appeared to be the living room, threw himself on it and fell asleep.

When Moishe opened his eyes again, the sun was streaming through the broken windows and he could hear the birds twittering outside. It was a beautiful summer day. He stretched himself and began to look round. It was obviously a family home. Toys were scattered on the floor. A doll with one arm missing lay by the couch. He noticed a closed door leading somewhere and decided to investigate. He tried the handle but the door was locked. He used his strength to force it open but it would not give way. He was hoping to find the kitchen. He

decided to venture upstairs although the staircase did not look too secure. After cautiously negotiating two flights of stairs he found that the roof had caved in and that the rooms were full of debris. He was about to turn back when he noticed a camouflaged door which must have come loose during the bombing. He pushed it open and found himself in a narrow passage. At the end of the passage he found a staircase leading down to the kitchen. He was now at the back of the house. In the kitchen everything was in disarray. Unwashed dishes, crockery, remnants of food. In the cupboards were a variety of tins. He found a tin opener and helped himself. It was the best meal he had consumed for a long time.

The door leading out of the kitchen was locked and there was no key. It meant that he had to go back the way he had come. By the staircase outside the kitchen he saw a door which obviously led to the cellar. He opened the door but as it was pitch dark inside he closed it again. He was about to move on when he noticed a large military flashlight in a corner. The batteries were still working and he decided to descend to the cellar. It was full of wine bottles, gardening tools, old trunks and other junk. But at the far end was a small door set in a concrete wall. He seized the handle to open it - it was made of iron and the hinges creaked. A very narrow passage led to another set of stairs. The place felt eerie and damp but Moishe was now too curious to stop. At the bottom of the stairs he came to a fully equipped concrete bunker. On a small table by the entrance there was even a telephone. Next to it there was a candlestick and matches. Moishe lit the candle and looked around. The bunker was roomy and fully furnished. It was divided into a living room and bedroom. The bed was unmade and littered with feminine garments. On a chair was a full-dress Nazi uniform with all the insignia and armband. There was every sign that the occupants had left in a great hurry. By the bed was a fair-sized iron chest with the lid open. He turned the light towards the chest and gasped. Glittering in the reflection of the flashlight was a veritable treasure trove - rings, bracelets, studs, chains, gold coins. Amid this pell-mell array of gold and precious stones was a cup. He picked it up. It was silver cup and he recognized at once that it had the Shield of David on it and the Hebrew inscription *lekhavod shabbat* - In honour of the Sabbath - it was a Kiddush cup. He clenched his teeth, "My peoples' property, the bandits," he spat out bitterly. "This is all loot taken from Jews."

Moishe put the cup in his pocket, closed the chest and shoved it under the bed. All he wanted was to get out of this evil place and into broad daylight. His first thought was to consult somebody about the chest but he knew no one except Clara Biebermann. He made his way back to the shack. Old Fritz told him that he had not seen Clara the whole day, she had mysteriously disappeared and he did not know where she was. Moishe drank a cup of coffee, ate a bun and left. Wandering aimlessly through the ruined streets he came upon a queue outside a wooden hut. To his surprise the people looked Jewish, men, women and a few children. His ear caught some Yiddish phrases. Jews in Berlin. Speaking Yiddish! As he drew nearer he read the sign on the door: AMERICAN JEWISH JOINT DISTRIBUTION COMMITTEE. He joined the queue.

It transpired that Joint arrived in Berlin in the same month as Moishe. Representatives of the Agency were already bringing aid to Jews who had survived the persecution. Moishe registered as a displaced person, was given a document, allotted food, clothing and a place to sleep. Within a week the group was told that transportation was ready for moving further

west.

Now the problem of the treasure trove beneath the bed of the bunker had to be solved quickly. What was he to do? He decided to consult one of the Joint officials. Friedman, an American Jew, listened carefully to his story but Moishe could see that he was not believed. He pulled the Kiddush cup from his pocket. "Here," he said, "this is the evidence I took out of the box." Friedman took the cup in his hand and examined it closely. "We had better go together. Don't tell anyone. We will go over tonight since the transport leaves tomorrow.

When they reached the house, it all looked much the same except for one thing. The door which led to the back of the house was open. Moishe noticed this at once. "Somebody has been here," he said in a whisper.

They walked through the kitchen, opened the door and descended. The bunker was as Moishe had left it. The iron box was still under the bed. Moishe quickly moved it out and opened the lid - it was empty!

Mr. Friedman said nothing. They had obviously come too late. The Nazi uniform still lay on the chair. The American tore off all the insignia and put them in his pocket. The armband with the swastika he trod underfoot and kicked under the bed. At the door of the bunker he turned, spat on the ground and pronounced the words of the Passover service: "Pour out thy indignation upon them and let thy fierce anger overtake them!"

Moishe Litvak had now acquired legal status: he was a registered DP - a displaced person. This was a privileged position. Not that he was not a displaced person before, but now he was officially so and therefore under the protection of the United Nations. To be a DP in the American zone was in itself a piece of good luck. None of the other Allies treated the Jews with so much consideration as did the U.S. Command.

Camp Daglfing, near Munich was one of the smaller centres with just over two hundred refugees. Like Moishe, they were all stateless, homeless, without means of livelihood and most of them without relatives. The camp was entirely administered by Jews and provided for jointly by the United Nations Relief and the American Joint. Restrictions in the camp were minimal, although there was considerable hostility towards Jews outside. The inmates spent most of their time telling each other about the horrors they had experienced and how they had survived. Moishe, in his usual cheerful way, became the confidant of many and a friend to all. The officers of the camp soon got to know of his past connections with Joint and invited him to help with the administration.

One day, in late autumn. Moishe accompanied one of the officers to Joint headquarters in Munich. While the official transacted some business, Moishe went to see the town. Munich was not in much better shape than Berlin but everything possible was being done to return to normal. Streets were being cleared, huts erected, relief centres organized. German soldiers, still in army uniform, were engaged in clearing away the rubble.

Moishe was walking aimlessly through the streets when he noticed a small church which somehow seemed to have escaped the general destruction. He walked in, mainly for quiet and contemplation. He sat down close to the door and shut his eyes. It was good to be alone. The camp was a crowded place and there was no privacy.

He had sat there for about a quarter of an hour when he heard footsteps. Instinctively he opened his eyes and looked round - walking down the aisle was Clara Biebermann. The

coincidence was so startling that when Moishe rose to greet her she froze in front of him. This was a different Clara from the one he had left behind that summer night in Berlin outside the shack. She was well-groomed, with a trim little hat and shoes to match. She was quiet, even solemn and sure of herself.

"Ach was," she said, "what a coincidence!"

They sat down in the quiet of the church and she told her story.

"Many things have happened since we last met," she began. "After you left me on that memorable night, I went to my miserable little hut but I could not fall asleep. Your vision disturbed me to the very depths of my being. The name Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ kept hitting my brain like a hammer. I tried not to think about him. I shut my eyes. I plugged my ears, I shut my mind, but it was no good. The more I tried, the worse it got. Suddenly I was overcome with a great desire to pray. I knelt down on the floor and cried like a child - Lord help me! Christ forgive me! Lord help me!

"I do not know how long this lasted, but gradually a great calm came over me. I must have fallen asleep kneeling by my cot, or perhaps I was awake, I cannot tell. Ferdinand, my husband, suddenly appeared in front of me. I could see his face, his eyes, his characteristic smile. I knew it was him, there was no mistake. He put his hand on my arm, looked lovingly into my eyes and said ‘Clara don’t cry. Christ has forgiven you and so have I. We are both sinners saved by the Cross. Let us bury the past and start again on better foundations’."

She stopped and took a breath. "I knew it was no dream but the real thing. Ferdinand did not go away, he stayed with me. He sat on the chair and on the cot. He took my hand and kissed it. I knelt at his feet and buried my face in his lap. After a long, long while he rose. He took his hat, kissed me good-bye and left. When I woke the following morning I went to the Hilfsstelle for refugees and registered for transportation to the West. As soon as I came to Munich I found the pastor of this church, an old friend of my husband’s from student days. I told him the whole truth and the way I treated Ferdinand. How we met by accident in Berlin, about the vision you had and my experience that night. Pastor Stieber is a good man. We prayed together. He took me into his house and got in touch with the Red Cross. They soon located my husband and he wrote immediately."

Again she paused. After while she continued.

"It was a wonderful letter. He said exactly the same thing as he said the night he visited me in Berlin. It is an odd thing and you may not believe it, but when I told him of his visit, he knew all about it and even described the hut. He had made application and now I am waiting for a visa to go to England. Isn’t God wonderful? I am forgiven! We are going to start a new life!"

At this point Clara could no longer contain herself. Tears rolled down her cheeks but these were tears of joy. She took Moishe’s hand and pressed it to her face.

"How stupid I was," she continued, "all these years and I did not know what the Gospel means: it is reconciliation in Jesus Christ, Jews and Germans are brothers in Him. I needed Hitler and all the tragedy of our people to teach me so simple a lesson . . . Oh how stupid I was!"

Moishe sat spell-bound. He never spoke a word. His eyes were riveted on her face and he drank in every word she said.

Clara wiped her eyes, straightened her hat, and smiled at Moishe. "I owe you a great debt which I will never be able to repay. Had you not come to Berlin and found me I would still have been a servant at old Fritz's shack, unforgiven and unloved."

Moishe didn't answer for a long time. Some strange things were happening inside him and he struggled to find words, At long last he mastered his feelings. "Mrs. Biebermann," he began, "or may I say, Clara?"

"Yes, of course," she responded quickly, "we now belong to the same family. You are my brother. Oh, how wonderful!"

"Clara," he went on, "you owe me no debt. We both owe something to God's gracious mercy. It is not only you who needs forgiveness. I too have sinned by departing from the Master's precepts. After Nina died - she was shot by a drunken German soldier - hatred filled my heart. I could not forgive such a terrible loss. I was thirsting for vengeance. It was only when I stood on the ruins of Berlin and saw the tragedy of Germany that I realized again a thing I knew all the time - that hatred is not the answer."

Here Moishe interrupted himself and wiped his brow.

"Hatred," he began again, "solves nothing. First the Nazis killed the Poles, then the Poles killed the Germans, then the Germans destroyed Warsaw. Now the Russians have destroyed Berlin, and so it goes on without end and without solution. The Germans have committed the greatest crime in history, they have exterminated my people by the millions. Now it is our turn to pay them back. Because we are not strong enough to do to them as they did to us, we at least kill them in our hearts by hating them with an immeasurable hatred. But hatred is a poison, I know this from my own experience. It consumes your mind and saps your strength. You cannot live with it. Man is made for loving and not for hating. I've known all along that this is so but my bitterness was too great to resist. You have taught me a lesson. I too will start again, with God's help."

He took her hand and kissed it.

Clara asked Moishe to visit the pastor's home when he next came to Munich. So they parted, each with a new vision and a new hope.

- 8 -

About ten days later, Moishe received a message from Munich asking him to call at Pastor Stieber's house. He was concerned in case something had happened to Clara and went the following day.

Pastor Stieber was a middle-aged man with a kindly face, deep blue eyes and a greying little button of a beard under his lower lip. He opened the door, shook Moishe's hand with genuine warmth and apologized for making him come all the way.

"Frau Biebermann told me all about you. I was fascinated by your story. In this house we have always loved the Jewish people and have a special affection for Jewish Christians. After what happened to your people during the war we are not worthy to receive a Jew under our roof. The reason we asked you to come is because we want you to meet a friend from England.

Pastor Stieber opened the door to the living room and asked Moishe to enter. The pastor's wife, Clara and a middle-aged stranger were in the room. Moishe was introduced to Frau

Stieber, he shook hands with Clara and then faced the stranger who, in halting German with a thick Scottish accent, introduced himself.

"I am the Reverend Nahum Levison, the President of the International Hebrew Christian Alliance. I am here to find out what we can do for Jewish Christians who have survived the Nazi persecution. I am glad to meet you."

They all sat down and Mrs. Stieber served tea. Moishe was amazed to discover that he was not alone. There was even an association of Jewish Christians! He was eager to hear what Nahum Levison had to say about what he called *the Alliance*. Levison dwelt on the fact that members of the Alliance are believers in the Messiah but refuse to dissociate themselves from their own people. This appealed to Moishe more than anything else.

"So you are a pastor?" he asked diffidently, "not a rabbi but a Jew?"

"That is so. I belong to the Scottish Church. I am the pastor of a congregation near Edinburgh. My people know that I am Jewish and I am proud of it. In fact I am a Sephardi, born in Palestine."

"Born in eretz Yisrael!" exclaimed Moishe. "Fancy that! So you really are a Jew!"

"Of course I am. We come from a long line of rabbis."

“Your church does not mind that you are Jew?" asked Moishe with obvious astonishment. "That could not have happened where I come from."

He looked at Clara who sat silently with her hands folded, listening to the conversation. Their eyes met and she blushed. There was an awkward pause. Clara cast down her eyes, contemplated her hands, and then spoke.

