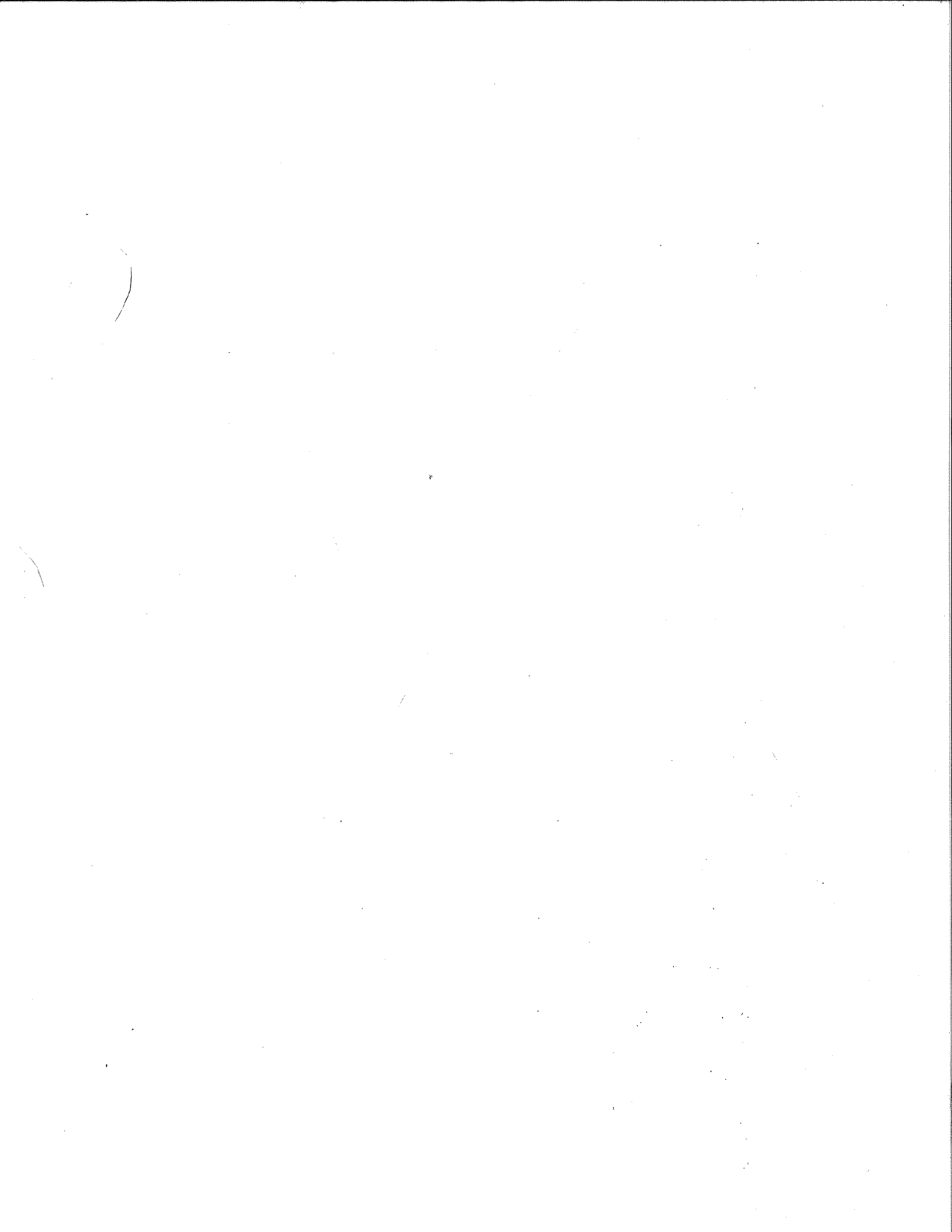

BEYOND THE RIVER

Kibbutz Hameuchad

Tel Aviv, 1985

(Hebrew)

The book is now in its second printing

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CHAPTER NO 1

B E Y O N D T H E R I V E R

CHILDHOOD LANDSCAPES

*

My twin sister Fritzi and I were not yet five when Father and Mother gave us the news that we were soon to move to a new house. Our brother Sammy, older ~~than us by~~ four years, was also full of enthusiasm about the new house that was being built for us somewhere in a suburb of our town, Radauz, and tried his best to share his happiness with us. However, in our imagination, that house was at the other end of the world. Even Mother's description of the house, where Sammy would have his own room and Fritzi and I would have a room where the two of us would sleep and play, frightened me. I imagined these rooms to be far apart, and my fears intensified when Sammy threatened to lock us out so that we would not rummage in his schoolbag for crayons, with which we loved to scribble on the white oil baize that covered the big kitchen table. He often complained about us to mother, calling us "those two little nuisances", and Maria, the servant, backed him up, protesting that Father spoiled us outrageously and that Sammy did not have enough space in the little room the three of us shared, obliging him to do his homework in the kitchen. I loved the Gelber's big house with the spacious yard, opposite the German Club and next door to the Fire Station in the middle of town. This was where we lived, where we had been born, Sammy, Fritzi and I.

And when Mother tried to convince me that we would have a big orchard of pear, cherry, plum and other fruit trees in our new house, as well as a rose garden and flowerbeds, I still thought in all innocence that the Gelber's garden and its trees was better. There we played on the soft grass, under the tall trees, and we loved to gather the ripe, fallen fruit that we found in abundance on the dew-splintered grass in the early mornings. One of the trees had come down in a storm, and it lay on the ground. By straddling it we were able to pick its sweet-and-sour dwarf apples, which we also used as little balls to play with in the garden.

The front garden, which was full of junk, also served us in our games of make-believe. The skeleton of an old coach without wheels in a corner of the yard transported us to Suceava, to visit Grannie; Fritzi was on the back seat while I sat on the driver's high platform. I grasped imaginary reins, urging on the horses. Sometimes the coach served as a fast train with carriages full of fantasy passengers. I remember that once, when Maria was not keeping an eye on us, Fritzi and I climbed the high fence that separated us from the Fire Station, to peer at the red engines with their long ladders and their endlessly wailing sirens. They had a tangle of rubber hoses, and the firemen nimbly and quickly climbed onto them, driving away in sudden haste. The houses in town, with their roofs of wooden tiles, often caught fire and the columns of thick smoke like giant tongues studded with big sparks and flames looked to me like monsters, keeping me rivetted to the spot, watching them with a mixture of fear and curiosity.

When Maria came running in a panic to get us down from the fence, I told her that I had seen our new house go up in flames. She began spitting left and right, crossing herself and harshly

scolding me. She worriedly said to Mother, "The little one will bring bad luck if she isn't careful". I burst into tears and told my mother I did not want to live in the new house. Fritzi also started to cry and my mother had her hands full trying to console us both. Our neighbour from across the passage, Auntie Wexler, came running at the sound of the weeping.

I remember the Wexler family from my earliest days. They were part of our family and of my immediate surroundings. Their only son, Mokkie, was our age and our only friend in the house. At the time, Mokkie was studying in the Hebrew day school, and he spent most of the day there. In summer, when the light outdoors lasted well into the late afternoon, we played in the garden with him and let him join in our races. Sammy always gave the signal to start the race, which began at the peach tree and ended at the apple tree. Mokkie always came last. Sometimes he would stumble when he bumped into the cherry tree which stood between the other two trees. Mokkie was a gaunt, bashful child, and Auntie Wexler called him a girl born a boy by mistake. She said of me that I had been born a girl by mistake. Auntie Wexler bestowed a great deal of love and attention on me, and at times she called me "My little mother", and she was the only one to call me Hannahle and not Annie, like everyone else.

The door to her apartment was always open, on her kitchen table there were always candy, which she would press me to eat. I only agreed to eat the cornmeal porridge my mother prepared if Auntie Wexler fed it to me. There was always a surprise for me when the plate was empty. The Wexler family left the house before we did, going to live in Czernowitz. Before they left, I received a gold ring set with diamonds as a present from Auntie Wexler; I saw tears in her eyes when she gave me the ring. She clasped me to

her heart and whispered: "You're my little mother". Kissing my small hand, she pointed to the ring finger and said: "My good mother wore this ring for many years; when you're big, you must wear it and may you live to be my mother's age." I missed Auntie Wexler powerfully. For the first few days after their departure I stood for hours in front of their locked door, knocking loudly in the hope that they would emerge. I also ate very little at that time, until Grandpa Efraim and Grannie came and stayed with us for a while to take care of me. I asked them to call me Hannahle, the way Auntie Wexler did, and not Annie. I also persistently asked them "What'll happen when we move to the new house and Auntie comes back and can't find us?"

A gift arrived from Czernowitz on our birthday; a big box tied with a pink ribbon. Mother put it on the table. Maria sat with Fritzi on her lap while Sammy and I kneeled on the bench next to the table, waiting for mother to open the box. I almost toppled from the bench with happiness. There was a dolls' tea set, and two teddy bears -- one brown with a white ribbon embroidered "Hannahle", and the other white with a red ribbon embroidered "Fritzike". At the time I did not know why Auntie Wexler called me her Little Mother. There were always a few lines in every letter or present from them addressed to Fritzi, Sammy and "my Hannahle", which Mother would read to us. Eventually, Auntie Wexler came from Czernowitz specially to celebrate my ninth birthday with us. It was then she told me that her own mother had died when my mother was pregnant, and the two of them had agreed that if my mother gave birth to a daughter, she would be named after Auntie Wexler's mother; my mother had borne two girls and, as the firstborn, I had been given Auntie Wexler's mother's name.

One day, we went to see the new house with Father and Mother.

It was still being built and only its frame had been erected, with planks of wood strewn everywhere. Sammy began running and hopping about among the planks, and I joined him. Fritzi did not want to let go of Mother's hand and clung to her all the time. When Sammy tried to induce her to join in our game of catchers, she burst into tears and declared that she didn't want to live in a broken house. But I liked the boards and planks lying around in the big yard, the workers' tumult, and everything else around there.

From there, we went to see some people Mother knew, the Fuchs family, who lived a few houses down from our new house. Mother told us that they had two daughters: Giza, who was a year older than us, and Betty, who was three. And they had a son the same age as Sammy, whose name was Duca.

The door was opened by Mr. Fuchs. Fritzi and I were hiding behind Mother, and all I could hear was his merry voice welcoming mother and Sammy, happily inviting them to come in, and calling to Mrs. Fuchs: "Gusta, we have visitors. The new neighbour, Mrs. Faust, has come to see us." Mrs. Fuchs came from the kitchen and two little girls could be seen hiding behind her skirts, too. Mr. Fuchs continued, in his merry voice: "I see that you've left your little girls at home, Mrs. Faust. Our little girls are also not here. Only our Ducale is at home." He put his arm around Duca's shoulders and introduced him to Sammy. And then: "Why are you standing around, boys? Duca, take Sammy to your room." Duca and Sammy left, hand in hand. Mr. Fuchs continued his merry-go-round with us, pretending to look for us, Giza and Betty. He then made funny noises which made us laugh and brought us out from behind our mothers.

Giza was rather plump, with round cheeks and a freckled nose. Her hair was black and as smooth and shining as silk, plaited into

two thick, short braids tied with white ribbons. Her eyes, like black cherries, gazed at us with some shyness, while she kept her grip on her mother's hand. That was how we met Giza and her sister Bettika, aged three, who was tiny, with smooth, dark blonde hair cut into a fringe, and a pair of laughing brown eyes that, as my father later described them, "were never at rest"; indeed, they were always darting about mischievously. From that day on, we visited them often. Mr. Fuchs was a furrier and his workshop was in the yard of their house, so that he was at home most of the time and we enjoyed including him in our games. We particularly loved his amusing tricks. He could bark like a dog, cackle like a hen, and he even disguised himself as a tiger, with the help of Mrs. Fuchs, who would stand behind him with her arms thrust into the sleeves of his jacket, which he would wear back to front, while he put his shoes on his hands and stamped on the table.