"You are right. Not where you come from. The same applies also to our own church in Germany. My husband could not have stayed at his church in Berlin had he not hidden the fact that he was Jewish. But it soon became known anyhow and he was sent to a concentration camp. I myself was poisoned with the spirit of anti-Semitism. I tried to overlook the fact that he was Jewish and tried to think of him as a German. But each time I found fault with him I put it down not to his human frailty but to his Jewishness. I kept on saying to myself: there is the Jew again!"

She fell silent. Pastor Stieber cleared his throat. "This is the point!" he said in the sonorous clerical tone, appropriate to pastors. "This is the point. We all do exactly what Christians are NOT meant to do. We judge our neighbours. Clara judges Ferdinand, Ferdinand judges Clara, and go it goes on . . . We forget that each one of us is before the judgement of God . . . The Christian principle is not based upon judgement but forgiveness - not human forgiveness but God’s forgiveness. Humanly speaking, the Jews cannot forgive us for what we have done, except by God’s grace . . ."

Nahum Levison said nothing. When the pastor had finished he looked at his watch. "I have another engagement," he said, "you will have to excuse me." He turned to Moishe. "The Alliance will help you to emigrate. We could even try to get you a visa for England, although that can be difficult. You can write to me or get in touch with Pastor Stieber. Here is my address."

Moishe took the card and put it in his pocket. They all rose and the party broke up. After Nahum Levison left, Clara saw Moishe out.

"Thank you for coming," she said. "I am leaving for England in two weeks time. Please

keep in touch. We will never forget you."

She gave him her hand, he kissed it and left.

BOOK IV

CHAPTER I

Moishe returned to the camp in a pensive mood. His experiences at the pastor's house needed sorting out. First, there was Levison. A typical Jew to his fingertips, born in Palestine, a descendent of rabbis, now serving as pastor of a Gentile congregation, and not hiding his Jewishness . . . Moishe immediately thought of Biebermann, how apprehensive he was of being known as Jewish. Then there was Stieber. A full-blooded German, blue-eyed, erect, dignified, the pastor of a church, regarding it an honour to have a Jew under his roof! From Stieber, Moishe's mind turned again to the Biebermanns. What a story! he thought to himself. Here was Clara, a proud and fanatical German, getting rid of her husband as if he were an outcast. Now, she was a humble penitent. Her change of heart was a miracle . . .

Moishe's mind conjured up the night in Berlin amidst the ruins when he saw Jesus floating in the starry sky . . . It must be the spirit of Jesus, he thought to himself, which has changed her heart. Then his mind reverted again to Pastor Biebermann. He was taking her back as if nothing had happened. He had forgiven her. What does it take to forgive a loveless wife? he wondered. Jews and Christians, Gentiles and Jews, reconciled, forgiving each other, helping each other, living together in love. This is the kind of world we must strive for. This is the kind of world we need.

By the time he reached the camp it was already late. As he entered the dormitory he thought it strange that all the bunks were empty. But he was too preoccupied with his thoughts and too tired to take much notice. He got undressed, got into bed and immediately fell asleep.

- 2 -

It was broad daylight. Moishe sat up, rubbed his eyes and looked round. There was no one in the room. All he could hear was the buzzing of flies. He jumped out of bed and dressed quickly. The first person he met outside was Mr. Rosenkranz, the Joint official.

"Where is everyone?" asked Moishe, puzzled.

Instead of answering, Rosenkranz put his finger to his lips signifying secrecy.

"Come to my office," he said.

It was only when they had reached the office and shut the door that Rosenkranz burst into laughter.

"Sorry, old man," he said to Moishe, "it must have been a surprise to you. You return from the town and find everyone gone! Well, we had to act quickly, there was no time to lose. We had a telephone call from Italy. One of those illegal ships arrived at Genoa sooner than expected. It was our turn for the Aliyah to Palestine. Only men were allowed to go. We had to spirit them away quietly without rousing suspicion, so they left at night. Had you been here you would have gone with them. Now you will have to wait for your chance."

Moishe listened dumbfounded.

"Cheer up!" said Rosenkranz, by way of comfort, "your turn will come."

The following day a new transport of refugees arrived to take the place of those who had

left and the dormitory was filled again.

- 3 -

Moishe pondered the fact that he had missed his chance of going to Palestine by a mere couple of hours. At first he felt sorry for himself but then he tried to see it in another light. Perhaps I was not meant to go, he reasoned. Who knows? Providence may have decreed otherwise.

A month later he received a letter from Clara Biebermann. The pastor added a postscript. They were happily reunited. They were living in London, in a community house, with other German refugees. Ferdinand was preparing for the Anglican ministry. They had met the Reverend Nahum Levison and Clara reminded him of his promise to get Moishe to England. Levison has offered and Clara hopes to see him in London. Would he write to the Reverend Nahum Levison?

Moishe had to make a decision. He spent several sleepless nights arguing one way and then the other. Meanwhile another letter arrived via the Red Cross in Geneva. It was from Nina's cousin, Rebecca Grossman, written on the chance that the Litvaks had survived. It contained the barest information: they had moved to London, they were well, they hoped to hear from him as soon as possible.

Rebecca's letter tipped the scales in favour of Britain. Moishe immediately sat down and wrote two letters, one to Nahum Levison and the other to Rebecca. Rebecca's letter was difficult for he had to tell her of Nina's death. He wrote hastily with a burning hand and glazed eyes and as briefly as possible. He promised to give details when they met as he hoped to reach England soon. Now it became a matter of waiting.

To obtain an entrance visa to Great Britain for a DP from Europe was a matter of almost insurmountable difficulty. It was only thanks to the dogged persistence of Nahum Levison and the good offices of some friends that the miracle happened. The Home Office issued a permit on condition that the International Hebrew Christian Alliance made itself fully responsible for Moishe Litvak. The news reached the camp before the end of 1945 and Moishe made his way to Munich to tell Pastor Stieber. It was late in December and Mrs. Stieber made sure that Moishe spent Christmas with them.

- 4 -

Christmas in Germany 1945, was an extremely austere occasion. The population was mainly dependent upon the Allied command for survival. Rationing was severe and there were no luxuries. The Stiebers were fortunate. Thanks to friends in Switzerland they received an American CARE parcel. Moishe knew the difficulties and had intended to stay for only one meal but Pastor Stieber would not hear of it. He insisted that Moishe spend the two days with them.

Moishe arrived with his bundle on Christmas Eve. Mrs. Stieber was at the door to greet him: "Fröhliche Weihnachten," she called, shaking him by the hand.

Pastor Stieber appeared from his study: Grüss Gott! We are delighted to have you. Fancy having a Judenchrist under our roof for Christmas! What a privilege!"

The Pastor was full of glee but Moishe felt embarrassed and did not know what to say. He

could not understand why having a Jew visit for Christmas was a special privilege. What puzzled him was that a German would say such a thing and obviously mean it.

Moishe went to church with the rest of the household. He was sitting in the front pew with Mrs. Stieber and their old servant and while the organ was playing a prelude his mind strayed to the day when he first entered this very church and met Clara. How strange, he thought, that I should be sitting in this church again, and now as a guest of the pastor. He was still sunk in thought when the organ stopped. It started again but in a different key and he suddenly realized that the congregation was singing:

Stille Nacht, heilige Nacht
Alles schläft, nur einsach wacht . . .

It was a tune he had heard before but he could not remember where and in what connection. Mrs. Stieber offered him a hymnbook which he took mechanically without looking at the text. His mind was wandering. He was in Minsk again. A crisp clear night. A blue vaulted sky with a million stars reflected on the surface of the river. Nina walked by his side. There was not a sound anywhere. Suddenly Nina said "What a night! A silent night! A true Christmas night!"

"Why, is it Christmas?" he asked.

"It is Christmas Eve tonight," said Nina. "We used to have so much fun when Mother was alive . . ."

She shivered. "Let's go home," she said and they turned back leaving the glory of the night behind them . . ."

The pastor appeared in the pulpit and Moishe roused himself from his reverie.

Pastor Stieber preached a simple but moving sermon. The church was full of people. They listened uneasily but silently. Only an occasional cough broke the stillness of the congregation. The Pastor began by reminding his parishioners that they had come to celebrate the birthday of a Jew. "Only recently," he said, "it was a crime even to be friendly with a Jew, Jews were hounded like animals. Many of us condoned this attitude on the part of a wicked and godless government. The German people has forgotten what it owes to the Jews. Salvation is of the Jews, says the Bible. The saviour of the world was and remains a Jew."

He continued: "My wife and I are privileged tonight to have as our guest a Jewish man. Not only is he a Jew but also a Christian, a Judenchrist. This is a double privilege, to have under our roof a brother in the faith as well as a brother of Our Lord according to the flesh. We want to assure him of our love and respect and of our deep sorrow and sense of guilt for all that our people have done to the Jews these frightful years of war. May he forgive us and may God forgive us for Christ's sake . . ."

Moishe wriggled uncomfortably. He felt embarrassed and self-conscious. He imagined all eyes glued to his back. His only hope was that he would remain unrecognized in the dim light of the church. But he was mistaken. The moment the service was over the pastor came to his pew.

"Please," he said warmly, "our people would like to shake your hand, do not deny them the privilege."

Stieber led Moishe to the back of the church. They were standing at the entrance with the

congregation filing past. Many had tears in their eyes. A few women were weeping audibly. Others whispered "forgive us" as they shook his hand. Their faces were furrowed, their eyes troubled and haggard, these were not proud Germans any more. These were poor and frightened people in need of comfort. Even the children looked ill and downcast. Moishe felt a sense of pity twisting his stomach. His eyes filled with tears and his temples throbbed. He tried to smile encouragingly but all he could manage was an odd twist of his mouth. He felt the sweat trickling down his collar.

Mrs. Stieber was in a corner of the vestibule holding on to her servant, both were crying. Only the pastor stood erect and full of joy. There was luminosity round him which surrounded him like an aura. When the last person had left the porch, he turned to Moishe: "This has been a great night for us. We have experienced something of Christ's forgiveness. Thank you."

His head swimming and bone-weary, Moishe dragged himself to his room. As he pulled the covers over his head to shut out the experiences of the day, the pastor's words churned round his weary brain "forgiveness for Christ's sake, forgiveness for Christ's sake . . ." Mercifully he fell asleep.

- 5 -

Moishe woke up to a bright and beautiful sunny day. When he came downstairs for breakfast the pastor had already left. Mrs. Stieber was in the kitchen. The table was decorated with all sorts of greenery and on his seat was a parcel addressed to him. Presently Mrs. Stieber came in: "Fröliche Weihnachten," she said cheerfully. "Did you sleep well? You must have been very tired after last night?"

"Thank you," said Moishe. "I slept so well that I overslept. I hope I have not kept you waiting."

"Not at all. We did not wait for you. My husband had to go out. He asked me to apologize."

Moishe looked at the parcel with embarrassment. Mrs. Stieber lifted it and put it in his hand. "Please take this. It's just a humble Christmas present. I hope it will be of some use to you. There is so little choice these days."

Moishe did not know what to do, unwrap the parcel or eat his breakfast. So he remained standing.

"Wouldn't you like to sit down," suggested Mrs. Stieber. "You can open the parcel afterwards."

Moishe sat down and looked around. He had been to this house before but there was a special atmosphere today which was new to him. It felt clean, snug and festive. Above all he was conscious of a kind of stillness which gave the impression that the world had come to a stop. It almost worried him.

"Well," he said, "this my first Christmas in a Christian home."

Mrs. Stieber looked at him and smiled.

The parcel contained a woollen sweater, a pair of socks and a book. It was the book which occupied his attention: F. Heman's *Geschichte des Jüdenschen Volkes*. And the cover was signed: Robert Peter Stieber, Weihnachten, 1945.

After breakfast Stieber went to church again. Moishe remained at home. He opened his book and began with the Foreword. He came to a sentence which made him pause: "History shows that the Jews, even if they do not want it, have to endure as one, whole and unified nation. They cannot disappear . . ."

Why not? he wondered. Why must we survive? Is it to suffer? Is this our destiny?

- 6 -

The Christmas dinner was a festive occasion. The CARE parcel made all the difference. The Stiebers invited several parishioners to share the bounty. Moishe was again introduced with all the warmth peculiar to the pastor and there was much hand shaking and heel clicking.

After dinner the conversation inevitably turned again to the Jews. One of the guests asked if the religious significance of the Jewish people had not come to an end with the coming of Christ. Pastor Stieber did not answer at once. He looked at Moishe, smiled at his wife, wiped his eyeglasses, pushed chair away from the table and crossed his legs. Now he was ready: "You do know," he began, "that the God of Israel is ein Bundesgott, the God of the Covenant. St. Paul said that God's calling is without repentance. Israel is therefore God's special people; Israel's destiny is an eternal destiny. They are called in the Bible an Everlasting Nation. He who touches them touches God's eye-apple and calls down disaster upon himself. Here is the reason for Germany's defeat, make no mistake about it!"

Pastor Stieber turned to Moishe: "Herr Litvak," he said, "you know best, being a Jewish Christian. Am I right?"

All eyes turned towards Moishe. They waited. Moishe was no ready speaker but he was essentially a truthful man. The question took him unawares and he immediately remembered the sentence in Heman's book and his own reaction.

"I have a difficulty. In fact I was going to ask you about it. Only this morning I read in the book you gave me that the Jews have to endure, even against their own will, they cannot disappear. Now here is my question: their history has been a story of endless suffering. What purpose does it serve? Does it mean that to be chosen by God is to be chosen for suffering? Would it not have been better for us to disappear, assimilate among the nations? Why must we survive as a people?"

Again the pastor did not answer at once. He shut his eyes, leaned back in his chair and remained in that position for quite a while. Suddenly he rose from his seat, walked across the room and then returned to the table.

"I must be careful what I say now," he began. "It is no easy matter to speak about a people's agony. I have myself struggled with this question during the years of war. As you know, I spent 18 months at Dachau for my views regarding the Jews. What I say therefore is not off the cuff but after years of prayer and thought. The Jews have to survive by God's will for the blessing of the Gentiles. This is their destiny. Like Christ, they are being crucified for the salvation of the world but a great resurrection awaits them. The Jews are the test of our humanity. Without them we would not have known how inhuman and pagan we are. Now we know the truth."

He sat down and closed his eyes. No one spoke. The company soon departed and Moishe

went upstairs to read Heman's book.

- 7 -

Moishe settled into the Stieber household. It came about gradually. First, he visited the Stiebers on Sundays to spend the day with them. He had many intimate talks with the pastor. Soon his visits became more frequent and the pastor suggested that he come to live with them. He could help in the parish. He could attend to the sick and needy and make himself useful in other ways. Moishe welcomed the invitation, especially since life at the camp was very monotonous. Apart from the usual chores there was little to do there, except listen to the endless repetition of the tales of suffering.

Visiting the sick and needy in Munich in 1945 was a gruelling experience even for Moishe who had seen enough suffering to last him a lifetime. Hitherto he was only familiar with the suffering of Eastern Europe, especially the Jews. That the Germans were suffering too had not occurred to him although he had seen the destruction of their cities and their poverty. Now he came face to face with the startling discovery that the Germans were suffering; theirs too was the anguish of human beings . . .

Because of the general destruction of the city, people lived in air-raid shelters, hovels, cellars and bunkers. They lived squashed like sardines, without sanitation, without furniture, without proper cooking facilities, but worst of all, without food. Families were separated. Husbands had either been killed in the war or were in Russian prison camps. The elderly and the children were left to fend for themselves. The hovels were crowded with starved and half naked children, emaciated, pale and listless. Wherever he went, people were crying out for food. Many were dying from hunger.

One day Pastor Stieber sent Moishe with a loaf of bread to a particular family who had been expelled from the Eastern provinces now occupied by Poland. There was a mother, grandmother and five children, the oldest about twelve. They lived in a cellar of a bombed-out house.

It was already past noon but the family was still without breakfast. The mother had gone to the Hilfstelle to stand in a queue for potatoes. To her dismay the supply ran out before her turn came and she was returning empty-handed to a starving family. When she found Moishe in the cellar and a loaf of bread on the table she burst into sobs. Kneeling on the floor she kissed his hand, wetting it with tears. Moishe tried to free himself but she would not let go. "You are an angel," she cried. "God has sent you to save us!"

"Liebe Frau, I am no angel, believe me. Pastor Stieber must have known of your need."

"Ach was! Ach ja!" she kept saying, and hung on to his hand,

It was a humbling and heart rending experience. Moishe felt deeply for the family and wondered how he could help. He went to the Quaker mission with a letter from the pastor and obtained some cast-off garments and shoes. But the main problem was food. Where to find food for a family of seven at a time like this?

Then the unexpected happened. The quarter-master of the American canteen, Sergeant Rudolf Bauer, occasionally attended Pastor Stieber's church. He was of German extraction and spoke the language. He suddenly turned up with a request. Could the pastor recommend a reliable civilian to help in the canteen? Preferably a non-German refugee.

Mrs. Friecke, her mother-in-law and the five children now became the responsibility of Moishe Litvak. Not a day passed when he failed to call on his way from the canteen. Every crumb that could be saved - and there was much wasted food among the Americans - was put aside for his family. Not only the Frieckes, but the Stiebergs and many others profited from Moishe's new position.

One evening as Moishe deposited his "loot", Mrs. Friecke said to him: "You are so good to us! We do not know how to thank you. Only God can reward you for what you are doing for us. Yet you are not German, are you?"

"No," said Molshe, "I am a Jew."

At the sound of the word Jew, Mrs. Friecke went pale and held on to a chair. "A Jew," she stammered. "A Jew?"

"Yes, of course, don't I look like one?" smiled Moishe.

"And you are helping us, after all that has happened?"

"Aren't we supposed to help each other?" asked Moishe. "Who else will help unless one helps the other?"

"Ach, mein Gott!" cried Mrs. Friecke, "I never, never shall forget this."

Grandmother and mother were crying together as Moishe quickly left the room.

Work in the canteen took most of his day. His care for the Frieckes and his help in the Stieber household occupied the rest of his time. He became so engrossed in the life of these people, with their needs and sorrows, that he forgot all about the possibility of his departure for England.

Then suddenly it happened. A letter arrived from the Alliance that a visa had been granted and Moishe was faced with a grave decision: should he go at a time like this? It was a matter of conscience. How could he leave his "family" and his other friends?

He took his problem to Pastor Stieber. They discussed it in great detail. Perhaps Moishe could do more for his family and others by going to England than by remaining here? It was this thought which tipped the scales. Thus the moment for parting had come. With a ticket in his pocket and money for the journey sent by the Alliance there seemed to be no other choice.

The good pastor and his wife saw him off at the station. As the train began to move Moishe lowered the window and heard them both call "Aufwiedersehen . . . !" And the pastor added as an afterthought: "We hope to see you again soon!"

CHAPTER II

The train to Liverpool Street Station stopped with a jerk and a hiss. People standing in the corridors held on to each other. Moishe fell into the lap of an old lady who wisely remained seated. He covered his embarrassment with a cough, doffed his hat and said "Verzeihung!" The woman stared at him and said nothing. The doors opened with a bang and the crowd spilled out. Most of the travellers were in uniform and spoke a language which to Moishe's ears sounded different from what he heard in the American canteen. If this is what English is like, he thought to himself, I'll never learn it!

With his wooden box in his hand he was carried by the flood of people towards the barrier. The gates were wide open and everyone surged through. It struck him as odd that no one asked for a ticket. This is not the way it is done in Europe, he thought to himself. The station was full of smoke, and the hissing noise of the locomotives pierced his ears. It was drizzling with rain through the broken roof and a gloomy dampness hung in the air. There was nothing cheerful about the place.

Meanwhile the passengers were sorting themselves out. People were finding each other, embracing, laughing, crying, talking and running about.

Moishe stopped by a lamp post and put his box down, undecided. A stranger appeared at his side: "Are you Herr Moses Litvak?" he asked in faultless German.

"Ja, ja, Ich bin Litvak," said Moishe with great relief at the sound of a language he could understand.

"My name is Kurt Steinberg. I represent the Hebrew Christian Alliance. I want to welcome you to this country." They shook hands.

"Thank you," said Moishe, "I feel lost here, especially as I do not speak the language."

Moishe picked up his box, and they made their way towards the underground. The long passages, ill-lit, damp and stifling, made a weird impression upon him.

With a loud clatter the train emerged from the tunnel. The doors opened and the crowd shoved its way inside. At a shrill whistle the doors closed again. The carriage rocked, people swayed and the train moved out of the station. Mr. Steinberg tried to say something but the clatter of the wheels made conversation impossible so they rode in silence. Within twenty minutes or so they arrived at Sloane Square. It was raining.

- 2 -

London was a stricken city. Ruined houses, burnt churches, unexploded bombs and weary people. After years of strain, now that the war was over, the reaction set in. Continued rationing of food, scarcity of goods, general impoverishment, changed the mood of the nation. The defiant spirit and the comradeship so evident during the years of war had evaporated. People were tired and edgy. Britain was taking stock and licking her wounds.

The first demobilized men appeared in the streets. They seemed to be ill-at-ease in their new suits supplied by the government. Moishe sensed a kind of reluctance on the part of people to become personally involved with strangers. At first he attributed the peculiar English taciturnity to anti-Semitism. In Europe people were either friendly or hostile, but never indifferent. But gradually he learned that the peculiar English reserve was a style of

life. All the same, he found English aloofness difficult to take. To him it felt like a form of hostility. In addition, the language proved impenetrable. The spelling, the pronunciation, the diphthongs, but above all the "th" completely defeated him. No matter how he tried, it never came out right. It was a source of constant embarrassment to him but in the end he gave up trying.

- 3 -

The Grossmans were living in a small house in Surrey. Zygmunt was a member of the émigré government and was making great plans for a restored Poland. Rebecca had learned English reasonably well and was active in the community. Poles and Jews were now friends again, at least according to the Government in Exile. A free Poland, with equal rights for all, was the slogan. Zygmunt Grossman had no option but to believe it. Moishe's tale of Polish behaviour during the holocaust, cast a dark shadow upon his hopes. Essentially a realist, he was torn between the promises of the émigré Poles and his personal knowledge of the facts.

"Poles do not change overnight," he said to Rebecca as they were discussing the future. "Make no mistake, they will soon find a useful scapegoat in the Jew and then it will start all over again."

"But where could we go," asked his wife, "we are too assimilated to fit into a Jewish community in Palestine. Here we are strangers. Poland is our homeland. Where else would we go, except back home?"

Zygmunt did not answer. He had no answer.

The Biebermanns were equally troubled. The pastor was now an ordained deacon in the English Church but there was nothing English about him. Neither by breeding nor education did he fit into the Church of England and the English language was a big problem. He was serving as a curate in the south of England. Parishioners who knew him personally liked him. But many others deliberately ignored him. A few stayed away from church because of him.

One day, a Mrs. Robertson Smith called on the Vicar while Biebermann was in an adjoining room. The door was ajar and he overheard the following exchange:

Vicar: "We haven't seen you in church for a long time, Mrs. Smith. I hope you still regard yourself a member of the congregation?"

Mrs. Smith: "Of course I do. But we now attend the church of St. Peter. My husband refuses to listen to a German and a Jew at that. We have had enough of both. Look at the trouble the Jews are making for us in Palestine! And as for the Germans, well . . . I'm not surprised he feels so strongly about it!"

Vicar: "Mrs. Smith, among Christians there can be no difference between Jew and Gentile, and besides, you know yourself, Mr. Biebermann suffered greatly at the hands of the Germans . . ."

Mrs. Smith: "It's all very well for you to speak, we lost a son in the war, and our Billy is now in Palestine trying to keep the peace. You ought to hear what he writes about the Jews and how they behave!"

Vicar: "But Mr. Biebermann is not a Jew, he is a Christian . . ."

Mrs. Smith: "You may call him what you like. He is certainly not an Englishman. The moment he opens his mouth he is a German and a Jew alright!"

Ferdinand Biebermann had heard enough. He quietly tiptoed out of the room and left the house.

The following Sunday the Rev. Robert Arthur Richardson, M.A. (Oxon) preached a sermon on the text: There is no distinction between Jew and Greek, the same Lord is Lord of all.

After the service the congregation left in glum silence and a few more families left the church. The Vicar wrote to the Bishop. It was decided to ordain the Rev. Ferdinand Biebermann to the priesthood and to move him to another parish.

Now the Bishop had a problem: where to place a German Jew whose accent was decidedly foreign? He consulted his chaplains who suggested a working-class district. But the Archdeacon rejected the idea. "People will say, you send us blinking foreigners because no one else would have them." The Bishop saw the point.

Finally the Bishop wrote to Dr. Bell, the Bishop of Chichester. All German pastors were his responsibility - after all he brought them over . . .

The good Bishop had no openings in his Diocese but suggested the North or the Midlands. The Bishop decided to approach a Midland colleague.

"Ah, why didn't I think of him before!" he said to himself. "The man is a rationalist, a labourite, a pacifist and an internationalist, just the man!"

This Diocesan had a bad reputation with his brother bishops. He was unconventional, unorthodox, a rebel, rocking the boat whenever he could.

Within a week came the reply: he would very much like to help but it was his rule that no one should serve in his Diocese except graduates from the "two recognized universities". He was very sorry he could not be more helpful.

The Bishop was dumbfounded. "What kind of liberal is that!" he exclaimed as he threw the letter into the waste-paper basket.

At long last a solution was found. The Rev. Ferdinand Biebermann was offered a desolate church in the East End. It was a church without windows, without a congregation and without hope. It was felt that in the circumstances there would be no opposition to a German.

The Archdeacon informed the churchwarden (he was the only man left and no woman was worthy of so exalted an office) of the Bishop's appointment. But then the incredible happened, parishioners emerged as if from underground. People who had nothing to do with the church, except on special occasions like baptisms, weddings and funerals, who never contributed a penny to its upkeep, were now protesting against the appointment of a German Jew. They were not going to have an enemy as their Vicar.

All this was happening behind Biebermann's back. He was not supposed to know about the problems he was creating. But he easily guessed when the Archdeacon had to explain that the appointment had fallen through.