* * *

CHAPTER NO 2

YOUTH: DREAMS OF KIBBUTZ LIFE

Just before we were given our school leaving certificates, I became involved in an unpleasant incident at school. Our homeroom teacher, Mrs. Torutz, asked the class which of the girls would be going on to high school. The candidates raised their hands. Most of them were Jewish. She said: "I know the Jewesses are going on to high school, because your parents have money. What I want to know is which of the Roumanian girls will be going?

When we arrived home, we told Giza's father about this. "And what did you answer?" he asked with a smile. "Nothing." Then, commandingly, he told us -- I did not know that he was joking, as usual -- "You go to the teacher tomorrow and explain to her why it's important for Jews to study, even when they don't have a lot of money." His explanation was simple: "The Roumanians and others have land which they can and must cultivate; we Jews have neither land nor Homeland, therefore we have to cultivate our heads, since that's all we have."

I liked this idea, and the next day in class I extended two fingers, as was customary, and infomed our teacher why most of those who had enrolled for secondary school were Jewish, according to what Mr. Fuchs had said.

There was a stillness in the class, like the silence before a storm. My sister Fritzi and her friend Giza were particularly afraid of the outcome. As for me, I was shocked at my own impudence, for which I knew I would be punished. Fortunately, the bell rang to announce the break and all the girls left the classroom , apart from me, since I had been ordered to remain

behind. To my great surprise, not only was I not punished for my impertinence, but I was given a primary lesson in Zionism for the first time in my life, and all in good spirit, from this teacher who was an antisemite.

"Don't you know that the Jews do have a country?" and she added, " Palestine, that's the Jews' country, and many Jewish boys and girls work on the land over there," and in further praise of this country of the Jews she also told me about the eternal sun, blue skies and groves of orange trees.

I left the classroom feeling good, my heart filled with pride. I waved to my Christian friend Magdalena Helenk, saying "I'm going to Palestine." This sentence was overheard by Rebecca.

Rebecca was a classmate of mine and one of the few who had not enrolled for high school. We did not play together often and I did not know her well. During one of the breaks she came up to me and, as though we shared a secret, asked: "Which 'ken' do you belong to? Who's your 'madrich'?

The words 'ken' and 'madrich' were meaningless to me and I pulled her with me to the rear of the school building, far from the tumult of the other pupils. We sat down on a rock, both of us panting after our run. "What are you talking about?" I asked her. Amazed, she asked: "Don't you know? I belong to Hashomer Hatzair, and you?"

Here were more words I did not know, words that seemed magical to me. "So, tell me," I urged her, "you said something else, like 'madrich', and now you said 'Hashomer Hatzair'." She grabbed my hand incredulously: "But you yourself told me that you were going to Palestine!" "Yes, that's right," I answered, "but I only said it to annoy Magdalena Helenk. I told her in detail about the conversation I had had with my teacher.

Rebecca proudly told me about her 'ken' in the 'Hashomer Hatzair' youth movement. She told me about her 'madrich', Ze'ev, and about the 'pe-ulot' that took place twice a week, in which she regularly participated. Her importance increased in my eyes as she used all these Hebrew words: ken - nest; madrich - group leader; Hashomer Hatzair - The Young Guard; pe-ulot - activities.

What else do you know? I asked her. She hummed a Hebrew song in my ear:

"Gilu haglilim giborei hachayil..."

I listened open-mouthed to her event-packed stories. She also told me that Ze'ev, their leader, often visited her house and sometimes on the sabbath her parents invited him for lunch. I asked Rebecca to take me to her nest, and we arranged to meet on Saturday afternoon outside the Temple. "From there," she said importantly, "I'll take you to my ken." On Saturday afternoon I slipped out of the house and went to meet Rebecca. I could see her from a distance, standing next to the Temple wearing a holiday dress. Her dark brown hair, sleek and shining, was tied back with a ribbnon and she held a red purse. She was older than me by a year, twelve, and was also taller than the rest of us. She waved her purse, beckonibng me to come to her.

Standing there in front of me, she was different from the girl I knew at school. At school she was always self-effacing and would lower her head without a word when the teacher reprimanded her. She smilingly tucked her arm in mine, now. All of a sudden I saw myself as a little girl compared to her. She was like an older friend who had taken me under her wing. "How long will we stay at the ken?" She noticed the anxiety in my voice. I told her I had left the house without my parents' knowledge.

She reassured me in a big-sisterly way, promising that we

would manage to be back before my parents noticed my absence. Protectively, kindly, she drew me along to Ze'ev's ken.

The Topliza is a narrow, winding River which flows all year round. It traversed almost the entire town and was spanned by narrow little bridges. Behind one such bridge, in a narrow, deserted alley not far from the centre of town, a shack stood on some rotting stumps of wood, half in the river. The heavy door of planks, also rotting, was secured with a big padlock. "Looks like we've come early," Rebecca said, "but don't worry, they'll be here soon."

We walked to a little wood behind the shack. Rebecca stretched full length on the damp grass. "What about your pretty dress, aren't you sorry to spoil it?" "Not at all," she replied so full of self-confidence that I envied her. "Ze'ev says that if we go to Palestine we won't be needing dresses at all, because everybody over there, girls as well as boys, wears shorts."

I admired her at that moment; wherever she went, I would follow, I told myself.

We heard voices, she jumped up quickly: "Here they come, come quickly." A shudder coursed through my body. It was as if someone had whispered to me: "You won't be accepted, you won't be accepted, you don't even know one word of Hebrew..."

I took Rebecca's hand and skipping over the lawn and skirting trees, we came to the door. It was wide open and a few boys and girls were already inside the shack. Standing with his back to the door, in the centre of the group, was a tall fellow who looked like a giant to me. He was gesticulating in all directions with his big hands.

As we entered, Rebecca called out in a loud, confident voice, very much at home: "Hazak ve-ematz, Ze'ev!" He turned his head in

our direction smiling broadly. "Welcome." And, looking at me: "I see we have a new comrade here, not so? My name's Ze'ev, or, if you like, Madrich Ze'ev."

My discomfiture vanished as if at the wave of a magic wand, like in the fairy tales: "My name's Annie and I'd very much like to enroll in your nest here." He laughed and scrutinized me again, extending a large, strong hand: "We don't enroll. You simply come and be with us. But just for order's sake, let's hear how old you are, and if your parents allow you to be one of us."

This time I blushed, but I answered him frankly: "My parents don't know, and maybe they'll never allow me."

Ze'ev spoke a very halting German, apparently some kind of scrambled Yiddish, but it was understandable and even charming. We were sitting on one of the benches and all the others were standing around, looking at me with curiosity every now and then. Rebecca joined the group, whispering to them in a secretive way, apparently telling them who I was.

Ze'ev wrote down my particulars in a little notebook. "For the time being, you can visit whenever you're able, and I'll try to pursuade your parents not to oppose it."

I went white. In a strangled, shaky voice I asked him not to try speaking to them. My father would never consent. "Leave that to me," he said, "in the meantime, get to know the comrades."

More boys and girls had arrived. They were all about my age. Most of them were new to me. We sat in a semi-circle with Ze'ev. Rebecca sat next to him. It was she who introduced me to Clara and her brother Lonya and all the others. Ze'ev also briefly explained to me that we were called the "Junior Level" and I was the newest member.

We sang "Gilu gilu ha'glilim," which I had already heard from

Rebecca, danced the hora in a circle, and then after a few games, said goodbye to Ze'ev with the greeting "Hazak Ve-ematz" -- the motto of the movement, which means Strong and Courageous.

My friendship with Rebecca went from strength to strength since I began going to the nest. We would meet at the Temple on Saturdays and go to the nest together. Rebecca was an only child and her parents pampered her and met her every wish. They lived in the centre of town, where her father had a panel-beating workshop in the yard of their house. I tried to visit them house often. Her mother, who always received me warmly, was a short woman who wore a head scarf which she never removed. It covered half her forehead above her small face in which her eyes twinkled with the smile of an innocent middle-aged woman. She would look at her beautiful daughter with delight and tenderness. Rebecca's father was also short, and he had a red birthmark on his cheek. He used to comb Rebecca's hair with his big, rough hands, calling her "mein shaine maidele". None of the girls in class or at the nest had dresses as pretty as hers. There was always money in her purse for her to buy whatever she wanted. With her, I went to Shtomer's pastry shop for the first time in my life; it was also the last, since I was afraid someone would see me there and report to my parents. I gave up the best pastry I had ever tasted, or would taste for a long time.

I also met Ze'ev at Rebecca's house and, becuase this was outside the framework of the nest, I got to know him personally.

As my friendship with Rebecca deepened so did my dependence on her. When I was unable to leave the house, Rebecca would fill me in on all the activities I had missed. She would do so during breaks, behind the school building, while we sat on a large stone we named "Our Nest". Our behaviour aroused Fritizi's and Giza's

curiosity, and they dogged our footsteps, trying to spy on us. We sat talking about things at the nest, about Ze'ev, whom we both admired, and made up all sorts of stories about faraway Palestine. When Fritzi and Giza would hide behind us to eavesdrop, we pretended not to notice them and invented a secret language which we ourselves did not always understand, to tease them.

Winter was at its height, and it was terribly cold in the shack, almost driving away the members of the Junior Level. It was decided that everyone would take turns to bring firewood from home. When my turn came I was again helped by Rebecca's friendship. I had already emptied out my schoolbag on returning home on Friday, and had filled it with chunks of wood. Rebecca was waiting outside for me and I exchanged my bag filled with wood for hers, filled with books. We had arranged in advance that she would take my bag home and bring it to the nest on Saturday. I emptied her bag and filled it, too, with chunks of wood. We had also arranged that in return for her help I would copy the homework I had done into her notebook and bring it to school on Monday, with her bag. I swore the 'faithful accomplice' oath. It was a perfect plan and reinforced our sense of complicity.

Unfortunately, there was a serious hitch. On Saturday, as I was silently sneaking out with Rebecca's bag , now full of wood, I was quite unaware that father was following me. He followed me all the way to the nest, which was a long way from the house. I entered the shack and had just triumphantly lowered the bag from my shoulder when my father appeared behind me. I was stunned at the sight of him. I felt in my bones that this was the end of me. Dear God, what would become of my great dream? It was likely to be snapped like a thread. And my humiliation in front of all the others, and Ze'ev, was intolerable. If only the earth would open

up and swallow me! I would never see Ze'ev again, nor Rebecca nor the nest. Worst of all, perhaps I would never see Palestine, or live the kibbutz life, for which I longed with all my soul.

I continued to meet Rebecca at school, under the watchful eyes of Fritzi and Giza, who had begun to torment me. Whenever they wanted to get something from me, they would tease me and call me "Rebecca". At times I would give in even when I was sure I was in the right, just to stop them from carrying tales home.

After about two months, Ze'ev appeared at our house. My heart thumped with excitement when I saw him. I flushed and began to stammer in confusion. Happiness mixed with anxiety gripped me. Seeing Ze'ev in my house meant I need not give up all hope of my dream coming true one day. Sammy, who had immediately discerned what was happening inside me, hurried almost happily to greet Ze'ev and introduced him to Mother courteously and deferentially: "Annike's madrich". Fritzi also immediately understood and whispered that she had changed her mind and was on my side from now on. I knew I had nothing to fear from Mother. She always accepted Sammy's opinion, and if Sammy was enthusiastic about the visitor there must be a good reason for it and she was prepared to accept him wholeheartedly. Apart from which, I knew my mother, and she customarily received everyone who came to our house graciously. I prayed for Ze'ev to succeed. "Please God, help me just this once." I had guessed the reason for his visit and I also asked God to let it end well, before the arrival of Father, whose reaction I feared. But to my great surprise, when Father saw Ze'ev, he made as if he did not recognize him. However, by his smile I understood that he would receive Ze'ev nicely. Indeed, after Mother had served some refreshment a lively discussion developed between Father, Sammy and Ze'ev. Mother sat at the

table, too, and invited Fritzi and me to sit by her. Encouraging me, she smiled and, enunciating each word, said: "Do you know, Father, that Mr. Ze'ev is Annie's group leader in the youth movement, and its a great honour for us to be able to offer him our hospitality? The word mister grated on my ears, but Ze'ev smiled understandingly, as though he knew how I was feeling. He told them about himself. He was born in Bessarabia and at the age of sixteen had gone to Palestine, the Holy Land, as Father called it. He was now a member of one of the Hashomer Hatzair kibbutzim and had been sent to organise and train Jewish youth for immigration to Palestine. He was only a temporary madrich and local people would replace him when the time came. The conversation with Ze'ev lasted till late at night in an atmopshphere of cameraderie. It was obvious that Father had been won over and was captivated by Ze'ev's charm, since he agreed that I could resume my visits to the nest on condition I did not neglect my school work.