The Bishop was now getting desperate: what was to be done with Biebermann? To his rescue came one of those odd Evangelical Societies which held churches in its patronage for the purpose of keeping them out of the hands of Anglo-Catholics. They had a chapel which no one wanted, with no congregation and no parish attached to it. It had been badly bombed, had no funds and no future. But there were two evangelical families who insisted on keeping the church open at their expense. They could only afford a German Jew.

The Rev. Ferdinand Biebermann was installed by the Archdeacon as priest-in-charge. At last he was off the Bishop's hands.

- 4 -

Mr. Biebermann began his duties in a humble way, by clearing the rubble. Soon the war damage was repaired at the expense of the government. First the roof was fixed, then the windows were glazed, then the walls repaired and painted. The priest-in-charge and his wife did the rest of the work. Clara, good hausfrau that she was, went about the task with great zest. She washed and polished and cleaned for weeks on end. At the end of the month the church was ready for use.

The following Sunday the congregation arrived: two elderly men, two elderly women and a middle-aged daughter. Together with Clara there were six people in all. The daughter played the organ and the service began with the rousing hymn: *Onward Christian soldiers*. It was a start.

Moishe arrived at the Biebermanns the month after they had settled in their new church. It was a happy reunion. There was much that they had to tell each other. It did Moishe good to talk to someone he had known before and who had met Nina. This link with the past gave him courage and hope. His problem was what to do with himself. He confided to the Biebermanns that he probably should not have come to England at all.

"What can I do here?" he asked, "I don't speak the language and I'm disabled as well."

They were making various suggestions when Clara said: "We've been looking for a part-time verger. Why don't you take on the job and live with us until something better turns up?"

Ferdinand was delighted. "What a splendid idea," he exclaimed. "Why didn't I think of it before?"

Moishe was only too willing and he returned to London to collect his belongings and tell the secretary of the Alliance of the arrangement.

- 5 -

Kurt Steinberg was very agitated. He was walking up and down and talking to himself: "Donner wetter! What an ass! Why should we be concerned with the Germans after what they have done to us?"

Moishe watched him out of the corner of his eye. He could not make out what it was all about. Only gradually did he get the story out of him. "That man, Victor Gollancz, what does he know? He knows nothing about Germans."

"Who is Victor Gollancz?" asked Moishe. "It sounds like a Jewish name."

"Of course he is a Jew. Only a Jew would think of it!" exclaimed Steinberg.

"Can you imagine," he turned to Moishe, "an English Jew starting a campaign to collect food and clothing for starving Germans, after all that they have done to us? He must be mad!"

"You don't think we ought to help them now that they have been defeated?" asked Moishe cautiously.

"Help them!" exploded Steinberg. "Who helped our people when they sent us to the concentration camps and the gas ovens? Ha!"

Moishe did not answer. It occurred to him that Kurt Steinberg was only speaking from hearsay as he had spent the war-years in Britain. He wondered how he would have felt had he personally been involved in the tragedy? And yet, he, Moishe in spite of all the misery he had gone through, found it difficult to hate. Perhaps Steinberg was right after all? But then he thought of Stieber, of the Germans he had met in Munich, of the Friecke family, and he wondered: how can one keep on hating such people? People so much like ourselves?

Finally he turned to Steinberg: "What about the good Germans who like ourselves have suffered innocently?"

"There are no good Germans," shouted Steinberg as he left the room slamming the door.

- 6 -

Pastor Biebermann knew all about Victor Gollancz. He had read his tracts and heard him speak on the subject: save the German children now. He was impressed by his Christ-like spirit and held him in high esteem. He told Moishe about this remarkable Jew who refused to accuse the whole German nation of the Nazi crimes.

Biebermann translated a passage from Golancz's book for Moishe, *Our Threatened Values*, published that very year, castigating the spirit of vengeance on the part of a supposedly Christian people:

> "That seems to me, as a Jew who believes in Christian ethics, a somewhat heretical application of Christ's teaching, and fifty bishops will not make me, who can read the New Testament as well as they, think otherwise."

Clara listened attentively while the two men were talking. "Is it not remarkable," she said as if speaking to herself, "that a non-Christian should have to plead with so-called Christians to behave in the spirit of Christ."

Moishe turned to Clara: "Not at all!" he exclaimed, "not at all! The Master said, 'by their fruit you shall know them . . . not those who call me Lord, Lord, shall enter the Kingdom of God, but those who do the will of my Father'."

"Pseudo-Christianity is worse than atheism," said Pastor Biebermann. "and you and I, Clara dear, know it only too well."

Clara did not answer.

"I would like to meet that man," said Moishe after a while. "Perhaps I could be of some use to him."

- 7 -

Moishe met Gollancz early in 1947. Gollancz was still under the powerful impression of what he had seen for himself during his tour of Germany. He carried with him a packet of photographs and these photographs spoke more convincingly than anything he could say. The emaciated faces, the appalling living conditions, the despair in the eyes of the old and the young, spoke volumes. With a remarkable tragico-dramatic sense, Gollancz had paid special attention to footwear. In a series of photographs he showed nothing but shoes. The photographs were passed round the audience so that people could see for themselves. To call

those tattered objects shoes was a travesty. They were only the remnants of what they must have been originally, now recognizable only by the fact that they were tied to feet.

Moishe lingered over one photograph for several minutes. The object spoke to him personally. He immediately recalled the wearer: "Why," he exclaimed almost audibly, "I could swear this is Kurt Frieke's shoe." It was a soft running shoe, half of the upper part had gone, a piece of string held the sole in position, another piece of string was tied round the ankle, most of the toes were exposed, the colour was a dirty grey.

While Moishe was thinking of the Friecke family and wondering how they were faring, Victor Gollancz was addressing the audience:

> "As most people are aware, who are aware of me at all, I am a Jew; and I am sometimes asked why, as a Jew, I bother about those in whose name infamies have been committed against my race, the memory of which, I fear - though I would wish it otherwise - may never die. I am sometimes asked this, I regret to say, by fellow Jews who have forgotten, if they ever knew, the teaching of our prophets. It has also been suggested that in my work for the Germans I am, in some deliberate and offensively self-conscious sense, heaping coals of fire. I would not much mind if this were true for what matters is not man's motive but any practical result that may follow from his work - and the present case that, I am sorry to say, has so far been distressingly small. The charge, however, is untrue and ludicrous. It is indeed a fact that I felt called upon to help suffering Germans precisely because I am a Jew . . . As a Jew I believe that nothing can save the world but a general act of repentance in place of the present self-righteous insistence on the wickedness of others: for we have all sinned, and continue to sin most horribly . . . As a Jew I believe that good treatment and not bad treatment makes men good . . . unless you treat a man well when he has treated you ill, you just get nowhere, or rather you give further impetus to evil and head straight for human annihilation . . ."[1]

The audience was listening with rapt attention. All eyes were fastened upon the stocky middle-aged Jew with black-rimmed spectacles and bushy eye-brows. This was no ordinary charity appeal. It was a sermon which went to the heart. It was a challenge to man's humanity. But the man who was preaching the sermon was no mere sermonizer but a man of action. He challenged his fellow-men to acts of compassion and the appeal was to man's highest motives.

When Gollancz finished his speech and sat down wiping his brow, the audience rose to give him a standing ovation. Moishe stood and clapped though he understood little of what was said. It was rather the atmosphere of good-will to which he yielded. Clara had tears in her eyes. Pastor Biebermann was whispering: "grossartig! grossartig!"

After the meeting Biebermann introduced Moishe to Victor Gollancz. They liked each

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[1] Quoted with slight alteration from Gollancz's Foreword to his *In Darkest Germany*, 1947, 18f.

other on sight.

"Come to see me at my office," Gollancz said in halting German, "there we can talk more freely."

Moishe promised to call the following week.

- 8 -

Gollancz took Moishe out for lunch to one of those quiet little restaurants around Covent Garden and near his office. They sat by a window which overlooked the street and watched the traffic go by.

"What a busy town," exclaimed Moishe as he saw a crowd of men and women emerge from large building on their way to lunch.

Victor Gollancz smiled benignly. "I hope you like it here, though the language must be a problem."

"A problem! I doubt I will ever learn it! There seems to be no rhyme or reason to it. You spell one way and pronounce another so as to make it more difficult for foreigners, I suppose."

"It must sound odd to strangers. What do you find the most difficult?"

"The 'th' and the 'w' are bad enough but then you add letters for fun like k-nife and k-night, just to confuse!"

"I agree. Bernard Shaw, you probably heard the name, has called for more reasonable spelling, but we English are very conservative, as you know."

"Well, people become used to certain ways and refuse to change."

At this point in the conversation, the waitress brought in the soup. While they were eating their meal the conversation did not go beyond the English weather.

After lunch Gollancz took Moishe by bus to the Embankment. They strolled along by the river. It was one of those still and hazy days in early Spring when the sun is only a small grey ball surrounded by mist. At last they found a quiet spot and watched the barges sailing by. It reminded Moishe first of Vilno and then of Warsaw.

"This looks very much like my native land, the rivers and the barges, only that our rivers are narrower and cleaner."

"I would love to hear your story," said Gollancz, looking towards the Thames, "if you would care to tell it."

"It would take a long time, Herr Gollancz."

"Never mind the time, I have kept the afternoon free for that purpose."

"Well, where shall I begin? I hardly know where to start, so much has happened in my life."

"Begin at the beginning," suggested Gollancz, with an encouraging smile.

"It will take longer than you think," warned Moishe.

"It does not matter, I will listen patiently."

- 9 -

It was already getting dark and a fine drizzle was blowing off the Thames. At last Gollancz began to feel the cold.

"It is chilly here and we are beginning to get wet. I apologize for our English climate."

"I am used to worse than this," said Moishe.

"Well, let us go home, I warned Ruth that I might bring a guest for dinner."

Gollancz hailed a taxi and they drove to Eaton Place.

Mrs. Gollancz was an accomplished hostess. She asked no questions and behaved as if Moishe were a member of the family. This gave him a sense of ease. Not much was said during the meal. After dinner Victor and his guest retired to the study. Moishe resumed his tale. The clock struck midnight when Moishe stopped talking. He looked up to the mantelpiece. "Is it as late as that? I warned you it would take a long time," he said apologetically.

Victor did not answer. He was too deeply moved to speak. He took off his glasses, rubbed his eyes as if to drive away a nightmare and fell into a reverie. Except for the ticking of the clock the room was silent. Moishe heard himself breathe.

At last Gollancz roused himself. He opened his eyes, replaced his glasses and looked at his guest. There was so much sympathy and warm humanity in that look that it warmed Moishe's heart and brought tears to his eyes. He knew that he had found a friend.

"And what will you be doing now?"

Moishe had no ready answer. This was the very question that worried him.

"I don't know," he replied. "I think I ought to go back to Germany. There are people who need me there."

"And who are they?" asked Victor with obvious surprise his voice.

"The poor starving Germans, like the Friecke family."

If there was anything that stirred Victor's heart it was human generosity. After all that Moishe had told him he did not expect such an answer. His eyes sparkled with excitement as he rose from his chair to shake Moishe's hand.

"This is a brave decision," he said in husky voice. "I admire you for it. We need more Jews like you."

"Well, I told you, I am an odd Jew. I believe in Jesus."

"I don't care what you believe, all I care is what you do. Many call themselves Christians who have nothing to do with Christ. Some are even Church dignitaries."

"I understand what you mean," said Moishe simply. "It is late now, I'd better be going. Sorry to keep you up so long."

"Don't apologize, it was a privilege to meet you. I would like to make a proposal to you but as you say, it's late now. Could we meet again?"

"Certainly. I will look forward to it."

"Well, I will get in touch with you now that have your address."

Victor took his guest to the door and saw him out.

- 10 -

"Peggy" said Gollancz cheerfully, "let me introduce a friend of mine, Moishe Litvak, a DP. Speak to him in any language you like - German, Polish, Russian, Yiddish - but not English!"

Peggy stretched out her hand and said laughing: "Guten Tag, mein Herr."

"Good morning!" replied Moishe in English, rolling his ‘r’.

Peggy acted as Gollancz’s executive for the Save Europe Campaign. She was well informed about conditions in post-war Germany and knew the language well enough to make herself understood. Peggy and Moishe liked each other on sight. They were kindred spirits who had much in common. They were both imbued with deep sympathy for human suffering and a concern for justice. The three of them sat down to plan their campaign. There was always a problem of liaison between the London office and the *Evangelische Hilfswerk* in Germany. There was also the need for someone to visit individual recipients and to investigate special requests. It was decided that Moishe should return to Germany and act as an agent on behalf of the campaign.

- 11 -

Pastor Stieber was at the station to welcome his old friend. They fell into each others arms. "What a joy to have you back!"

"It’s nice to be back!" said Moishe. "How are Frau Stieber and Herta?"

"Herta, unfortunately, is not too well; her age and the war years are beginning to tell. Otherwise we are all well, praise God."

Moishe’s first visit was to the Friecke family. Grandmother was in bed, worn out with the privations of refugee life in the war-stricken land. But their general condition had improved thanks to a cleaning job Mrs. Friecke had obtained at the American canteen. The children looked much better fed and their footwear was much improved as a result of one of Gollancz’s parcels sent at Moishe’s request. Moishe was greeted with great joy. The children swarmed all over him and treated him as if he were the father of the family. Even the old lady perked up and insisted on getting out of bed to welcome the guest. Mrs. Friecke was still at work and Moishe waited for her to come back. On seeing him she almost fainted. "Praise God! You are back, our protector and friend!" she cried, tears rolling down her cheeks. "Ach du lieber Gott!" she kept saying. There was much talk and laughter.

- 12 -

Moishe obtained a special permit from the military authorities to travel in the American zone. Thanks to Pastor Stieber’s connections his work centred upon church circles. He became known as *unser Judenchrist* - our Jewish Christian. He enjoyed the respect and trust of many church leaders.

One day his business took him to the outskirts of Frankfurt. After meeting with a few church leaders in the village of Ginnheim he made his way back to the city. Outside the railway station he noticed a man he thought he had seen before. The man was standing at the curb speaking to somebody. As Moishe passed them he overheard a few words in Yiddish. His curiosity was aroused and he waited for an opportunity to accost the man. In a few moments the two parted and the stranger began walking towards the station. Moishe caught up with him: "Excuse me!" he said, "I noticed that you speak Yiddish with a Lithuanian accent. Are you a landsman?"

"My name is Berel Katz, I come from Vilno."

Moishe burst out laughing, "What a coincidence!" he cried. "You don’t remember me? I

am Moishe Litvak! We have met before."

Berel stretched out his hand: "Well! Well! Haven't you changed! Fancy meeting you here, alive and well!"

They recalled the old and bitter days.

"Let's go to a restaurant and chat for a while," suggested Moishe. They found a small place near the station and ordered coffee. They had much to tell each other. Many things had happened since they last met in the hideout in Zavalna Street where Moishe received his commission to travel to Warsaw. Berel, like Moishe, had lost his wife. Two of his children had died of typhoid fever. The other two perished at the hands of the Germans. He had miraculously survived in the forests with the partisans and now he was busy smuggling emigrants to Palestine on behalf of the Zionist organisation.

"And what are you doing with yourself?" asked Berel.

"Well, I am engaged in welfare work, here in Germany," said Moishe,

"With whom are you working?" asked Berel curiously. "Is it the same organization as myself?"

"I'm afraid not. You won't believe it, I am not working for an organization at all. I am helping friends in England to distribute food and clothing to needy Germans."

Berel was thunderstruck. He jumped to his feet pushing the table aside so that the coffee spilled. He started to say something but couldn't produce a sound. For a moment there was an uneasy silence, neither of them knowing what to do next. Suddenly Berel spat into Moishe's face, shouting, "Traitor!" and dashed out of the restaurant slamming the door. Moishe wiped his face and remained seated for a long time. At last he rose heavily to his feet, paid his bill and walked out.

- 13 -

At first Moishe was deeply hurt. He kept rubbing the spot on his face with his handkerchief as if to rub away the incident. The more he rubbed the worse he felt about it but gradually he calmed down. He still had a couple of hours to wait for his train so he decided to walk. He walked the ruined streets of Frankfurt around the railway station. As he walked he kept repeating to himself: traitor! traitor! He must have been walking for about half an hour when he became aware that he was attracting the attention of passersby. He decided to go back to the station. What he wanted most was to be alone.

There is no more lonely place than a busy railway station full of preoccupied and indifferent people. Moishe spotted a corner seat on a hard bench next to a man fast asleep. His neighbour was snoring gently with his head hanging down and his mouth wide open. Moishe sat down and began to think.

He called me traitor, he spat in my face, he did exactly what was done to Jesus. But Jesus took no offence although he was the Messiah. He prayed for his persecutors. And here am I, an uneducated little Jew, a mere Litvak! Why should I mind? I understand how Berel Katz feels. I felt exactly the same. I was crying out for vengeance. He cannot forgive, but who can? But for the mercy of God, I would have been as bitter as he is today. Poor Berel! I understand him only too well. When I was lying on the roof with the machine-gun at my side all I wanted was to kill Germans. This was only natural considering what they did to us. It

took me a long time to find my way back to my former way of thinking. It was only when I came face to face with the suffering Germans that I realized that Christ's way is the better way.

Berel is an impetuous man. David told me how he called him *provocateur*! Now he calls his brother traitor. How strange! It seems to run in the family.

Perhaps Berel Katz is also a traitor? First, he fought P.P.S. nationalism for the sake of universal brotherhood, then he worked with the Poles whose only aim was to restore Poland, now he is an agent of the Zionist Organization. A Bundist turned Zionist! Such is life. We grasp at every straw in search of a solution. But one thing we cannot do, we cannot break the vicious circle of hate. We cannot afford to stretch out a reconciling hand to the enemy. Yet Gollancz is right. Hatred only produces hatred and we are exactly where we were before. Who will help us to break the chains of our misery?

The loudspeaker suddenly announced the imminent departure of the train to Munich. Moishe roused himself and ran to catch the train. He just made it.

CHAPTER III

When he arrived in Munich, Moishe found a letter awaiting him. It was from Clara. Clara was not in the habit of writing and he was apprehensive opening it. Indeed, the worst had happened. The Reverend Ferdinand Biebermann had died suddenly six weeks ago. Clara had been too distraught to write sooner. She was now making preparations to return to Munich. Would Moishe break the news to the Stiebers? She hoped they would put her up for a while until she got straightened out.

Moishe had a soft spot for Clara and admired Ferdinand. His death affected him profoundly. Yet behind the sadness there was a hidden mischievous note of expectation which he tried to suppress. Now Clara was free and he would see her soon. He scolded himself for thinking that way but the more he tried to divert his mind the more his thoughts turned towards her. In some curious way Clara's image became mixed up in his imagination with that of Nina. Sometimes he was not too sure whether he was thinking of Nina or Clara.

At last Clara arrived and Moishe was at the station to meet her. He expected a weeping and broken woman. To his surprise he found the opposite. Clara was every whit her prim self. Composed, simply but tastefully dressed and affable. So much so that Moishe was taken aback. Except for the narrow black arm-band, there was nothing to indicate that she was in mourning. Was it a lack of feeling? he wondered.

The Stiebers were pleased with Clara's arrival. She could not have come at a more opportune time. Herta was bedridden and Frau Stieber, not too well herself, had to care for an invalid servant as well as take care of the household.

Clara soon settled in and made herself at home. She liked to keep busy and she occupied herself with the daily chores. Perhaps a little bit over-busy? Moishe was wondering. Was she trying to keep her mind off more recent events? Ferdinand was never mentioned. This puzzled him. Was it indifference? Was it a hard streak in Clara's character? Had she not cared for Ferdinand after all?

- 2 -

One Sunday afternoon Clara and Moishe were left in the house alone. The Stiebers had gone to visit a parishioner at the hospital. Herta was asleep in her room. They were sitting at the table opposite each other. Clara was pouring coffee. Moishe felt uneasy as he stole an occasional glance at her face. The afternoon sun was falling upon her profile and the soft autumn light seemed to add gold to her hair. There was a warmth about her which reminded him of Nina, yet they were so different in looks and temperament. Moishe felt he must say something to break the uneasy silence. He tried to think of a subject but all he could think about was Ferdinand. Ferdinand was uppermost in his mind each time he saw Clara. Finally he broke the silence: "Isn't it strange that we should be together again," he remarked uneasily.

"Yes, life is strange. Who would have thought that I would be back in Munich so soon?"

"Do you miss your husband, Clara?" he ventured.

"Of course I do. You have no idea what he meant to me after our reconciliation. We had never been so close before. In Berlin there was the family, the household; he was busy with

the parish, we never really knew each other. Those were lost years. Hitler poisoned my heart. In the end I turned away from him when he needed me most. But I do not regret it now. The last couple of years have made up for it."

"You are so composed. You give the impression that nothing has happened. No one would have guessed that you were in love with him."

Clara turned her penetrating blue eyes upon Moishe. "Did you expect me to go about crying?" she said with surprise in her voice.

"Well, not exactly crying, but you seem almost happy and I have been puzzled."

"Let me tell you the truth, then," said Clara in her soft southern German accent. "I am a lonely woman too proud to let the world know. Besides I am trying to keep my word."

"Your word?" asked Moishe curiously.

"Yes, I promised to be brave."

"That you certainly are."

"It was about two months before Ferdinand died. He may have had a premonition. We were walking along the shore towards the setting sun. I can still see every detail as if it were today. Ferdinand suddenly stopped, took my hand and said: ‘Clara, if anything should happen to me, I want you to be brave.’ He frightened me. Why? I asked, are you not well? Is there something wrong with you? ‘No, not at all,’ he replied, ‘but as you know, human life is uncertain. You have no friends here. You will be lonely. You will go back to Germany and you won’t cry, will you?’"

She paused. Her eyes filled with tears and her voice began to break. "Excuse me," she said. She rose from the table and went to the kitchen. Moishe was left by himself. He was sorry to have started it all.

When Clara came back, her eyes were red and she apologized. "I’m sorry to be so silly. You must forgive me," she said with a wan smile.

"Forgive you? It is I who must ask your pardon." said Moishe apologetically, "I raised the subject."

"Well, you might as well know. You are one of our few close friends. I promised him not to cry and to go back to Germany."

She suddenly bent over the table, buried her face in her hands and began to sob like a small child.

Moishe’s heart was bleeding. He stood up, went over to Clara and put his arm round her with tears rolling down his cheeks. In the end he took her hand and kissed it. She looked up at him through her tears and smiled. "Moishe," she said, "you are a comfort to me. Let’s be brave together." Gently pushing him aside, she rose from her chair and left the room.

- 3 -

Moishe and Clara were two lonely people. Moishe had no one who belonged to him and neither had Clara. Her parents were dead, her children had perished in the war, her husband was gone. Her only link with the past was Moishe Litvak. He had known Ferdinand. He was one of his race, he held similar views and ideals. Like Ferdinand, Moishe was a sufferer who never complained. Her motherly instincts were stimulated by that man who lived humbly and never asked for any favours.

For Moishe, Clara embodied womanhood and she reminded him of Nina. Outwardly they were different. Nina had inherited some of her father's features: pale complexion, jet-black hair, brown eyes. Clara was a typical German: fresh complexion, blonde and blue-eyed. Both were slightly built, with gentle, regular features. What made them so alike were their natural unassuming dispositions and warm-heartedness. As could be expected, Moishe and Clara drifted closer and closer to each other.

He told her the story of his life, he spoke to her about Nina, he shared with her his daily problems and experiences. She was a good and sympathetic listener.

Clara was not a good talker but whenever she spoke there was no chatter. She was never concerned with trivial matters. She had good judgement and was exceedingly thoughtful. It was good to be in her company.

The Stiebers watched the budding romance with friendly interest. "I wonder," said Frau Stieber to her husband, "how long they will hold out?"

"They are getting there," said Pfarrer Stieber with a chuckle.

- 4 -

Herta died in late autumn. They all went to the funeral. Pfarrer Stieber spoke warmly of Herta's self-effacing life, her devotion to duty, her Christian character. He finished by saying: "there is meeting again for those who die in Christ. Jesus said: 'In my Father's house are many dwellings . . . I go to prepare a place for you.' We do not sorrow as those who have no hope. Since Christ rose from the dead there is an eternal hope for every believer. As the Apostle Paul had said, 'Whether we live, we live unto the Lord; or whether we die, we die unto the Lord; whether we live therefore or die we are the Lord's'."

Moishe and Clara stood at the edge of the open grave. She leaned towards him and took his hand. He responded with a gentle squeeze. As Pastor Stieber pronounced the benediction they both bowed their heads. It was as if the blessing was specially meant for them. Somehow they both knew that from henceforth their paths had been joined together, they now belonged to each other until death.

- 5 -

The wedding was a simple ceremony. The reception was at the parsonage. Only a few special friends were invited. Clara was simply dressed and Moishe wore his Sunday suit.

The Litvaks went back to a humble flat with one room and a kitchen on the ground floor of a recently restored building. The Stiebers had decided to accept a call to Stuttgart and were to leave in a week or two. Moishe was working on behalf of the Refugee Committee in Geneva and made Munich his headquarters. Clara acted as his secretary. They were visiting refugee camps, trying to find relatives, writing letters to the Red Cross, keeping in touch with needy families, arranging medical help for the sick, providing food for the hungry and clothes for the naked. They were a busy couple, hardly ever at home.

One morning as Clara drew back the curtains she saw that her window was splashed with paint. She went outside to investigate. To her horror she found a swastika painted below the window and the ominous slogan she knew so well from Hitler's days: *Jude verrecke*! (Jew perish!) The rest of the day she spent removing the paint and washing the window. The

incident shook both of them, They never thought that this would happen so soon after the war.

"We have learned nothing!" Clara remarked bitterly.

Moishe, with his usual good nature, waved it off. "Few people ever do," he said. “Don’t take it too seriously."