During this conversation Father revealed to Ze'ev that the idea of going to Palestine had been under consideration even before their meeting, but the time was not yet ripe for it, because Sammy had to complete his high school studies and wanted to study medicine, while we girls were still young and had a good few years of school ahead of us. Father raised various other points in support of postponing the family's immigration to Palestine. The talk continued long after Fritzi and I had gone to our room and to bed. Fritzi fell asleep at once and I opened the booklet Ze'ev had brought me as a present, and began to read.

I remember one story that impressed nme, about one of the young men, a newcomer to the Kibbutz. His name was Wolfe, which they had changed to Ze'ev (ze'ev means wolf in Hebrew). Together

with his new comrades, boys and girls, he did all kinds of work in the fields, sometimes in the cowsheds. After work he liked to read books he had brought with him from the diasporah. Ze'ev was described as a shy, bespectacled fellow who enjoyed playing the piano his parents had sent him. One night, he was given a rifle and went out to take his turn on guard duty. His friends, who knew he was timid, lay in wait for him behind a tree, to test him. When they saw him standing there, tensely listening to every rustle, they made a noise among the branches. In his fear he forgot all about his rifle and began yelling for help. My heart was pounding with empathy for Ze'ev, but later in the story I read how that same weak and scared fellow eventually became one of the bravest and most hardworking members on the kibbutz. As I read the story my mind drifted to my madrich Ze'ev, who was staying the night at our house, and my heart filled with happiness because I would be able to see him tomorrow and wish him good morning. I fell asleep feeling that this was the happiest night in my life, because God had granted my prayer, and it was possible that the whole family would one day go to Palestine, as Father had said, and I would be a member of a kibbutz over there. I dreamed all night that we were standing on ladders picking oranges, while the winter sun sent down pleasant light and warmth, and Sammy and Ze'ev played the violin and the piano.

* * *

CHAPTER NO 3

SECONDARY SCHOOL

Preparations for our entry into Secondary School began before the end of Fourth grade. Before enrolling us, Mother and Father began assessing whether they would be able to afford this undertaking. In the course of Father's preliminary enquiries, it emerged that the fees for one pupil came to some 3000 lei a year, not counting other expenses -- the school uniform, books and so forth, all of which came to a considerable sum. My parents doubted whether they would be able to bear the cost.

We had learned for the first time, from Mother, of our limited financial situation after Father sold his metal workshop and became a partner in the trucking business run by Uncles Yiddel and Hirsch, Mother's brothers. As Mother said, Father had many debts, and she suggested postponing our entry to Secondary School until the next year. Father nodded on hearing this suggestion: "After all, you are half a year below the usual age."

I saw all my dreams vanishing. I had dreamed of wearing the uniform of a Secondary School pupil, which really enchanted me, of a satchel all my own, of walking down the street with my head held high. These were advantages I could only achieve at Secondary School. Fritzi dreamed of the same advantages. But both of us accepted the decree, not daring to press our parents, and when Mr. Fuchs turned up and told us that he had enrolled Giza in Secondary School, it really hurt.

Father and Mr. Fuchs sat over a cup of coffee in the kitchen, while Mr. Fuchs talked about the many expenses he had undertaken. "But to hell with the money, the main thing is that Giza should be

able to cope with the entry exams, which they say are very difficult." "I didn't give that a thought," Father said. Listening to the two of them, I, too, had not been scared of the exams, nor had I given them a thought. Sammy had never had any difficulty with his studies, so that we had never had cause to be bothered by such things.

Father, with satisfaction and a measure of pride, told Mr. Fuchs about Sammy's impressive scholastic achievements. He had been exempted from paying school fees from the very first year. He took out the letter he had received, at the time, from the Secondary School secretariat, in which he had been notified that his son Sammy was exempt from all fees, and after a while he had even been given a grant, which Father had put into a savings account towards Sammy's future studies in Medical School: "Apart from his music lessons and clothing, for which I pay, I have hardly any expenses for him, he even pays for his books and note books from the extra lessons he gives to pupils in lower grades."

Father's words made me sad, maybe almost as sad as that time in the Hashomer Hatzair nest. I suddenly perceived the sorrow, pain and suffering a person undergoes in his lifetime, and I swore to myself that I would study how to relieve the suffering of others, when I was grown-up.

That night Sammy sat in our room with us, testing us for the arithmetic exam we were to write the following day in class, for our Fourth Grade Certificate. Unable to control myself, I spilled out all my bitterness, I pleaded with him to influence Father to change his mind. Sammy was also upset and disappointed, and when he had finished testing us he left the room saying cheerfully, as though some brilliant idea had just occurred to him: "I'm going to talk to Father."

We sat without a word around the big kitchen table, for supper. I was on the point of tears when we heard Sammy suddenly say to Father: "Daddy, do you know what I've been thinking?" Father looked up at Sammy, Fritzi and I held our breath, for we were sure he was referring to us. Sammy ceremoniously announced that he was prepared to give up his stipend in our favour, just so that Father would enroll us for Secndary School. I wanted to get up and hug and kiss our dear, good Sammy, to thank him with elaborate, emotional words, to ask his forgiveness for the tricks Fritzi and I sometimes played on him, and I was also prepared to promise him that in future I would devote myself wholeheartedly to my studies, so that he could be proud of me.

But instead, I lowered my eyes to the plate in front of me on the table, as though I was very busy eating. Mother tried to suppress an audible sigh.

"Sammiko, my dear, Father and I have given very serious thought to the matter, we would also prefer the girls not to remain an extra year in Primary School. But it isn't only a matter of 3000 Lei for tuition, but of almost double that amount, maybe even triple, and we simply can't manage it this year." To my great surprise, Fritzi opened her mouth, something she had never done before, and with unusual temerity implored our parents to try, promising to excel at her studies in the hope that both she and I would win grants, like Sammy. I was most perturbed at her suggesting this possibility at all, and speaking for me, too! I knew, despite my reputed imagination, that I could never imagine succeeding like Sammy, I was aware that everyone regarded him as extremely gifted, whereas I was no more than a run of the mill pupil.

But her words brought smiles back to Mother's and Father's

faces; as though a magic wand had been waved, Father altered his firm decision to a position of "Maybe". He promised to go to the Secondary School offices the following day to enquire into possibilities. Mother encouraged him by indicating that she would be prepared to forgo something -- something we did not comprehend.

The next day we were sitting in class, waiting for the bell to ring for the long break. Giza had anxiously asked me early in the morning whether we had enrolled yet for secondary school. When I replied that there was some doubt, she became sorrowful. As the bell rang, Giza ran into the corridor to drink some water and she saw my father going into the office. She quickly ran towards us, her eyes shining with joy, to give us the good news. We hurried into the corridor, where we met Father. He told us that he had gone to make detailed enquiries and, to his surprise, had learned that there was a law, luckily for us, whereby twins were required to pay only half the fee each. He was in an elated mood.

And so we were not separated from Giza and we began to prepare for the entrance exams together with her. At first, Sammy tried to teach us French as well as arithmetic, which he was already teaching us. But despite my promise to be disciplined, I could not meet what I regarded as his excessive demands, and Father decided to engage Fraulein Gertner, who was a High School graduate, to coach us for the French entrance exam. Indeed, I passed every one of the exams.

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CHAPTER NO 4

A SAD PARTING:JUNE 1940

Rumours of a Russian invasion of North Bukovina and Bessarabia were rife, and our town, Radutz, which was in South Bukovina, was in turmoil. We were on hot coals. Soldiers of the retreating Rumanian army crammed the streets. With this, there were widespread rumours that the Russians had entered our district as well. Those were anxious days, devoid of any certainty or confidence in what the future held. Some of the town's Jews, those who were involved in the Communist party, surreptitiously rejoiced in the hope that there would indeed be a Russian invasion. But many, my father among them, were afraid of the Russians and the price that would be exacted by their coming.

Fritzi, myself and Giza were about to complete our third year of secondary school. My brother Sammy had finished his seventh year at the boys' lyceum. He had one year left before attaining his matriculation certificate.

After a week of upheaval, Jewish families began leaving the town to cross the border into Czernowitz and Bessarabia. Many of my classmates were among them. The atmosphere in the class was troubled; the end of the year exams were postponed and did not take place as planned. The number of Jewish students dwindled day by day. Coming into the class, our headmistress, Mrs. Paduraru, would sarcastically enquire: "Which of you is leaving, girls?" Which was directed at the few remaining Jewish pupils.

I told Father about this, in the hope that we, too, would leave. But my father rebuked me, "You worry about your studies, Anika; we have no reason to leave. I'm not a communist and I'm not

a member of any other party. We have no relatives in Czernowitz nor in Bessarabia. Besides which, I hope nothing exceptional will happen, and everything will get back to normal."

But Father's predictions went unfulfilled. Real chaos prevailed in the town. Many families left each day, and their empty houses were taken over by Jewish families expelled from the surrounding villages.

Those were days of sad partings from my best friends. First, Sima Kuperstein came to say goodbye to us, then came Rebecca, Mitzi and Berenice, and with each emotional parting my souvenir album, and Fritzi's, grew fuller, but there was an emptiness in our hearts.

The most difficult parting was from Giza and Bettika, our constant companions from our earliest days. Somehow, I sensed we would never see each other again, and that our delightful childhood years were about to end.

I hurried to Giza and Bettika's house, to be with them during the few hours that were left until their departure. Their house was in turmoil; many people were coming and going, some to buy the possessions that were being sold, some to take their leave. Packed crates and bundles of bedding, carpets and curtains were piled in the wide passage and scattered throughout the rooms now empty of furniture. The scene was like a deserted railway station.

The day before they left, Bettika and Giza came to visit us at home. They arrived in the morning and, in the afternoon, were joined by their parents and their brother, Duca. There was a Sabbath atmosphere in the kitchen. Father, who was never home at that time on a weekday, and Mr. Fuchs sat side by side on the bench, talking animatedly. Mother and Mrs. Fuchs spread the big Sabbath tablecloth and set the table. Bettika was underfoot all

the time and nothing Mr. and Mrs. Fuchs did could restrain the restless little girl. "How dare you, Mammale," chided Mr. Fuchs as if in earnest, drawing Bettika between his knees: "Now you won't be able to move, my sweet," but she knew very well how to exploit her father's abundant love, and mischievously freed herself from his knees and climbed to his shoulders, from where she shot triumphant looks at us. The sound of Sammy and Duca's voices raised in loud discussion came from Sammy's room. Giza was full of enthusiasm at the prospect of the journey, and I was a little jealous of her. When we were all seated at the table, we dared not talk loudly in Father's presence, so we exchanged glances, now and then kicking each other under the table, just to tease, and to brace ourselves for the sad parting.

My mother and Mrs. Fuchs spoke excitedly about the journey. Father did not speak much, but listened to Mr. Fuchs, who was most enthusiastically trying to persuade him to leave Radutz and come to Czernowitz: "There's no future for the children here. We'll always hear the word Yids. Its a fact. The Rumanians have always been antisemites, but I'm quite sure that we won't hear the word Yid in Russia, where everyone's equal." Father asserted that there was nothing to fear from the Rumanians, since here we had been born and here, maybe, we would die. Unless we went to Palestine, the Jewish Peoples' Holy Land, which bore some connection with the children's future.

This was the first time since Ze'ev, the leader of my group in the youth movement, had visited, that father had expressed himself decisively and confidently. Mother and Mrs. Fuchs were inclined to accept Father's opinion, but Mr. Fuchs was firm in his view that now was the time to leave. Further, the Fuchs family had many relatives in Czernowitz, with whom they stayed during every

summer vacation. "Overnight," Mr. Fuchs asserted, "a border and zones have been established, and if we don't cross now, maybe we never will." Bettika and Giza stayed on after lunch. Sammy accompanied Duca and his parents, who returned to their house to complete their packing. Mother and Father remained chatting in the kitchen and we went to our room.

We spoke about the journey and the provisions Mrs. Fuchs had prepared for the road: "Enough for an unlimited period". But, in spite of the crush at the border, she expressed the hope that they would arrive in Czernowitz by afternoon, at the latest. The name Czernowitz gave us a strange feeling. Only two months earlier, it had been a city like any other in Rumania, you could take a bus or a train and be there in a relatively short time. And now this same Czernowitz had all of a sudden "taken off" beyond the mountains of darkness, or light. Depending on the definition of those who either did or did not believe in the communist regime and Stalin. And beyond those mountains I had friends I was already managing to miss. To be painfully aware of their absence. When I hugged Giza for the last time, I asked her to give my love to Rivka and Sima, to tell them I missed them. I did not add anything else. I knew there was no chance of getting a letter from them, or of seeing them. Not in the near future, at any rate.

My parents and Sammy accompanied the Fuchs family to the wagon waiting outside. Fritzi and I ran to our room, pressed against the windowpanes and saw the wagon hitched to two horses, loaded with boxes and bundles, standing under the street lamp, with the driver on the seat. Then we saw our two friends climbing up and disappearing among the bundles. Mother and Mrs. Fuchs embraced with feeling. They gazed into each other's faces for a moment, hands clasped, without a word. Father parted from them

with a handshake. Then we saw Mr. Fuchs climbing up to sit beside the driver. Sammy and Duca shook hands for a long time and then they assisted Mrs. Fuchs into the wagon and, finally he, Duca, also climbed up. When the driver cracked his whip above his head and the wagon moved away, we saw Giza and Betty rising from among the parcels and waving in the direction of our window. We remained glued to the window panes, our tearful eyes following the wagon until it disappeared around the street corner.

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CHAPTER NO 5

POGROMS

Sammy's closest school friends among the Christians, friends with whom he had studied from earliest childhood to maturity, were Stefan Helos and Yunel Rotter. Despite their membership in the Iron Guard fascist movement, they continued to visit our home and the friendship between them and Sammy was undamaged.

But, at Father's request, they would come in ordinary clothes and not in the uniform they usually flaunted. And it was thus they came one Wednesday afternoon (20.1.1941). After a few pollite exchanges, they asked where Sammy was. He was playing his violin in his room. Before Father could answer, Yunel asked him: "Did you meet my father today?" Father nodded and hinted that they had spoken of him and Sammy, adding: "Your father isn't pleased that you waste so much time on party nonsense." Yunel shrugged: "I know, Father belongs to the generation of old liberals and we have nothing in common." "I don't intend to teach you. When you grow up you can judge what's best for yourselves." With that, Father meant to end the conversation he had begun. But Stefan and Yunel persisted and it was obvious they had come specially to talk to him. Father gestured to Fritzi and me to go to our room. But Stefan stopped us with a raised hand: "Mr. Faust, the girls should stay and listen. As Sammy's friends, we've come to warn you not to send the girls to school, and you'd better stay home as well. Father stood dumbfounded and could only ask what they meant by a gesture of the hand. "We've learned from a fellow party member that they are planning a pogrom against the Jews tomorrow," said Stefan and they both began to apologise, saying they would have nothing to do with it, but there was nothing they could do to

prevent it. Father paled, and it was clear that he was extremely vexed with the two "sheikotz" -- gentile -- messengers. I was gripped with fear when I saw Father biting his lips in anger. I was afraid he was about to throw the two of them out of the house. Mother also looked alarmed and in order to avoid a confrontation, she said: "I think the boys mean well, and deserve our thanks."

Hearing the noise, and not knowing its cause, Sammy came into the kitchen. He exchanged greetings with his friends, who then hurriedly left. "Don't let me see you in their company ever again!" Father let all his anger out on Sammy, "those hooligans! Trying to order me to stay at home! I'll show them who's scared of whom!" "Maybe they were telling the truth," Mother interrupted, "maybe they were trying to help us? Maybe its worth going to Mr Kunstadt, the Community Chairman, to clarify what's going on?"

Sammy was also angry and left, slamming the door. Mother gave Father an accusing glance, but she quietly asked him to calm down and go to Mr. Kunstadt. "What's the point in going to Kunstadt?" he added. "If there was any truth in what the two sheikotzim had to say, I'd have heard, and not by implication, from Rotter himself. We met only yesterday and we arranged that he'd come to Botosani with me tomorrow. It isn't possible that he'd deliberately keep something so important from me. After all, we aren't exactly strangers ... Rotter's a decent, honest goy." "These days you mustn't trust anyone," Mother sighed. "Alright, if you really want me to go," Father pacified her. "But don't get into a panic. And you, girls, don't worry," he cupped our heads in his hands, and sent us to our room with a kiss on the forehead. "You're going to school tomorrow, hear? Don't get any ideas about a holiday!" "Daddy," I said, "perhaps you shouldn't go out of the house now?" I also tried to pursuade him not to go to Botosani

the next day. I wanted all of us to stay home. "Anyhow, we're learning very little at school now, because a lot of the girls in class are absent." But Father, himself worried, tried to soothe us: "I told you not to worry. Mother wants me to go to Mr. Kunstadt, maybe she's right; I'll be right back and then we'll all have supper." Father went to the door, and left.

When we were alone, Fritzi sobbed: "I'm terribly scared, Annika, if only Daddy won't go tomorrow." "And what about after tomorrow?" I asked. "If only it was after tomorrow already," said Fritzi in a choked voice.

Sammy came in, his face clouded with sadness. He was worried, but knew how to hide it. "What are you doing?" he asked, laughing. "I thought you were shaking with fear, so I came to tell you a joke." He was trying hard to sound merry. We sat on Fritzi's bed and the air of the room was once again serious.

"Sammy, what do you think, are they really going to have a pogrom against us tomorrow?" He didn't answer. He seemed to be planning something. We heard the gate open and through the window saw Mittika the driver and Mr. Rotter approaching. "Here they come, its a sign that everything's alright," Fritzi said, "Daddy'll go to Botosani tomorrow as planned, and you'll see that it was all a bluff." "Yes, everything will be alright," Sammy promised. "But you promise me that you won't leave the house tomorrow."

Sammy was an authority for us, and I relied on what he said. But Fritzi protested: "Daddy told us to go and we must go. Even if he won't be home." "We'll see about that tomorrow," Sammy said.

We could hear Mittike and Mr. Rotter going into the kitchen and saying good evening to Mother. I pricked my ears to hear what they were saying. Mr. Rotter asked for Father and Mother said he

had gone out, but would be back immediately and she asked them to wait. They said nothing about what was going to happen the next day. My mother did not mention the conversation with his son at all, and from what Mittike and Mr. Rotter said, we understood that the trip would take place the next day, as planned. Sammy remained with us, testing me for a history exam. Fritzi and I studied the same material in different classes. Fritzi would learn whole sections by heart and she would recite them to me before each exam, while I followed the text in the book, so I already knew the work. I answered all Sammy's questions to his satisfaction.

Fritzi happily told us that Father had arrived.Uncle Izzio had also come. They were speaking quietly and easily, pacing along the gravel path to the front door. Sammy also went to look, and his face lit up with pleasure as he went out to them. The three of them entered the kitchen with a cheerful "Good evening". There were no signs of anxiety or fear on their faces. Mother invited everyone to dinner. All her questioning glances in Father's direction went unanswered. Except for a few words in Hebrew, which we did not understand:"Hakol ke'shura, Rebecca." -- Everything's alright, Rebecca.

The men spoke animatedly. Mr. Rotter asked after the girls, as he called us. He spoke admiringly of Sammy, as always, and expressed his satisfaction at the friendship between Sammy and his son Yunel and also expressed the hope that they would continue being friends in the Medical School at Iasi, where they were both enrolled.

Uncle Izzio rose to leave, saying that little Mozio was waiting for him. The baby had not fallen asleep yet when he left the house, and he had promised to come back early in case he stayed awake waiting for him. "Don't exaggerate, Izzio," Mother

laughed, "an eighteen-month-old baby doesn't understand promises yet." And Uncle Izzio, proudly: "Not a baby like Mozio, you should hear how clever he is. He was a genius while still in his mother's belly. He's the only one who can tell Annika from Fritzi, isn't he?"

We had celebrated Mozio's first birthday in great splendour with all the family present. He had been dressed in a white silk shirt with lace collar and cuffs. And blue velvet trousers and white shoes, in which he had taken his first tottering steps.

The evening would have ended as usual, had Grandfather not come and disturbed the peace. We heard Urso barking, and Grandfather's deep voice: "Quiet, stupid, don't you recognise me?" He struck his cane on the stones. Grandfather had come in by the back gate, where Urso reigned and where he fulfilled his duties faithfully. At night, father used to let him off the chain, with which he was tied all day, alert to every sound; nobody dared approach our yard. The firewood stacked to dry in the yard before it was sawn and put into the storeroom, the chickens, the ducks and geese that ran around at liberty in the yard, the fruit trees that stood ripening for picking, were under his sole control and safe against theft. He had recently also managed to chase away criminals who had come at night to paste antisemitic posters on our windowpanes. Grandfather burst in like a cyclone, without relating to those present: "Is it true, Moshe, that you went to Kunstadt in connection with some rumour that they're going to take it out on the Jews tomorrow? Why didn't you come and let me know about it? With this stick," he raised his cane, " I'll smash the skull of anyone who tries to touch us! To Mr. Kunstadt, you went? And how will that help you?"

While Grandfather was at the peak of his rage, Father waved

us out of the kitchen. Mr. Rotter and Mittike paled; Uncle Izzio and Mother were stunned, and Sammy tried in vain to calm Grandfather.

We stood behind the door to listen. First to react was Mr. Rotter. Apparently he did not know and had not heard a thing, and he only knew through Grandfather that his son was involved in the matter. He cursed and abused the Iron Guard, who were destroying all that was good in the nation and the country. Grandfather called him the "Yiddisher Goy"; and Mr. Rotter had indeed proved his liking for the Jews. The argument toned down after Father promised Grandfather that there was no truth in the rumour. "The main reason for the rumour, " Uncle Izzio claimed, " is that the Czernowitz border was closed yesterday, and the Iron Guard is exploiting the opportunity to threaten the Jews, who can no longer get away."

Again fear gripped us. My heart contracted, I suddenly saw that between us and Bettika and Giza, Sima and Rivka, yawned an abyss which we may never cross, and we would never meet again. The discussion ended when Uncle Izzio hurriedly left and we, not wanting to be caught eavesdropping behind the door, fled to our room.

When we awoke, I heard the rattle of the truck's engine. I jumped out of bed and went to the window overlooking the yard. Between the curtains I could see Father and Mr. Rotar sitting in the driver's cabin; Mittike was leaning over the engine, manually turning the crank with quick rotations, which was producing the rattle. Mittike was tall and broad-shouldered and his big hands gripped the crank as if it was a garlic peel, as Father said. Before long trips he used to sleep over in our kitchen, as he had the night before. He got into the driver's cabin and sat behind

the wheel. The truck slowly drove out of the yard.

I could hear the engine for some time, until the truck was out of sight. Grandfather had also sat down to our table that morning, having come early, fully prepared to escort us to school. The argument had started all over again, and Sammy insisted that we stay home. Mother relied on Mr. Kunstadt's assurance to Father that he had been informed about the hooligans' intentions, but senior police officers had promised him that they would prevent the pogrom at all costs and protect each and every Jew. Mother believed these promises, and insisted we should go to school. Grandfather agreed with her. Had they asked for my opinion, I would have happily stayed at home, particularly since I did not like the idea of Grandfather escorting us.