They would have taken no more notice of the incident, but exactly one week later, the windows were again splashed with paint. There was another swastika, but this time the words were different: *Verräterin*! *Rassenschande*! Clara was called a traitoress who defiled her race.

Moishe did not mind being called a Jew but he minded profoundly when Clara was maligned. They were both very upset. Clara felt ashamed that this should happen all over again among her people. She almost felt personally responsible. They wondered what to do next. Their first thought was to call the police. But what good would that do? After long deliberation they decided to leave Germany for good. They had done what they could. They were obviously not wanted. The question was where should they go? Clara was German and Moishe was a DP without a homeland. Who would receive them? There was only one country that a Jewish DP could try - Palestine.

The next morning Moishe called at the Zionist Agency and registered for emigration to Palestine.

- 6 -

The plight of displaced persons stranded in European camps waiting for a country which would accept them stirred the world’s conscience. The United States opened its doors to a limited number. Many, mainly the young, wanted to go to Palestine. Great Britain found itself in a dilemma; it desired to retain the good will of the Arabs and at the same time to pacify the Jews. It obviously could not do both. The White Paper on Palestine with its severe restrictions on Jewish immigration met with outrage on the part of the Jewish communities around the world. The Zionist Organization redoubled its efforts to smuggle Jews into Palestine illegally.

From November 23rd, 1945, when the first ship with illegal immigrants was intercepted by the British authorities, another fifty-six vessels tried their luck. Of these only sixteen managed to elude the British navy, forty were turned back.

The SS United States left the Italian port of Bari carrying seven hundred refugees. It deliberately ran aground on the shores of Nahariya, twenty-one miles north of Haifa and spilled its human cargo into the sea. Police and soldiers managed to round up about one hundred refugees, the other six hundred were hidden away by Jewish settlers.

The most notorious incident occurred in connection with the vessel called Exodus. It carried 4500 refugees And came within 17 miles of the shores of Palestine when it was attacked by five British destroyers. It was rammed from three directions and boarded by British troops. The refugees resisted, resulting in the deaths of six and one hundred and twenty wounded. One of the first victims was an orphaned boy of 16 years named Hirsch Yakubovich. The Exodus was escorted to Haifa where the refugees were disembarked and then taken in prison ships back to France and from thence to Hamburg. This was done to "teach the Jews a lesson".

Cyprus became the depository of about 12000 Jewish refugees crowded into make-shift camps. The British authorities allowed a quota of only 750 a month to enter Palestine and even so small a token of good-will was fiercely resisted by the Arabs.

- 7 -

Moishe and Clara left for Italy and with 1500 others boarded the illegal ship Haim Orlossoroff. For a time it looked as if they would make it but when they came within sight of the Promised Land, the British navy discovered them. The troops boarded the ship and as usual the men put up fierce resistance. The soldiers used tear gas and water hoses to subdue the desperate rebels. The ship was turned back under escort and landed at Famagusta in Cyprus.

The refugees were taken to the detention camp at Xylotombu and placed in rusty Quonset huts. One hut provided shelter for five to six families, so crowded there was no privacy and no comforts. Life was rough, primitive and boring. People were restless and nerves were strained to breaking point,

In the Litvak's hut there was a young couple who had been married by a rabbi in the camp. The young lad whose name was Abram, had not known a home since the age of fifteen when he fled from Warsaw to Russian occupied territory to escape the Germans. But the Germans overtook him and together with hundreds of others he was stripped naked and placed with his back to an open pit to be shot. He was only alive because he fainted while awaiting death and fell into the grave too soon. When he came to he found himself in the pit surrounded by dead bodies.

Of the five hundred Jews who were shot, there were four other survivors. They managed to escape unseen and creep into the nearest village to hide. In the end Abram managed to slip across the fighting line and offer himself as a volunteer to the Russian army. He was inspired by one single desire - to kill Germans. He was enlisted in the Russian forces and marched with Zhukov's army all the way from Kharkov to Berlin. Later he was smuggled by the Zionist underground through the DP camp of Bergen-Belsen to the U.S. Zone and from there to Italy where he boarded the Haim Orlossoroff.

On board ship Abram and Moishe rarely met. Abram was with the young haluzim singing Zionist hymns and dreaming of the new life in a kibbutz. Moishe, now middle-aged, kept in the background. He was not an ideological Zionist. All he knew was that there was no room for the remnant of his people in Europe or anywhere else. He also knew that Palestine was a trouble spot and at best only offered a temporary solution.

There was another reason why the Litvaks kept to themselves. Clara was very conscious of her German origin. The only language she knew was German and her looks gave her away. She tried to mix as little as possible and whenever she was accosted she smiled sweetly and pointed to her husband. The tension on deck was such that people had no desire to occupy themselves with matters other than their own. They were so mixed a group from every part of Europe that no one took much notice of Clara. But in the camp things were different. There was much time on hand and much gossiping.

Living in the same hut with the Litvaks was a family with an elderly spinster aunt and a young niece. Sarah was a difficult woman under any circumstances. But under camp conditions she soured everything within the range of her voice; it carried far and wide. Nothing was ever right with Sarah; she complained about everything. The food was either too cold or too hot, the weather was too dry or too wet, people were either too quiet or too noisy, and so it went on. Her inseparable companion was her niece Rivka. Between them they dissected, analyzed and criticized every person's character within their reach. The epithet *shnorer* was their main weapon. In Yiddish a shnorer is a whining, impudent beggar, but it may also mean a despicable person who cannot be trusted. For Sarah and Rivka everyone in camp was a shnorer except themselves.

It was inevitable that Moishe and Clara would become the victims of these two women. But Clara was the more vulnerable one by reason of her origin. They soon found a name for her: *dee daitshke*. By itself in Yiddish this simply means, a German woman, but not the way Sarah and Rivka said it. All the derision and hatred they could think of they put into that single word. The daitshke embodied all the misery, sorrow and suffering they and their race had endured. They pierced Clara with hostile eyes and sought an occasion for war. They soon found one.

Moishe and Clara occupied the far end corner of the hut with a thin curtain suspended from the roof to give them a measure of privacy. Clara had a compulsion for cleanliness and frequently passed by the Gutman family with a pail in her hand, carrying water either in or out. Each time she passed Sarah's corner she heard her hissing voice: "Here goes dee daitshke again!" Clara was only too conscious of the hatred that emanated from that corner. At first she tried to take no notice but inevitably it began to wear her down. She would quicken her pace and look the other way, but the hissing voice pursued her whichever way she turned.

One morning Clara was walking out with her pail of dish water when she tripped in front of the Gutman corner. The dirty water spilled all over the floor and splashed on to Sarah's clothes. This was more than she could stand, especially from dee daitshke! With her hair flying and her fists clenched she dashed at Clara who was slowly picking herself up. Rivka was hard behind her aunt. The two women pushed Clara down to the floor again and began to pull her hair. Moishe came running from the outside and so did everyone else. The hut crowded with people, there was an even larger crowd outside. "You traitor!" shouted Sarah at the top of her voice. "You meshumed! Fancy bringing a daitshke into a Jewish camp! She spilled dirty water over us. This is how she loves the Jews! You shnorer you! They drank our blood, they burned our flesh, they butchered our families and now she throws dishwater at us innocent people! Away with her! We want no daitshke here! Heraus! Heraus!"

With Moishe's help, Clara rose from the floor dazed and dripping. By this time a camp official had arrived to investigate the reason for the tumult. It was obvious that the Litvaks could not remain in that hut. They were quickly moved to another site at the opposite end of the camp.

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Moishe had gone to post a letter at the camp office when he met Abram. Abram was his usual affable self. "I'm sorry for what happened between your wife and Sarah," he said, "These women, they can never keep their peace. You were good neighbours to have in the hut."

"Clara is very upset about it all. It is rather unfortunate. She cannot help her origin. Neither can you, nor I."

"Of course, you must understand how we feel about Germans," replied Abram.

"Naturally, I do, but it is rather silly to blame every German for what the Nazis did to us."

"And who do you think were the Nazis?" asked Abram, somewhat peeved.

"Well, they were also Germans, but you do not blame a whole nation for what some them did? Do you?"

"Yes, I do!" said Abram in a hoarse voice laden with emotion.

"You mean to say you blame the women and the children and the old and the crippled for Hitler and his henchmen?" asked Moishe in a tone of unbelief.

"A nation is a nation," replied Abram."One Jew misbehaved and all our people suffered. You cannot isolate individual from collective guilt. The Germans are guilty of the greatest crime in history. We will never forget and never forgive!" he said in a loud voice full of bitterness.

"We will have to forget and forgive. How otherwise can we live side by side - in eternal hatred?"

"Moishe," shouted Abram, "there can be no forgiveness! No reconciliation! No Jew worthy of his name will ever shake the hand of a German."

Moishe stopped to look at this man whose eyes were burning with hatred, looking out of a pale and drawn face. Though barely twenty-three years of age this stooping, haggard figure looked like an old man. Abram appeared to be the embodiment of the legendary, homeless, wandering Jew. Moishe was deeply moved. All his love and sorrow for his people stirred within him. He stretched out his hand towards Abram, but Abram pretended not to see it.

"Haver," said Moishe soothingly, "I know how you feel. Only God can heal our wounds and put love again into our hearts."

"There is no God," shouted Abram, "there is no love. From now on we are alone! We will hate, we will fight, we will take our revenge!"

Abram turned abruptly and went away and Moishe was left standing wide-eyed in the middle of the road. "Where will it end?" he sighed to himself.

- 10 -

A huge bonfire burned in the middle of the camp. Young men and women were dancing the Hora. There was dancing, shouting and laughter most of the night celebrating the end of their bitter journey. The ha-tikvah was sung again and again. The haunting melody was stirring the young and bringing tears to the eyes of the old. They called out mazzel tov! to each other and stayed on their feet until the small hours of the morning. They ran from group to group and hut to hut, shaking hands and embracing each other. Old squabbles were forgotten, enemies became friends. It was a memorable night for everyone, except the

Litvaks.

Moishe and Clara were in their hut on their bunks talking in whispers. "What shall we do now?" asked Clara. "The camp is being disbanded, they will all be going to Palestine."

"Perhaps we ought to go with them and try to settle in the new land? Jews have suffered enough discrimination to be tolerant. We are certainly not a racist people. After all you are married to a Jew."

"What kind of a Jew are you?" asked Clara, after a period of thoughtful deliberation. "You are baptized, you believe in Jesus. You explained to me the meaning of the word meshumed - in the eyes of Sarah you are a traitor to your people - almost as bad as being a German."

Moishe did not answer for a long while. He listened to the singing outside. "They are singing the ha-tikvah - it means the Hope," said Moishe. "There is new hope for all Jews in the Land of Promise. Of course I am a Jew. Faith in Jesus makes me a better Jew, besides I love my people. They have suffered much and we must be forbearing."

"I will do whatever you decide," said Clara humbly. “I will go where you go, this is the least can do."

"Clara dear, don’t be frightened. We trust in God. He will not let us down." said Moishe softly, stretching out his hand across the bunk to touch her face.

Outside, the noise gradually diminished and Moishe and Clara slept.

CHAPTER IV

The Galilah, a 3800 ton vessel formerly the property of the Hudson River Line in the U.S.A. called at Famagusta proudly flying the Israeli flag. It came to take on board the remnants of the Jewish refugees still stranded on the island.

On May 14th 1948, Palestine ceased to exist as a geographical entity. Israel was proclaimed an independent Jewish State after nearly 2000 years of diaspora existence. At last the prophetic vision had come true:

> "Therefore, behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when men shall no longer say, 'As the Lord lives who brought up the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt' but 'As the Lord lives who brought up and led the descendants of the house of Israel out of the north country and out of all the countries where he had driven them', then they shall dwell in their own land."

The moment the British mandate in Palestine came to an end, Jews began to pour in from every corner of Europe. At last the turn came for the DPs in Cyprus. Finally, they could go to the only country which would receive them gladly - Israel.

It was an ideal time for sailing, early in January 1949 when the Galilah left Famagusta. The wide, boisterous sea, the sparkling waves, the fresh air and the blue sky had an intoxicating effect upon the immigrants. A new sense of freedom, after years of restriction, added zest and hope to the young and the old alike. They had made this journey before but under quite different circumstances. Now they were travelling as legal repatriates at the expense and invitation of the Israeli government. No one was pursuing them and there was no danger of their being turned back.

Even Moishe and Clara, who were at first full of apprehension, were carried away by the exhilarating spirit aboard the ship. Everyone was excited and Clara was treated as part of the family - the mishpahah. To their joy and relief Sarah and Rivka were not on the boat. The Gutmans had been granted visas to the U.S.A. and remained behind. Abram was too happy and occupied with other matters to take much notice of the Litvaks. Since their last encounter Moishe and Abram had hardly met. They ran into each other on board ship several times but just nodded to each other. Their views were too disparate for a compromise and so they were determined to leave it at that.