When Lola, our Rumanian neighbour and classmate, called from outside, we both jumped up happily and made for the door. Grandfather rose and also determinedly strode to the door. He flung it open and, stick in hand, pointed the way out: "If you please, girls, forward with Grandfather!"

At the very last moment, Sammy managed to pursuade Grandfather to stay home. "Grandfather, there's really no need for an escort. They're going with Lola. Look, everything's quiet and there are other children in the street on their way to school. And besides, you can rely on the girls to look after themselves if necessary. After all, nobody's going to attack them just for the hell of it. Grandfather was offended, but withdrew from the door. "You think I'm just an old fogey, so have it your own way. But if they harm one hair of the girls' heads, I'll give them a taste of my stick!"

We were already in our school uniforms. The schoolbags were ready with the sandwiches inside them. I hurriedly put a net on my

braids, because we were careful not to dirty the compulsory white collar of our school dresses. Sammy followed us into the street and again told us to be careful and, if anything went wrong, to come home at once.

The street looked the same as always. Mr. Avrum's shop was open already. Little children were crowding into it to buy fresh rolls for school and Mr. Avrum, who had a slight stammer, was admonishing them to stay in line. They emerged in groups, laughing and imitating the way he spoke: "Ch-ch-children, d-don't t-touch!" Mrs. Glezer's Margaretta was on the balcony, both elbows on the railing, also breathing the fresh morning air.

Further along, almost at the corner of the street, stood the Rippel family's house. Every morning we would see Mrs. Rippel busily clearing the snow which had piled up in her garden. She would never raise her head as we passed, and we would wish her "Good morning", loudly, so that she would hear. Standing firmly planted, her back bent and her head in the furrow, she would call: " A good and blessed morning to you, girls."

We reached the main road, on which stood the elementary school we had previously attended. Many boys and girls were streaming out of the side streets with their mothers. We walked faster. Our school was in the centre of town, among stores, businesses and workshops mostly owned by Jews. The great synagogue, "The Temple", stood nextdoor to the school.

Not far from the school, we noticed large concentrations of the Iron Guard, all wearing their uniform, with clubs in their hands. They stood in groups, their faces stern: ready to do battle with the little Jewish children innocently on their way to school.

The shops opened one by one. Workers were arriving at the

workshops. I looked around for a policeman to protect us in case of need, but there was not one to be found.

We were already close to the school building, Lola walking beside us. I tugged at Fritzi and whispered to her: "Let's go home." Lola was also surprised at the unusual sight: "What's this? A war? Why are they all standing here?" With contempt and some fear, I told her: "You've got nothing to be scared of, run to class, Fritzi and I are going home."

Just then, I saw Jews leaving the synagogue. The groups of hooligans suddenly spread out -- they moved towards the synagogue and the shops and workshops, and savagely fell upon the Jews they met.

Fritzi and I pressed against the fence next to us, and we saw how one of the hooligans attacked an old Jew coming out of the synagogue; he beat him on the head with his club and blood spurted from the old man's head. The hooligan grabbed his beard, but I hid my face in my hands. I stood there as if paralysed. Fritzi gripped my arm and pulled me into a nearby yard.

Heartrending cries sounded from all sides. Women's cries for help and cries of pain: "Oi, oi," someone shouted, "Gotteinu, helf mir!" (God help me!).

We found a hiding place in the yard, among some tangled rose bushes which grew the length of the fence. We threw our school bags into the bushes and crawled in after them. The air was split with the anguished cries of men and women. The cries of those thirsting for Jewish blood could be heard, too: "Dirty yids." "Shout, yids, we'll send you to Russia, to Palestine. Let the yid have it, give it to him, that's not enough!" They screeched like beasts of prey. Stones were flying and the sound of shattering windowpanes filled the air. Fritzi put her hands over her ears and

quietly prayed to God to end the rioting, to look after Mother, Sammy and Grandfather at home, and Father on the road, and all our family. She repeated the prayer over and over through clenched teeth, her face pressed to the ground.

I tried to see what was going on, through a gap between two boards in the fence. Many boots were kicking against bodies flung on the stones in road. Their shouts could be heard for a long way. Splinters of glass flew in all directions. I shut my eyes so as not to see, and joined Fritzi's prayer. Terrible thoughts entered my head. What was happening at home? Had they reached our street as well? If only Grandfather would not go out into the street, or Mother, or Sammy, to look for us. And what about Father? And Uncle Izzio and his family? I do not know how long the rioting lasted. It was like an eternity, but the voices slowly died down. The savage yells of the hooligans had almost stopped. The cries of the victims turned into sighs and cries of "Shma Yisrael". Hear O Israel, the Lord is One. We heard a few more isolated voices, among them a man's shouting all the time: "May God punish you, damned goyim." Over and over again. Until this voice, too, grew silent.

A frightening silence reigned. From the bushes I saw a man leave the house and go swiftly to the gate. My blood froze in my veins. I hugged Fritzi very tightly, hiding her face in my chest and whispering to her: "Sh, sh, sh." A woman followed him out of the house, trying to get him to return, with despairing gestures. She stood in the entrance as though afraid to leave the house. The man, who had already reached the gate, came to a stop and I saw him cross himself, turn on his heel and hurriedly return to his wife. Both of them crossed themselves and went indoors. It was completely silent, I looked again through the gap in the fence and

could not see anyone. The hooligans had vanished without a trace. I said to Fritzi: "Come, let's get out of here.Perhaps the owners of the house will see us and take us inside. Maybe they know Father. Come." We crawled from under the bushes.

Suddenly we heard horses trotting along the street and the voices of policemen calling to one another. We went to the gate, which was open, and ventured into the street. We looked left and right, ahead, and everything was still. Not a living soul. Apart from the policemen. There were fragments of glass on the pavement. The shops looked as if there had been a fire, and some of them had been emptied out. Doors were wrenched out and windows smashed.

The four or five policemen had spread out along the street. Among them, I suddenly saw our neighbour, Marchinko. I shouted to him, "Mr. Marchinko, Mr. Marchinko!" Hearing my shout he turned to face us in surprise: "Annie, Fritzi, what are you doing here?" he said. We burst into tears and asked him to take us home. He dismounted, lifted the two us into the saddle, then mounted, too, calling to his friends" "I'll be back in a moment."

On the way he asked if we had seen what had happened. We answered him in chorus that we had not seen anything, but had heard only cries and shouts. I asked him what was happening in our street. He calmed us: "The disturbance was only in the centre of town." He called it a "disturbance".

We were already near home when I remembered that we had left our school bags under the bushes. "Never mind," Policeman Marchinko reassured us, "I'll bring them to you tonight." People were strolling around calmly and peacefully near the elementary school, as though nothing at all had happened. It was quiet in our street, too. We came to our house. The policman lifted us down from his horse and promised to come to our house with our

schoolbags in the evening. "Regards to your parents," as though nothing had happened. But Fritzi and I were shocked by the terrible sights we had seen that morning; we were shuddering in our very bones.

Sammy opened the door to us. He did not seem surprised to see us and asked in his calm voice if we had run away from school. Grandfather was still there, he was sitting in the kitchen sipping contentedly at the glass of tea in his hand. When he saw us, he put the cup on the table, looked at us in some confusion, and asked: "Has something happened, girls?" With bated breath we told them what we had heard and seen. Mother was in the yard at the time, and when she heard our voices, she came running to the kitchen, in consternation: "What happened? What happened?" Our words tumbled out confusedly and they were shocked. Mother hugged us and murmured: " Thank God you're here, thank God you're here."

The street was full of life again in the afternoon. Happy noisy children ran about gaily, trying to catch one another. Lola also came inside to see if we had arrived home. She said that the Headmistress had come into the class before they had begun to study, and had asked the teacher to keep the Jewish students indoors during the break. She also told us that they had heard terrible cries outside, during the geography lesson, and the teacher had bolted the windows. But it was only in the evening that we heard the details of that morning's disaster.

Mr. Kosteritz our Jewish neighbour, who worked as a clerk in the clinic, came over with his wife and told us of the many injured and of the looting and destruction of shops. What shocked us most was the evil tidings that Mr. Tennenbaum had had both his ears cut off. He had been brought unconscious to the clinic, and only when his wife came was he moved to the hospital, where he

died. Other neighbours also came and went, trying to question Fritzi and I as to what we had seen and heard.

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CHAPTER NO 6

FATHER GOES TO BUCHAREST; UNCLE MOSHE AND OLD WIVE'S TALES

Father was off to Bucharest again, on business, and he set out early in the morning with Mittike in the truck. Mother was busier than usual that day and did not notice that evening, when Father usually returned from his business trips, had come. Mother began to worry only after we had eaten supper and her worry grew with every hour that passed.

It was late at night already when Urso's barking warned of a stranger's approach. Mother had not yet managed to open the door when a voice was heard calling: "Mrs. Faust, telegram!" We were alarmed at the sight of the telegram in Mother's hand. It was from Father to announce that he would not be home that day and was on his way to Bucharest. "Why Bucharest, all of a sudden?" Mother wondered, " Bucharest wasn't mentioned at all!" We made all sorts of guesses, but none was realistic. Sammy's guess was not accepted by Mother either. He had hazarded the guess that father had happened to get a consignment for Bucharest and had decided to carry on to that city. Mother rejected this assumption as unlikely, since Father's work permit was for a limited area.

Three days had passed and we still had not heard anything from Father. Mother approached Mr. Reiss, Father's bookkeeper, in case he knew of Father's purpose in visiting Bucharest. But he also had not been given the slightest indication and was no less surprised than we were. The worry and tension increased with every day that passed. Mother kept peering through the curtain, not hiding her anxiety from us. On Thursday afternoon Uncle Izzio, Aunt Rosa and Mozzio called on us. They had not known that Father

had not returned. Uncle Izzio suggested sending a telegram to Uncle Shmuel, his and Father's cousin, to find out if Father was with him. "I see no point in worrying, he must have had a good reason for going to Bucharest and he will certainly be home for Sabbath."

Uncle and Auntie's visit allayed the tension a little. We amused ourselves all afternoon with Mozzio, who was a sweet and entertaining child; he would crawl under the table, shouting: "Where's Mozzio?" We pretended to search and when we "discovered" him he would burst into a peal of laughter, climb on Sammy's back and oblige him to go on all fours, like a horse, with him as rider: "Whoa, whoa!" "That child is wonderful," said Mother, also laughing at his antics.

Thursdays were devoted to making the stuffed fish, the meat, the soup, the pies and the preserved fruit dessert, and to the baking of the Sabbath loaves, the cakes and the bread for the rest of the week, and Mother used to work till late at night in the kitchen. On Fridays she would always give us some delicious, square egg-cookies with a saucer-like depression in the centre.

I woke up and asked mother for a cup of milk. There was a dryness in my mouth. Mother brought me the milk. She came into our room carrying the cup and a candle in her hands: "Young lady, do you know what time it is? Its two o'clock in the morning!" I could see in the candlelight that she was not in the least angry with me and was "admonishing" me out of mother love. Mother sat on the edge of my bed and began to stroke my hair and my forehead, to check whether I had a fever. I could feel the pleasant, soothing warmth of her hand. She urged me to drink all the milk.

Suddenly, we heard Urso's bark. "Its Daddy!" Mother cried. Urso had a different bark for everyone entering the yard. For a

stranger -- rapid, angry barks. For Grandfather -- friendly, but aggressive barks, because Grandfather always teased him with his stick. The joyful barking was always for Father only.

Right afterwards we heard Father's voice hushing Urso: "Quiet, Urso! Enough, you'll wake up the whole town!" For a moment I wondered. We had not heard the noise of the engine ... Mother and I ran to him. Father was stroking Urso's black fur to quiet him. With one jump I was enfolded in Fathers big, strong arms. Then he embraced and kissed Mother, too. And so, our arms around each other, we went into the house. Urso's barking had awakened Fritzi and Sammy as well. After our first excitement had subsided, Father told us about the events of that week.

No sooner had he left the house than he was stopped by some Rumanian soldiers who had been on their way to us with an order from the military headquarters to commandeer the truck for the army. After pursuasion and promises from Father to report together with the truck, and bribes to the soldiers, they consented to allow Father to continue: "We didn't find you at home." After this run-in with the soldiers, Father had decided to continue on to Bucharest in order to consult with Uncle Shmuel as to how to avoid having to hand over the truck, his means of livelihood, to the Rumanian army. He had sent the telegram on arrival in Botosani. From there he had gone directly to Bucharest, to Uncle Shmuel, his cousin on Grandfather's side. Shmuel's mother was Grandfather Efraim's sister. She lived in Gura-Humor, and we saw each other often. The relationship between her and Grandfather Efraim was very good, and we called her Aunt Rachel. Uncle Shmuel had gone to live in Bucharest many years before and he had succeeded in business and become prominently wealthy. He was the owner of the Reshitzer steel-cutting works; a partner in an oil refinery; and a

partner in the Surra chain of stores in Bucharest, some of which he owned outright. The Vitro-Meten ceramics factory, whose products were sold throughout Rumania and overseas, also belonged to him. He had many trade contacts in several countries, including Germany, which he supplied mainly with steel. Uncle Shmuel was happy that Father had come to him; they had been attached to each other in their adolescence. It was an emotional meeting. Uncle Shmuel suggested that Father should transfer ownership of the truck to him, and so next morning they had pasted eye-catching stickers on the windowscreen: "In the service of Germany", a sure protection against harrassment. It had also been decided that Father should stay in Bucharest until he acquired a driver's licence. And so, the family was to move to Bucharest.

I jumped for joy: We were also going to leave town! I was full of anticipation of change and possibly adventure. To see the big world! My good childhood friends, in leaving, had left a longing and emptiness in my heart. Even secondary school had lost its glamour. The atmosphere there had become clouded after most of the Jewish girls had left.

Except that Mother utterly rejected the plan: " The girls won't fit in there. We have family and friends here, everything has its place for us. If you have to leave," she said to Father, "so be it, but the whole family? Let's hope the situation here improves quickly and you'll be able to get back soon, without causing an upheaval in our lives."

Father asserted that the conditions offerred him by Shmuel assured them of a comfortable life, and that time would also have its effect. He said we could come back here at any time. We would not sell the house, but would merely close it for an indefinite time, and Grandfather and Izzio could keep an eye on it. He added:

"We can be closer to Sammy." But Mother held her own: we should wait and see how things turned out. The discussion continued almost till morning. Shmuel had suggested employing Father, with the truck, at Vitro-Meten at a salary which would ensure us of a comfortable living, and we would live in his spacious house, in an elegant neighbourhood, until a suitable apartment could be found, which he would rent for us. And concerning the girls: we could, later, be enrolled in a good school. The main thing was to get a residence permit for us in Bucharest, something that was virtually impossible in those days, but Uncle Shmuel also could handle this problem without difficulty. Sammy was on Father's side and he also tried to convince Mother. I prayed that he and Father would succeed in pursuading her.

It was already seven in the morning, and Father made no mention to us of going to sleep or getting ready for school. He even categorically declared: "Today you'll stay home and rest. I have to leave for Bucharest by the first train tomorrow morning." "But its the Sabbath tomorrow," Mother protested. "I don't want to worry you, but its best you know: the situation is far more serious than they are aware of here. Its dangerous for Jews to travel by train. Had it not been for Mittike, who travelled all the way from Bucharest with me, I would have been endangered. They -- the Iron Guard -- get onto the trains and attack Jewish passengers. A Jew who was in the carriage with me was thrown out of the train while it was in motion. It was a terrifying sight; the carriage was full of people and not one of them moved a finger. I have therefore decided to travel on Sabbath, which won't be breaking Jewish law because of the danger to my life. I'm taking Mittike with me to work on the truck until I get my driver's licence. "

Father's imminent unexpected departure was certainly very hard on Mother and I took it upon myself to comfort and encourage her. But Mother was very withdrawn and went about without responding to me at all. From time to time she would put a pot on the stove, wiping away her tears. Suddenly, she buried her face in her hands and with a deep sigh, cried quietly.

I could not bear her tears. I hugged and kissed her: "Mammale, don't cry, please, my heart tells me its all for the best." I believed what I was saying, and with all my heart wanted Mother to believe it, too, and stop crying, and smile again. At last she pulled herself together and loosened her tongue. She gazed at me for a long time with her eyes reddened from lack of sleep and weeping: "Do you know, Annika," she tried to put a gay note into her voice, "grown-ups also cry sometimes. And at times little girls like you can soothe us. I'm beginning to believe what you're saying, Annike."

I was flooded with pride and happiness, as mother embraced me and whispered: "Promise not to tell anyone that you saw your mother crying." I looked at her face with satisfaction and I promised faithfully not to tell a soul. Then, suddenly, as though nothing had happened, she revived, wiped away a last stubborn tear, and energetically took four glasses and a tray from the cupboard, poured tea, put out a bowl of cookies, and gave the tray to me: "Take that into the parlour." Curious to know what they were talking about in there, I went towards the room carrying the tray. I tried to knock at the door with my foot, and receiving no answer quietly pushed the door open with my elbow, and entered. Nobody observed my entrance. Father and Mr. Reiss were leaning on the big table. The cloth was spread, and there were large notebooks at the end of the table, in which Mr. Reiss was

explaining something to Father. Grandfather and Mittike were sitting facing each other in armchairs, quietly conversing. Embarrassed, I heard myself whisper: "Grandfather, Grandfather," and Grandfather gave me a wide, surprised smile. Mittike came over and took the tray from me. Father had almost no time to smile at me: "Thanks, Annike, how did you know we wanted something to drink?" I went out, feeling let down for some reason, not having absorbed anything at all. I had not been included in any of the conversation. I went to my room, only to find Fritzi stretched out on her bed, sleeping the sleep of the just.

With the arrival of Uncle Izzio, Aunt Rosa and baby Mozzio, the atmosphere in the house improved. Mother approved of Aunt Rosa who was very dear to her. "My wise sister-in-law", Mother called her, and she managed to raise her spirits this time as well. Mozzio, who filled the house with his laughter and his delightful shouts, also did his bit.

After Mittike and Mr. Reiss had left, Father and Grandfather joined Uncle Izzio and Sammy on the bench in the kitchen. The conversation revolved around the family and Uncle Shmuel, in Bucharest, who had grown distant from the family in recent years, was even perhaps being forgotten, and see, the contact had been renewed. Uncle Max and Aunt Jeanette and their seven-year-old son Siegfried came to visit us, all dressed up, as was befitting on a holiday.

The big table in the centre of the room had been laid for supper. The china, cutlery and gold-rimmed vases that Mother had taken from the cupboard that ran the length of the wall, stood on the table. The upper part of the cupboard consisted of shelves laden with crystal and silver dishes, and had glass doors. Grandmother, rest her soul, always used to say jokingly: "This

room is so big you could lose a horse and cart in it." But on Sabbaths and holidays, when the family gathered, nobody got lost. Everything always looked beautiful and festive, as it did on that Sabbath.

The big room also served as a playroom. When Father was away from home, we used to bring all our games and toys into the room, as well as our games of make-believe, which we so loved. We played under the big table, where we built a doll's house: we pulled the big green velvet table cloth with the tassels, which hung halfway down to the floor, all the way down to form a wall. The opening on the other side was the entrance to the house. We arranged all the scatter-cushions from the sofa under the table, like a bed. All we lacked was real food for the dolls, but Mother was against this.

When Grandfather declared that it was time to go to synagogue, the uncles, father and Sammy rose, and Grandfather handed out the prayerbooks he had brought with him. And here were Aunt Rachel and Uncle Moshe, too. This uncle, whose sense of humour never deserted him, hastened to apologise: "I haven't brought my prayershawl with me and so I won't be able to join you at the synagogue!" As though warning him, Grandfather looked at him with twinkling eyes: "Nu, everybody knows how you are on a Friday night, and as for your prayershawl, do you have any idea where it is? You haven't touched it since the day of your wedding." Aunt Rachel blushed, "Mr. Faust, you may be sure I air it regularly." Uncle Moshe was not a great synagogue-goer, but he was called a tsaddik, a righteous man, in the town, and among the family. I once heard a conversation between Aunt Rachel and Mother, in which Aunt Rachel was worriedly telling her how Uncle was involved beyond his means in charitable acts. "Listen, he's taken on himself to pay for the wedding of so-and-so. I don't know

where he's going to find the necessary sum. Believe me, Rebecca, its going to come from my housekeeping money." "Don't worry, Rachel," Mother consoled her, "God will repay you. What's more, it makes your Moshe happy to give charity to the poor."

We called them our uncle and aunt and were sure that this, in fact, was what they were to us. Only years later, Mother told us that they were just neighbours of ours, not relatives. "But," she added, "good neighbours and true friends are better than distant relatives." When I once asked Mother where Aunt Rachel's and Uncle Moshe's children were, she answered me sadly that they had no children and "never would have any". "Why?" I persisted. "Because God didn't give them children." The answer did not satisfy me and only when I grew up did I come to understand that not every couple was a mother and father. "Why haven't we got more brothers and sisters?" "My own mother," she explained, "had twelve children, and it was very hard for her. So I only gave birth twice, and see, I have three children! I didn't want more. I thought it would be hard for me, too. But you're lovely children!" She hugged me affectionately: "Now I'm a little sorry, but you'll see to it that I'm Grannie to a lot of grandchildren." "You, a grannie?" I cried in disbelief. It was hard for me to imagine my young and beautiful mother as a grandmother, sitting on a balcony, in a rocking-chair, as I remembered my own grandmother. She used to wear a long, gathered skirt, a blouse with long sleeves that covered her thin hands, and a high, gathered collar that fastened under her chin. A pink silk scarf with tassels adorned her head, covering her white hair which, according to her, had once been as black as mine. When not in her chair, she was always busy in the kitchen, stirring noodles in a pot on the stove, or kneading dough. The smell of her cooking used to arouse my appetite, I

particularly loved her goulash with potato pudding. She also knitted a great deal. "An artist at knitting," to quote Mother. A basket of wool and knitting needles was always beside her chair; all the pullovers, the grandchildren's as well as grandfather's, and all the woollen socks, were made by her. Even on summer evenings, Grandmother used to sit on the balcony knitting by moonlight, occassionally raising her eyes to look at the sky, as though trying to count stars. If a star fell, she would say, as though revealing a secret: "A falling star means a good person has been born. And some say that a good person has passed on. One way or another, each and every star has its own purpose and discipline." She taught me to track stars in the sky. She could also point out the Big Chariot, the Milky Way and the Bear, and I was sure that they all shone for Grandmother.

I also listened very attentively to her stories, which were mostly about herself. I loved sleeping at Grandfather's and Grandmother's house. It was small: a kitchen with an outside storeroom, and one big room. The balcony ran along the whole front of the house. Two big beds stood in the room, and there were also a table and chairs, two closets, various stools, and a big dressing table, which Grandmother called the "Commode". Above it there was a large mirror in a gilded frame, into which Grannie had inserted the photographs of Lillian and Harold, from birth to young womanhood and young manhood. Although I had never met them, I envisioned her as a tall, blonde girl with smiling eyes; she was nineteen. Harold, who seemed a serious boy in the photographs, was wearing a suit and tie and looked about 15-16. Grandmother called them "papierene kinder", paper children. They were the children of Uncle David, Grandmother and Grandfather's eldest son, who had emigrated to America at sixteen. Grandmother told me that he had

visited home twice before marrying Aunt Minna, but that had been before we were born. He wrote regularly and Grandmother tied the letters in bundles which, together with the album of photographs of David and his family, filled the big drawers in the dressing table. Whenever she took out the album to look at the pictures, she would shed tears, which she wiped away with the corner of her apron. In winter, as I lay in her bed, Grandmother would hurry to light the stove and cover me with the warm eiderdown.