The Galilah anchored outside the harbour. The captain had been instructed to enter Haifa in the morning to give the officials a chance to welcome the new arrivals. Most of the passengers were already awake before dawn, too excited to sleep. They were crowding the deck and peering across the water. The rising sun threw long shadows upon the Carmel which appeared fresh and green as a result of the winter rains. Suddenly, the sun was overshadowed by heavy clouds and it began to rain again. The mountain became shrouded in mist and the harbour disappeared from sight. Only a few young men braved the rain; the others went below deck.

When the gong sounded, the anchors were lifted and the boat was manoeuvred into the harbour. This was too much for the travellers, rain or no rain, they all came running to the upper decks. As the ship drew nearer to the shore, shouts could be heard from land: shalom! shalom! hazak! hazak! They could see crowds of people on the pier. In spite of the rain and the early hour the citizens of Haifa and district came out to celebrate the arrival of yet another ship of Olim.

The Galilah tied up at the pier and the gangways were lowered. As the first passenger set foot on the plank the band struck up the Ha-tikvah. An old man walked cautiously down the wobbly steps leaning heavily upon his stick. A small bundle under his arm, with a grey beard and wearing a long coat, he looked the typical homeless Jew. When he reached the end of the gangway and stood upon Jewish soil, he sank to the ground. There was a gasp from the crowd who thought that he had fallen. He stretched himself upon the wet ground and kissed it, tears running down his haggard face. The crowd instantly responded: "hazak! shalom!" they cried with tears in their eyes. Two officials lifted the man and led him away. He had come home.

In those early days of independence, Israel was wide open to anyone who claimed Jewish origin. There was no difficulty for Moishe and Clara passing the immigration authorities They were treated as everyone else and assigned to a temporary campsite and a tin hut. They too had arrived.

- 3 -

The almost daily arrival of immigrants created a difficult situation for the authorities. The main problem was housing. Some of the new arrivals were placed in former British army camps, others in temporary tin shacks (pahonim). When the crowding increased even canvas was used to provide shelter.

Moishe and Clara were sent to a reception camp on the outskirts of Jerusalem and placed in a corrugated hut. It was the rainy season and the grounds were full of mud. Streams of water beat upon the tin roof and kept them awake. But the exhilaration of being in the Holy Land, the Land of the Bible, the Patriarchs, the Prophets, and the early Church, made up for the many inconveniences.

At the first possible opportunity they went up by bus to view Jerusalem. Unfortunately, the sight of the Old City was forbidden them. They could only see it from a distance. The main thoroughfare was cut in half. Coils of barbed wire marked Jordanian territory. One building along the road was equally partitioned - one half was Jewish, the other half Arab. Signs of war were everywhere. Though called the City of Peace - ir-shalom - there was anything but peace. All the same, it was a tremendous experience for both of them to walk through the streets of Jerusalem.

When they returned to the camp they found a message awaiting them. A man had called and would call again tomorrow. Did he give his name? Who was he? But all they could find out was that he wore battle dress and said he would come again. Moishe and Clara spent most of the night puzzling who it might be. They could not think of anyone who would know them or be interested in them. There was, of course, David and his family. But he had not written for over 20 years and even if alive would not know that Moishe was in Israel.

The following morning the attendant called at their hut. There was a man in the office who wanted to speak to them. Moishe put on his heavy boots. "You had better stay here, Clara," he said, "I'll meet the stranger and see what he wants."

Inside the wooden hut a man rose from his chair. Tanned, moustached, and in battledress, he looked like a British tommy.

"Are you Moishe Litvak?" asked the stranger in hesitant and broken Yiddish.

"Yes, I am," said Moishe.

There was a pause as the two men looked at each other. For a moment Moishe thought he saw a faint resemblance to David but this man was in his early thirties, and David, if alive, would be in his fifties by now.

"Are you from Vilno?" asked the soldier.

"Yes, I am." said Moishe, more puzzled than ever.

"I am Hayyim," said the soldier.

When Moishe last saw his nephew he was a boy of about twelve. It was difficult to visualize him grown up, let alone this big burly man, weather-beaten, strong and full of vigour, a typical Sabra. For a moment Moishe looked at him with unbelieving eyes, he thought he was dreaming or imagining it all. But he quickly came to and stretched out his left hand.

"Dodi!" cried the soldier and embraced his uncle.

- 4 -

After 30 years of wandering Moishe met somebody who belonged to him. It transpired that David had died of malaria soon after their arrival in Palestine. He had been engaged with other haluzim in draining the Hula swamps. Hannah never recovered from the shock. She became ill and lingered on for another couple of years in a state of mental breakdown. Hayyim was brought up as an orphan in one of the kibbutzim. He had always hoped that one day he might meet his father's brother, the only uncle he had and whom he remembered from his childhood.

It was by chance that he had run into a friend who was a sailor who told him that he had just returned from Cyprus with a bunch of olim. More in a joke than in earnest Hayyim asked whether there were any Litvaks on board. To his surprise his friend said that there actually was a middle-aged couple by that name. He had reason to take notice of them because there some talk among the olim that the man's wife was German. Litvak is a common name among Jews hailing from Lithuania. It was more curiosity than anything else that made Hayyim decide to track down the couple.

"Life is stranger than fiction." said Hayyim as he finished telling his story.

"Especially Jewish life!" said Moishe.

- 5 -

Hayyim was an officer in the Israeli army with the rank of captain. As a kibbutznik of many years standing he was known and respected and enjoyed what came to be known as *protektzia*. This was a term imported from Eastern Europe where bribery and simony were widely practiced as a matter of course. In Israel, protektzia had come to mean that a person

knew how to influence the right people. As an old settler, Hayyim had many friends in high places and therefore enjoyed considerable protektzia. Living accommodation was at a premium and some immigrants had to wait years before they could be moved to more permanent dwellings. But Hayyim was not going to leave his uncle in a rusty tin hut at this time of his life. His own family was in a kibbutz and with four children of his own there was no room for anyone else. So he appealed to a friend in the housing administration and within a week Moishe was offered a downstairs flat in Jerusalem near the Mea Shearim quarter.

It was only a room and a kitchen but it was a luxury compared to what they had had to put up with before. Protektzia went even further. Moishe was told to apply for work at an old peoples' home nearby and was given the job of night watchmen. He soon discovered that additional domestic help was needed and Clara was employed there as well. They had made it! They lived in Jerusalem, the Holy City, they had a flat, they both worked, and they were independent.

- 6 -

Only those who have experienced a summer in the sweltering heat of the coastal plain will appreciate the luxury of living in Jerusalem at an elevation some 2500 feet above sea level. The vaulted sky, the clear dry air, the cool night breezes and the sense of living on top of the world have a peculiar effect on newcomers. There is a sense of well-being about the place which proves irresistible. Moishe and Clara soon fell under the spell of the most fascinating city in the world. In spite of war conditions people seemed strangely relaxed and very friendly. The miracle of independence and the success against the Arabs created an atmosphere of religious awe even among non-believing Jews. The flight from Egypt and the conquest of Canaan seemed to have been repeated. The Old Testament suddenly became a popular book and people who had never read it before were studying it with devotion. To Moishe it seemed that he had suddenly been transported to biblical times. It was good to be there.

On their days off, the Litvaks would visit Hayyim's family in the Kibbutz and they made many friends there. No one seemed to take much notice of Clara's German origin. Jerusalem itself was a cosmopolitan city with Jews from all over the world speaking a hundred languages. There was a large colony of German Jews who accepted Clara as one of their own. This was a great encouragement to her and she gradually lost her self-consciousness and began to identify with the Jewish people. Both Moishe and Clara were learning Hebrew. Israel was her new fatherland.

In one of the quiet side streets, in the vicinity of the Y.M.C.A. there stands a house somewhat out of line with the rest of the buildings. The back of the house is surrounded by a high iron fence and in front there is a small but well-kept garden. As Moishe and Clara were strolling along the street one Saturday evening they heard a familiar Christian tune coming from behind the door.

"I have not heard that tune since we left Munich," said Clara. "It would be nice to belong to a Christian congregation and enjoy the fellowship of other believers. I wonder who these people are?"

At that moment the front door opened and a young couple walked into the street. To

Moishe's surprise they both looked Jewish.

"Excuse me," said Moishe to the man, "we thought we heard some familiar singing, what kind of house is this?"

The young man looked at Moishe carefully as if to determine whether friend or foe.

"We are meshihiim," he said after some hesitation.

"Who are they?" asked Moishe.

"Jewish believers."

"Jewish believers?"

"Yes, believers in the Messiah."

"Oh! You mean Jewish Christians."

"We do not call ourselves Christians, that is the way the goyyim speak. We believe that Yeshua is the Messiah."

"May we come in?"

"Of course you may." The couple went back and opened the door for them. "My name is David," said the young man, "and this is Ruth, my wife."

They all shook hands. David disappeared into another room and came back with an elderly man.

"Brother Shmuel," said David, to the man with the beard, "these people want to know who we are and asked whether they may come in."

"What is your name?" asked Shmuel.

"My name is Moishe Litvak. This is my wife Clara and we have recently come to Israel and are strangers here."

"Shalom! Shalom! Welcome! No one is a stranger here," said Shmuel as he warmly shook their hands. "Please, come in. The meeting is almost over. I will introduce you to the brethren."

They had just come in time for the last hymn. The words were in Hebrew but Moishe and Clara knew the melody well:

The God of Abraham praise
Who reigns enthroned above
Ancient of everlasting days
And God of love.

The haunting melody of this hymn which combines western cadence with an ancient Hebrew tune warmed the hearts of the newcomers. They hummed along while the others were singing.

The hymn ended, there was a short prayer and the Aaronic benediction completed the worship. The meeting broke up and turned into a time of conversation and refreshment. Moishe and Clara were introduced to the rest of the company.

A friendly matron with a thick German accent got hold of Clara.

"Are you from Germany?"

"Yes," said Clara, "and you?"

They became friends immediately for they found that both of them came from the same district and had much in common.

"You must come again; we meet every Shabbat night," said Shmuel, as Moishe and Clara

were leaving the hall.

- 7 -

The members of this community were mainly immigrants from every part of Europe. Only occasionally did they have "Hebrew night" because few of them were conversant enough in Hebrew to understand all that was said. Usually they conducted their worship in their own native tongues, but mainly in Yiddish. Moishe could not have found a more congenial company of people. Some were Lithuanian Jews like himself and it did him good to listen to the distinctive Yiddish accent of his countrymen mingled with Russian. It was almost like being home again.

This group of meshihiim belonged to no particular denomination. They were neither a church nor a synagogue. They were a fraternity who owed their loyalty to Jesus as Messiah and accepted the full authority of the Old and New Testaments. They were profoundly influenced by western Christianity, mainly Protestantism. They respected rabbinic law in the narrow sense but tried to retain the spiritual tradition of their Hebrew past. They interpreted the Old Testament in the light of messianic fulfilment and identified with the national aspirations of the Jewish people from purely religious motives. From a traditional Jewish point of view they were a heretical sect, something like the Karaites or the Donmeh. Moishe who had an inborn suspicion of historic Christianity and an antipathy towards narrow rabbinic Judaism, felt at ease in this messianic circle. As is usual with minorities, the Meshihiim clung to each other. They carried each others' burdens and tried to encourage one another in times of need. There was an atmosphere which was reminiscent of the primitive Jewish Christian community in Jerusalem. It was this sense of renewal and simplicity which attracted some gentile Christians to the group. There was no discrimination against them except for a faint feeling of superiority on the part of the Jewish members as a result of belonging to God's Chosen People. It was noticeable that the Gentiles always took a back seat and hardly ever spoke at meetings.

It was among these meshihiim that Moishe and Clara found their spiritual home.

- 8 -

They had been a full year in Jerusalem and Moishe and Clara were celebrating the anniversary of their arrival by inviting a few of the brethren to their flat. They also asked the assistant matron of the old people's home to join them. This was a mistake. Shoshannah Herzog, a German Jewess, affable, unprejudiced and without religious convictions, was a great gossip. Soon everyone in the institution knew that Moishe Litvak associated with meshummadim - renegade Jews. Eventually, this came to the attention of the administration and one of the officials, who was a fanatical rabbinic Jew dedicated to discovering heretics, began to spy on the Litvaks.

One Tuesday evening, when Moishe and Clara entered the hall for the weekly bible study, they noticed a man sitting by himself in a corner at the back. One of the brethren asked him to come forward but he refused and left halfway through the meeting. It was only later that they recalled the incident.

For quite a while nothing unusual happened, although Moishe detected a change of

attitude on the part of a few usually friendly night nurses. But one morning as he was returning from work, he saw the word MESHUMAD, crudely scribbled in chalk on the wall of the house. He rubbed it off and took no further notice.

- 9 -

Clara was preparing breakfast and Moishe was in front of the window reading the morning paper when suddenly there was a crash. He jumped to his feet and Clara came running from the kitchen. A big stone had been thrown through the window. It had fallen on the breakfast table and shattered a plate, there were pieces everywhere. Moishe stood pale and trembling.

"This looks like Nazi Germany all over again," said Clara.

Moishe said nothing. He was too upset to eat. He drank a cup of coffee and went to bed while Clara cleared up the mess before going to work.

It took Moishe a long time to fall asleep but finally tiredness overcame him. He fell into a troubled sleep but when he awoke late in the afternoon he felt as tired as when he went to bed. Some strange foreboding was weighing heavily upon him. He stretched, rubbed his eyes and went to wash his face at the kitchen sink. A letter lay on the floor as he passed the front door. It was from the office of the old people's home advising that his services would not be required at the end of the next week.

Moishe was stunned. What had he done, he asked himself, to incur the displeasure of his employers? He was punctual, meticulous in the performance of his duties, trying to help whenever he could and frequently working overtime without remuneration. It was only gradually that he began to piece together incidents which threw light upon his dismissal: Miss Herzog's visit to their flat, the stranger at the meeting, the word meshumad on the wall, the stone through the window, and now the letter, all links in the chain of events.

"They are dismissing me because I am a believer in Jesus," he said to himself, jumping to his feet.

"Now it makes sense! Did not the Master say: 'blessed are you when men will revile you and persecute you for my sake? Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven!' I don't mind!" he shouted, stamping on the floor hard as he could. "What can they do to me? Nothing! If God is for us who can be against us? I will find other work with God's help."

When Clara came back from work she found Moishe calm and collected.

"We will go over to Shmuel after supper and consult him," he said, in a casual voice as if it were a matter of no consequence.

- 10 -

A week later Clara was also given notice. Again, there was no explanation and no apology. She was simply told that her services would no longer be required. This happened at a time when the influx of immigrants was at its highest and conditions in the country at their worst. Clara did not take it as calmly as Moishe did. She was a hard worker and put her heart into whatever she did. The old people loved her for her endless patience and thoroughness and she regarded it a personal slight to be dismissed for no apparent reason.

Again they turned to Hayyim but this time protektzia did not work as effectively as at

first. All they could do was wait and meanwhile immigrants were entering the country by the thousands. Some were Jewish Christians, most of them from Roumania, and they naturally sought help from Christian organizations. A few families joined the meshihiim and one family attracted special attention with their six children. It soon became known among orthodox Jews that Christians were bribing Jewish parents to allow indoctrination of their children in the faith of the goyyim. The rumours were spread all over the country and caused agitation even among Jews usually indifferent to matters of religion. The cry went up from many quarters: "We will not yield the children of Hitler's victims! They have not come to Israel to be snatched before our eyes! Save our children from the hands of the perverters."

Somehow, Moishe, though utterly innocent, was thought to be involved by those who had caused his dismissal. He was the most natural and tangible target for their hostility. After all, didn't he belong to the group of the meshihiim? Didn't he sail under a false flag? Didn't he penetrate a Jewish institution under false pretence? Wasn't he married to a daitshke? Didn't he pretend to be Jew when in fact he was a meshumad?

One evening as Moishe and Clara were returning from their weekly bible study they were suddenly surrounded by group of young fanatics.

"Hey, meshumad!" shouted one bearded young Jew with long side locks and in the traditional hasidic dress, "now you are cornered!" The others sneered as they tightened the circle and Clara began to scream. "You shall not touch this man!" she shouted in German.

"Hear the daitshke speak!" laughed the bearded young Jew. "Where were you when Hitler was burning our people, hey?"

One man pushed her aside and they fell upon Moishe like a pack of wolves. Within seconds he was knocked to the ground, kicked and beaten. Clara screamed again for help and the pious hooligans quickly dispersed, disappearing in the dark lanes of Mea Shearim, leaving Moishe's crumpled body on the pavement.

It took quite a while for an ambulance to arrive. Clara went to the hospital holding Moishe's battered head in her lap.

CHAPTER V

"What hope is there Doctor?" asked Clara with tears in her eyes. Doctor Kurt Rosenberg looked at her with deep sympathy. For a moment he hesitated; should he tell her the truth?

He was a German refugee, trained in Berlin, now a middle-aged man who had seen much suffering. He was torn between the discipline of his profession and the natural human empathy of a typical Jewish doctor. In the end his German training prevailed. He turned to Clara and looked her straight in the eyes. "It is no good pretending. You have to be brave and face the inevitable. We have done everything we could. He is not responding to antibiotics and the gangrene is progressing. It's just a matter of time. The poison is steadily advancing towards the brain, and then it will be all over."

Clara covered her face with her hands and began to sob. "Yes, I must be brave, doctor," she kept saying while crying disconsolately. "Yes, I must be brave."

Clara had spent three full weeks at Moishe's bedside. She was with him all day and most of the night. But for the insistence of the matron she would not have left the room at all. During this time Moishe was in a deep coma. Occasionally when the fever hit with particular severity he would fall into a state of delirium. These were times of the greatest trial for Clara.

"Give me the gun," he would shout. "Don't be afraid Nina. Look! You press the trigger and the Germans fall! Look how they are falling. One, two, three! Pan Komarski, you are a Polish hero! You know how to fight! Hit them! Hit them!" he cried at the top of his voice, flailing his arm and almost jumping out of bed.

Clara had to use all her strength to hold him down. Fortunately the attacks did not last long. He quickly sank back on his pillow exhausted and reverted to his unconscious state. Only once did he open his eyes and try to say something but nothing came out. Clara thought she felt a slight pressure of his hand.

- 2 -

It was in the late afternoon on the 23rd day after Moishe's admission to the hospital that he suddenly opened his eyes. "Nina," he whispered weakly.

"Yes, dear," said Clara. She gently took his hand and put her ear to his mouth.

"Nina." he said again, "I love you." There was a long pause. "You must forgive them, the Master says so . . . Be brave . . ."

He shut eyes again, took a laboured breath, his Adam's apple twitching, again he slightly pressed her hand, sighed, and was gone.

A strange peace descended upon the room. The screened window keeping out the afternoon sun cast a long shadow and Clara sank to the floor, still holding Moishe's emaciated hand. His face was transformed and all the agony, all the pain were gone, replaced by a strange expression of contentment, almost of happiness. He looked as if he were seeing things denied to the living.

"He is now in the presence of his Master," said Clara, full of awe, as she quietly left the room.

- 3 -

"Halt! Halt! He is a meshumed!" A man was shouting in Yiddish as he ran towards the open grave. "Stop! Stop! He is a renegade." His long coat flapped in the air, and with one hand he held on to his cap while with the other he frantically motioned towards the people around the grave.

All eyes turned towards the stranger. As he reached the grave he stopped to catch his breath. Big drops of perspiration ran down his cheeks. It was almost a minute before he could speak again. "He must not be buried in holy ground!" he cried hoarsely, his eyes burning with indignation.

"And who are you to stop us?" asked Hayyim, fierce with anger. "Don't you know that this is a profanation of the Holy Name? It's a sin to shame a dead body. You ought to know better."

"It is a greater sin to desecrate holy ground!" returned the stranger. "A meshumed shall not lie among God's people."

The men who were about to lower the body into the grave, put it down again.

"Reb ltzik is a pious man," said one of them, an elderly Jew with a grey beard. "He would bring no disgrace upon a Jew without good reason. We had better postpone burial until things are clarified."

Clara looked bewildered and began to cry, "First they killed him," she lamented, "now they will not let him rest in peace."

By this time the superintendent had appeared on the scene. He listened respectfully to Reb Itzik's tale. When he had finished the superintendent motioned to the men to take the body back to the cemetery morgue.

It is usual in the East to bury the dead with the least possible delay. Jews have adhered to this custom in all the lands of their dispersion. It is regarded as a dishonour to the dead to do otherwise. To refuse burial is the greatest humiliation which can be shown to the deceased. In accordance with rabbinic ruling even a criminal must be honoured by decent burial. It was therefore no light matter to interfere with the interment of Moishe Litvak.

As soon as the body was brought back to the morgue, Hayyim, fuming with anger, made his way to the district judge who was also a friend. A fierce struggle ensued behind the scenes between Hayyim and Itzik who both enjoyed protektzia. Hayyim knew all the enlightened, progressive, westernized Jews who swayed power in the land. Itzik knew all the conservative, orthodox, fanatical Jews who contested that power with every means at their disposal. The fight over Moishe's body assumed political dimensions. The question was: who held jurisdiction over the cemetery? Was it the rabbinate or was it the government?

In the course of bargaining, proposals and counter-proposals were made, some quite irrelevant to the issue at hand. The orthodox grasped at the opportunity to haggle for position while the irreligious tried to elicit promises from the orthodox. All the while, Moishe's body lay in the morgue.

- 4 -

The orthodox won. It would have been politically inexpedient to incur their wrath but Hayyim Litvak was a problem. To soothe his hurt feelings, he was quickly promoted to the

rank of major with some vague additional promises for the future. Moishe's body was quietly removed at night to the Protestant burial grounds adjoining the Roman Catholic cemetery. Hayyim did not think it wise to attend the interment. It would have hurt his career to acknowledge his family connections to a meshumad. Only a few of the meshihiim were present as time was short and everything happened in a hurry. A priest of the Anglican Church officiated at the burial service. Brother Shmuel asked permission to say a few words.

"Friends and brothers," he began in a hoarse voice, holding back tears, "Moishe had only been with us a short time, but we learned to love him. He has fallen victim to fanatics who have a zeal for God but not according to knowledge. It is only right that meshihi should die in Jerusalem. Our beloved brother has followed the footsteps of the prophets, of the messiah, of Stephen, of James and of many other Jewish believers. None of them has died in vain. Their blood is a witness and a challenge to our people. At this open grave, we meshihiim pledge ourselves to remain loyal to the Master and to our nation. We will gladly suffer for the sake of our Messiah until we have won the right to live as free men in the Land of our Fathers."

Shmuel paused. He cleared his throat and intoned the ancient Prayer for the Sanctification of God's Holy Name, the traditional Prayer of the Synagogue in memory of the dead: Yitgadal veyit-kaddash shemeh rabba. Magnified and sanctified be his great Name in the world which he has created according to his will.

At the sound of the hallowed words so laden with emotion and past memories the women began to cry. Frau Steinberg, the German Jewess who had befriended Clara the night she and Moishe first met the meshihiim, was at her side. "This is the prayer for the dead," she whispered into Clara's ear as she took her arm. Clara did not stir. She stood transfixed at the edge of the open grave, her eyes fastened upon the box which contained the remains of what had been her husband and friend.

The clergyman began the words of committal: "Forasmuch as it hath pleased Almighty God of his great mercy to receive unto himself the soul of our dear brother here departed, we commit his body to the ground," he stooped and picked up a handful of soil and as he threw the soil on to the coffin he recited the words: "earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust . . ."

As the loose earth fell upon the wood with a thud, Clara shivered and closed her eyes. She was moving her lips in prayer. As the two grave diggers picked up the spades to close the grave, Clara raised her arm. She was holding a silver cup which glittered in the sun. The diggers looked to the priest awaiting instruction.

"This is a Kiddush cup," said Clara with trembling lips, "my husband treasured it. I want it to go into his grave. Please throw it in." She turned to the clergyman and handed him the cup.

"Well, if that is your wish . . ." He hesitated for a moment and then threw it into the grave. It must have hit a stone for there was a sharp clank. The priest motioned to the grave diggers and they began to throw in the earth. No one moved. The grave was filled and the remaining soil was heaped into a mound.

Shmuel produced a little cedar sapling, stuck it into the loose soil and said in Hebrew: "Zekher zaddik liverakhah" - the memory of the righteous is a blessing.

The priest bowed his head: "Rest eternal grant unto him, O Lord, and let light perpetual

shine upon him."

He shook Clara by the hand, bowed to the others and left. Clara remained standing at the foot of the grave. She stood there for a long time until Frau Steinberg turned to her and said, "Clara dear, it is getting late, we must go now."

Clara looked at her with vacant eyes. "Where shall I go? He was all that was left to me," she whispered.

"You will go with me; we belong to each other. My husband was killed by the Nazis, your husband was killed by Jews. We are both the victims of human hatred."

- 5 -

"Clara dear! wake up, you're having a nightmare!" Frau Steinberg was standing beside Clara's bed tugging at her blanket. It was the middle of the night and only a small electric bulb threw some light from the kitchen. Gradually Clara roused herself, sat up and blinked.

"What's the matter. Clara? You have been shouting as if somebody were murdering you. You certainly gave me a fright."

"I'm sorry. I had a terrible dream. I'm so glad you woke me. Ferdinand and Moishe were fighting - with swords. Both of them were wounded and there was a lot of blood. I was trying to separate them but they just pushed me aside. They began to fight again and all I could do was shout for help but they just looked at me and laughed. Then Moishe said, 'It's only make-believe; we really love each other.' And Ferdinand said, 'Of course we do, are we not Christians?' Then they started fighting again . . . You will kill each other! I shouted, you are leaving me a widow. I have no one left but you! Then they both said together, 'Don't worry! We are fighting for the right to live!' What a stupid dream. I am so glad it was only a dream; it seemed so real a moment ago."

"Well, not so stupid," said Frau Steinberg thoughtfully, as she stroked Clara's hair. "We are all fighting for the right to live and we get hurt in the struggle. It is not the dead who fight. They are at rest now. There's no need to fight beyond the grave where there is room for everyone. It's here that the struggle continues!"