I would always see Grandfather sitting till late at night reading from the Zohar by lamplight. Grandmother used to sit at my bedside telling me about her sons. She would talk about Uncle David with such pain and longing that I also clearly experienced the yearning. She would say that in Father, God had given her back a son. During the First World War Father had been too young to enlist, but because of an error in his family name, he had been conscripted and sent to the front together with grandfather. For two years she suffered sleepless nights and anxious days. Then, one night, at midnight, there was a knocking at the door. Uncle Max and Uncle Izzio, who were still boys, hurried to the door with her. "Mother, mother of mine, its me, your son Moshe!" When she opened the door she saw her son before her -- an officer with a medal on his chest. A medal she did not understand. No matter how I pleaded, my father never told us anything, neither about himself nor about others. It was only from my grandmother that I learned he had served in Trieste, in Italy, as an officer, and that he had been wounded in one of the battles. And she would sigh and repeat over and over again: "God has given me back a son."

She recounted the story of her marriage to Grandfather Efraim as she knitted. I sat on the footstool, and without raising her eyes, Grandmother told me: when she was sixteen, she was invited

to Vienna, to her cousin's coming-out party. Her cousin was seventeen. Grandmother drew out her words and slowed the rythm of her speech, trying to describe the blue silk dress she had worn to the party. "My late mother sewed that dress with her own hands, Annerl." She put down her knitting for a moment and, for a start, demonstrated the fitted bodice of the dress, sliding both her hands down her gaunt body, and then she swept them outwards to conjure up the wide, gathered skirt, which had covered her ankles. She had worn a stiff, well-starched petticote under the dress. "Grandfather Efraim, who was a soldier in the Austrian army, had also been invited to the party, and that's where we met for the first time." Smacking her lips, she described him entering the ballroom, adding with unconcealed pride: "All the girls flocked around him." She took a deep breath, as though wanting to preserve the experience for eternity. "Your Grandfather was handsome. When he came over to ask me to dance the Crocodile, which was danced in pairs, I blushed and was so shy and confused I didn't know what to do." "But why?" I asked her. "Well, you know, Annerl," she smiled shyly to herself, " I come from Solka, a small town." "And why did Grandfather choose you in particular?" And Grandmother, as though appealing for his help, looked tenderly at Grandfather. Then, after a brief sigh, she said: "Nu, I don't know," having been certain that Grandfather would answer instead of her. Indeed, Grandfather laughed and said: "Nu, don't you know? Your Grandmother was the most beautiful of all." Grandmother gave her girlish laugh. The next day Grandfather had invited her to the Vienna Opera. Because of her new shoes, "which pinched me terribly," she had not enjoyed herself at all and had not followed the action on stage.

We were sitting around the table in the garden with Uncle

Moshe. Mozzio had fallen asleep on a blanket on the grass, and Siegfried was listening to Uncle Moshe's version of a story about Honi the Rainmaker. When Aunt Rosa came to take Mozzio inside, she called us to come in, too, since the men would soon be returning from the synagogue. Fritzi and I were already wearing our Sabbath dresses. Mother had also changed. She was wearing a beige silk blouse and a brown cloche skirt, her hair was drawn back and held by an ivory clip and I imagined she was the Sabbath Queen herself. The table was festively laid. It was covered by a snowy white cloth and the porcelain crockery also gleamed white. The pure silver cutlery, which was only used on holidays, was arranged next to glasses that shone like mirrors. Two vases full of roses were at the centre of the table ~~with the unlit candles in their~~ candlesticks between them.

We sat on the sofa watching Mother and the aunts reciting the blessing over the candles. Each whispered her prayer into her raised palms. I seemed to see the prayers escaping between their spread fingers like invisible smoke, bursting through the ceiling and rising heavenward, where God sat gathering them one by one.

I was filled with a sense of security and calm because God was there, listening to their prayers, and because he would hear them and watch over us and all Israel. And when they took their fingers away from their eyes and lit the candles, the room was filled with light and joy, and we all burst out with the greeting:

"A Blessed and Peaceful Sabbath!"

Mother and the aunts had tears glistening in their eyes, which they hurriedly dried, as though they had been ordered to do so. The men returned from synagogue and after they had recited the Sabbath Benediction and the Welcoming of the Angels of Peace, the whole family sat down at the table. Grandfather was at at the

head, with his three sons beside him. A festive silence reigned as he chanted the Sanctification, poured the wine from the decanter which reflected the candle-flames, and broke the long sabbath loaf which lay before him under a napkin gold-embroidered with the Hebrew words "Shabbat Shalom", giving each of us a piece.

I followed the dance of the candle-flames, imagining that they were dancing with each other, bowing to one another time after time, as though to express the joy of Sabbath which had brought them together. I counted them and there were fourteen. They seemed also to be vying with each other to see which would die out first, and which last. I could not take my eyes off Grandfather, either, as he conducted the singing after the meal. His sweet voice dominated all the others, and I wished for myself that this evening would never end, and that God would watch over Grandfather forever and ever.

The following day, Sabbath, early in the morning, Father said goodbye to us and left the house with his suitcase. The previous evening's hapiness gave way to sadness.

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CHAPTER NO 7

SAMMY IS ACCEPTED TO MEDICAL SCHOOL

Every Teusday, a letter in a big envelope would arrive from Father. We would be waiting at our window from early afternoon for the postman to come down the street, waving the blue envelope. Father would come home once a month for two days. He usually arrived late at night, always on a Thursday, and he would leave home on Sunday night.

During the half-year he spent in Bucharest, Father learned to drive a truck and obtained a driving licence. He also succeeded in getting a Bucharest residence permit. At the same time, he tirelessly searched for a suitable apartment for us and a school where Fritzi and I could continue our schooling.

This time, the postman brought us two letters. One in Father's blue envelope, which was thicker than usual, and another, in a white envelope, from the University at Jaschi.. Sammy was not at home, and Mother opened the letter adressed to him. She was radiant: "Girls! Girls! Sammy's been accepted to Medical School!" There was no end to our wonder as we read the printed letter: "To the Student, Mr. Faust Samuel. After studying your documents, and your results in the entrance examinations, which you passed successfully, we wish to inform you that you have been accepted as a student in our university's Medical School." It was signed by the Professors of the Medical School... Attached to the notification was a detailed list of the equipment he had to bring with him. Further to administrative and financial arrangements, he was to appear in person to arrange same no later than June this year (1941).

In our happiness, we almost forgot to open Father's letter.

This time a letter from Uncle Shmuel and his wife was enclosed, in which they wrote about life in Bucharest and about their spacious home, and tried to pursuade Mother to leave Radautz soon and come to live with them until such time as the apartment on St. Georgi Street, which Father had found, would be ready.

"Actually," wrote Father, "the apartment won't be ready until the end of the year, that is, after our High Holy Days, but until then we've been invited to be Uncle Shmuel's guests." Mother considered for a while, and: "No," she decided in the end, "we can't do that. It won't be convenient for us to stay with Uncle Shmuel, nor will it be convenient for them to put us up for two months. So I prefer to stay home till after the holidays and then go to Bucharest, straight to the apartment we'll be living in."

Fritzi and I ran to greet Sammy with the joyful news that had come for him, and Mother waved the envelope at him. Sammy snatched the letter from Mother's hand and began reading under Mother's openly loving and proud gaze. With tears coursing down her cheeks she hugged and kissed him, calling him: "My treasure, you are Mother's treasure!" Sammy was also excited and swung Fritzi and I up in the air three times:"Hooray hooray hooray!" It was a moment of happiness, so lacking in our lives over the past few months of Father's absence. Mother booked a trunk-call to Uncle Shmuel's house in Bucharest. We crowded close to the receiver to hear Father's voice. Mother became excited and began shouting: "Moshe! Moshe! Our Sammy's been accepted to Medical School!" Everyone at the post office turned their heads in Mother's direction and smiled. Father also sounded excited: "I'm coming home, I'm coming home, Rebecca!" We went home disappointed at not having managed to speak to Father.

On the night before Friday, as usual, Father arrived home. He

promised to stay with us, this time, till the end of the next week. The house was filled with an atmosphere of joy and great preparation for Sammy's departure for Jaschi. For the first time since the Thursday riots, Yunel and his father came to the house. Even though Yunel had left the fascist movement, Father remembered the day of the pogrom and held it against him, forbidding him to come to our house. But that Sunday Father invited them to come, saying to Mother: " On our day of happiness we can forget what happened, specially since they weren't directly involved."

Yunel had also been accepted to Medical School, and the fathers exchanged impressions and decided to take care of the administrative arrangements together. Mrs. Rotter also joined us and she and Mother planned a hamper for the journey and for the boys to take with them to the students' residence. They spoke animatedly, deciding what they would bake together to send to the boys.

During Father's week at home, all attention was on Sammy. Mother and Father went with Sammy to Mr. Ratt's drapery store and chose a length of reddish-brown cloth for a suit and material for shirts and underwear; they also bought him two pairs of shoes -- boots for winter and a light pair for summer -- and cotton socks, woollen socks and even handkerchiefs. The same day, they also went to Mr. Knesbach, the best-known tailor in town, to have the suit made. Father was trying to get everything done before returning to Bucharest. My thoughts wandered to Sammy even when I was at school. Despite my sadness that we had not been given any new clothes this year, since everything had been spent on Sammy, I shared his happiness.

When tailor Knesbach's messenger brought the new suit to our house, Mother took it from him and stroked it as though it was a

baby. Sammy stood in front of the big mirror in the parents' bedroom, dressed in his new suit, while mother walked around him inspecting it from all sides. She slid her long fingers gently down the back of the jacket to see if it was wide enough,and she lifted the shoulder pads to make sure it did not pull too tight. She paid the most attention to the inspection of the seams, ordering Sammy to stretch and bend. Nor did the buttons and pockets escape her full attention. Finally, she straightened up and smiled at us, an expression of pride and happiness on her face: "So what have you got to say about your brother, girls?"

Indeed, Sammy was a handsome fellow, tall, upright, with a long face and perfectly combed light brown hair. His curls would sometimes rebel and fall onto his forehead. His eyes were as grey as Grandfather Efraim's.

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CHAPTER NO 8

THE LONG VACATION IS INTERRUPTED: SAMMY IS ARRESTED

The long school vacation was drawing nearer and nearer, and I impatiently awaited the examination results and my trip to Suceava to stay with Aunt Leah, my mother's sister. My trip to Suceava for the summer vacation was all I could think about. Mother was trying to get out of it and had all sorts of excuses to prevent my going, but a letter from Aunt Leah unintentionally wiped out all her arguments. Aunt leah wrote that everyone was waiting for me to come, specially Biankutzka, my four-year-old cousin. They had promised her, wrote my aunt, that Annike was coming to visit her and she woke up every morning with the question: "Where's Annike?". Faced with this, my mother could say nothing, psrticularly since the problem of the train journey, which involved some danger to my safety, was solved: a new express bus line to and from Suceava had been opened. What still delayed matters was the problem of my school grades. "If, heaven forbid, you have one failing grade on your report card, you'll have to remedy it immediately, otherwise we won't be able to enroll you for high school in Bucharest."

There was a stifling heatwave. People could not remember there having been such heat at the end of June for years. With our hair combed loose, in our best dresses, we set out for school to receive our Third Year Elementary School Certificates. Arm-in-arm with Lola, who had waited for us outside our house, we joined scores of boys and girls all dressed in their best. The younger ones walked beside their mothers, and not one of the older ones was in school uniform.

The festive atmosphere which had already begun in the street

on the way to school culminated in the schoolyard with a burst of happiness. Before gathering in the classrooms for the awarding of the certificates we joined in the graduates' folkdancing and singing. There was a big surprise awaiting me at the notice board with the exam results, where dozens of pupils of all grades were clustering around. Fritzi, Lola and I also hurried over. I could see some girls from my class at the board, and a few of them began to yell at me: "Anna Faust, Anna Faust, you're second on the distinctions list!" And, indeed, my name was emblazoned in second place with the my grade average written next to it -- 9.60. Fritzi and Lola were shouting in my ears: "How did you do it?"

Fritzi was also among the distinctions, in fourth place. Once again, Mother rushed off to the post office to book a call to Father. I heard his satisfied laugh through the receiver, and he immediately authorised my trip to Suceava, promising to be home as early as possible.

At nine in the morning, after a pleasant hour-long journey, the bus arrived at Suceava. There were many people with suitcases and parcels waiting on the pavement in the queue. Among those waiting to receive passengers, I saw Aunt Leah, Uncle Haim Hirsch and Bianca. Aunt Leah had a bouquet. I hurried towards the door with my suitcase, where people were blocking the way out. A young woman with a baby on her arm was ahead of me and she stopped right in the doorway while people helped her with her luggage. I waved my free hand at Bianka. When she saw me she broke away from my uncle and started running towards the bus. Uncle grabbed her by her dress and lifted her up, and she waved at me, calling my name.

I spent most of the time on the first few days with my little cousins and the family. I was sorry to hear the Lotte and Hanni, my closest friends, with whom I used to spend the whole of my

holidays in Suceava, had left for Czernowitz with their families. The general atmosphere was also not as I remembered it from previous years. My uncles were very worried and I gathered, from their conversations, that they were anxious about the fate of the trucks they owned. There had been frequent attempts to requisition these, and to prevent this they had had to pay out a lot of bribe money. "But it won't last," I heard Uncle Hirsch say to Uncle Yiddel. Uncle Hirsch had managed to acquire a sweets factory and he advised Uncle Yiddel to do likewise.

I met Duztiv during that holiday at Aunt Leah's. He was three years older than me and he had come with his father to see Uncle Haim on business. Aunt Leah tried to draw me away from there, but Uncle, always young-spirited and with a wonderful sense of humour, introduced me to father and son with unconcealed pride as "Miss Anna". I felt my cheeks burning, but I passed the baptism of fire successfully.

When they had gone, my Uncle came into the kitchen and complacently announced, in D 's name, that I was invited to a picnic with him on Sabbath. My Aunt was all acquiver: "And will there be other girls and boys?" However, after a quiet discussion, Uncle prevailed when he announced that he and Bianca would be there too.

The next day, I was sitting with Bianca on the sill of the open window which overlooked the street.She was playing with her doll while I fed her bread and butter. Suddenly she drew my attention, calling: "Here's Duztiv," and she leaned her head out of the window and called to him. He stood underneath the window and, with an agile movement, threw a flower up to us: "Biankutza, this is for your cousin." He exchanged a few childish words with Bianca and then, casually, asked if I was coming to the picnic.

promising me a pleasant time in good company in a delightful wood.

Towards evening Duztiv came again, with the excuse that his father had sent him on a small errand, and he asked my aunt's permission to take me for a little walk. At a nod from my uncle, I was allowed to go out with Duztiv for one hour, accompanied by Bianca. Bianca jumped for joy, certain that the whole outing was solely for her benefit. She walked between us and we swung her up and over every stone or mound on the way, and her laugh pealed out continuously. Over her head, Duztiv threw me looks of undisguised love and paid me simply-phrased compliments with a lightness that impressed me.

His freedom of manner and his handsome appearance made me proud to be walking beside him. Conversation flowed between us as though we were old friends. It was the first time I had ever gone walking with a boy. The hour passed quickly, and I was sorry it was over. Bianca also wanted to continue our walk. Du picked her up, stroked her hair and persuaded her in a fatherly voice to return, "or Mommy'll be angry and won't let you go out with me again", he gave a wink in my direction. We parted in front of the house and he promised to come again, reminding me of the proposed pleasant outing on Sabbath. I took Bianca's hand and the two of us ran into the house, my heart pounding with excitement.

My uncle opened the door. His face was serious and he looked worriedly at me. "What happened?" I asked, "we weren't late." My aunt was sitting on the bench, holding a paper. "No, Annike," he said. "You aren't late. But a telegram has come from your mother, and she wants you to come home at once."

I began to tremble and burst into tears. I dared not ask why, and what had happened.

My aunt held me soothingly, "Your father isn't at home and

your mother must want you with her." But her words did not make sense to me. Mother had agreed to let me go, after all, and Sammy and Fritzi were with her. It could only be that something much worse had happened. Maybe someone had suddenly fallen ill? An accident? And maybe... my aunt held out the telegram to me and through my tears I read: "All well. Send the child home tomorrow."

I arrived in Radautz on Friday morning. Mother and Fritzi were waiting for me at the bus stop. "Where's Sammy?" I asked. Mother calmed me: "He's at home. On the way home she told me that there had been some arrests among the Jewish students, the day before, so she had preferred Sammy to stay at home. This was also the reason why she had become frightened and called me home.

"At times like this," said Mother, "its best for us all to be together."

I did not understand why they had arrested students, specially. Mother could not explain it either. Sammy welcomed me cheerfully and apologised for not coming to meet me with Mother and Fritzi. And in an apparently joking mood: ""How was the holiday?" I did not answer. My sense of humour had vanished together with my holiday and the anticipated and unattended picnic and I seemed to have been deprived of the power of speech.

In the evening, too, when Mother was blessing the candles and Grandfather said the benediction over the wine, and they sang Sabbath songs together with Sammy, I felt no better. Fritzi's pleas were of no help; she wanted to know how I had enjoyed myself and how the little ones were, had they grown? I answered no more than "Yes" and "No'.Mother said I was tired and asked Fritzi to let me be, "She'll tell you everything tomorrow". Mother looked very tired herself, and we all went to bed early.

Grandfather took his leave with "Good Sabbath and sleep

well", which sounded like a prayer. I was unable to fall asleep. I heard Mother get out of bed every so often and go to Sammy's door. But when I did fall asleep, I awoke to the sound of loud banging on the front door. Urso began his furious barking and did not stop. Urso wailed -- there was an enemy at the gate. We heard the angry voice of a man threatening to kill him. It was five in the morning. Mother, pale and trembling, stood at Sammy's door. Sammy was already standing there, pulling on his trousers over his pyjamas. The banging on the door increased and we heard a man shouting: "Open the door! Gendarmes!" Mother held Sammy, urging him to escape by the back door and hide in the Marchinko family's garden, which bordered on ours. Sammy said there was no point in running. It would even be dangerous. "Whatever happens to the rest, will happen to me. Besides which, they've surrounded the house." He opened the door.

Two gendarmes stood there, with bayonetted rifles. Mother tried to defend Sammy when one of themn presented a pink slip of paper: "You are Sammy Faust?" "Yes," I heard Sammy answer. "Come with us," the other one roughly ordered him. "You're under arrest!"

Fritzi clung to Sammy, crying despairingly: "No, no Sammy, don't go with them!" Mother also tried to resist and they shoved her roughly aside. "Why, why are you taking my son?" Mother shouted, weeping. "He shot at our soldiers yesterday," one of them said nastily. I stood by the wall, shouting at them: "That's a lie! My brother has never held a rifle in his hand!" Mother rushed over to me and spread out her hands to protect me. The rifle butt intended for me landed on her head and she fell down, covered in blood. They dragged Sammy out with them.

Pale, barefoot, in his pyjama jacket, Sammy stood in the

doorway and shouted to us: "Take care of Mother! Get help!" and he disappeared into the darkness with them.

Stretched out on the floor, blood flowing from her head, Mother mumbled: "Where have they taken him? Where have they taken my boy?" Fritzi brought a large towel from the closet, which I securely wrapped around Mother's head, talking to her all the time to make sure she was still alive. Fritzi was running to and fro, afraid to come near to Mother. I told her to run to the Nyekiporiuk family and rouse them.

Fritzi ran out of the house in her bare feet. I tried to pull Mother towards the sofa, but she gestured that she would get up by herself. I was pleased to affirm that she was conscious. I helped her to rise and, with her leaning on me, we succeeded in reaching the sofa and she immediately sank down onto it. She stroked my arm and in a weak voice asked me to run to Uncle Izzio to let him know what had happened. I was afraid to leave her and promised to do what she asked the moment Fritzi came back.I also promised her to get Sammy released. Some hidden power was speaking from my throat; Mother again asked me to run to Uncle Izzio, before he went to synagogue.

The towel was by now all red and blood-soaked, and Mother was growing paler. Horrific thoughts filled my head. I saw her dead, being carried in a coffin...If only Father was at home! There was nobody to turn to. The Jewish neighbours were newcomers to the street, and I was somehow afraid to approach them because I did not know them. The only ones close to us were, actually, the Rumanians. Mrs. Nyekiporiuk , a Rumanian, was the only one who could save us. But what was keeping Fritzi? Out of despair, the idea came to me: I... but here came Mrs. Nyekiporiuk and Fritzi at a run. I breathed in relief. Perhaps Mrs. Nyekiporiuk would be

able to administer First Aid...

Breathing heavily, Mrs. Nyekiporiuk came in with Fritzi at her heels. When she saw Mother, she held her head in her hands: "God Almighty, what have they done to you, Rivka?" They were friends. Mrs. Nyekiporiuk's name was Rebecca, which is Rivka.

"Jan," said Mrs. Nyekiporiuk, "has gone to fetch Dr. Premminger, now you lie quietly, because Jan went in the cart and they'll be here soon." Big tears fell from Mother's eyes as she pulled Mrs. Nyekiporiuk to her with both hands, mumbling in a tearful voice: "They've taken my son away from me, Rebecca!"

I heard the cart stop outside the house and ran to open the door. Dr. Premminger, accompanied by Mr. Nyekiporiuk, entered. Dr. Premminger was our family doctor. He was a well-built Jew, of upright carriage, and there was always an encouraging smile on his face. Even the injections in his bag did not frighten me. This time he looked frightened, a little stooped, his face was pale and his eyes were very tired. He quietly approached Mother and removed the towel from her head, his hands trembling. His silence frightened me and I drew closer to him. My voice grated in my throat when I asked him if the wound was serious.

Mother looked at him, her eyes brimming, as though expecting salvation from him. When he looked around as if to check whether the Nyekiporiuks were still there, Mother said to him: "Don't be afraid, they're friends," and a sigh of pain escaped her as he touched the wound.

I suddenly heard him say: "Not serious, not serious, Mrs. Faust. I've been tending much worse wounds since last night," and he said there had been many arrests during the night and he had been called to the aid of families wounded by the gendarmes when they tried to resist the arrest of their sons, and there had

also been cases of heart attack.

"The boys' innocence will be proved and they'll be quickly released," he tried to console us. The words "their innocence will be proved" filled me with an anger I had never before known. Anger at Dr. Premminger, at Mr. Kunstad and the naive Jews who believed that the gentiles really suspected Sammy and the other Jewish boys of having shot at Rumanian soldiers, and all one had to do was prove to them, the gentiles, that the boys were innocent. Perhaps they themselves, ever so slightly, suspected the boys, too? Or perhaps they were pretending, in the belief that, by pretending, they could somehow bribe their way out of some crime they themselves had committed?

Dr. Premminger cleaned the wound, covered it with a piece of guaze on which he had spread some ointment, and secured it with a strip of plaster. He breathed deeply and said: "You're lucky, Mrs. Faust, the wound isn't deep and there's no need for stitches," and he instructed me to bring mother some rose conserves and water.

Mother sat on the edge of the sofa, extremely pale. She tried to stand up, but Mrs. Nyekiporiuk, who had stood beside her all the time, forbade her. Dr. Premminger also ordered her to lie down and rest, since she had lost a lot of blood.

All of a sudden, without any premeditation, without knowing what had come over me, I heard myself shouting to Fritzi: "Quickly bring Mother some water, I'm going to get Sammy out!"

They were all stunned, but nobody tried to stop me and Mother was sure I was hurrying to Uncle Iziu. But my feet carried me to Colonel Vassiliu. Had I had a rifle in my hands and knew how to shoot, I would have run right then to the police station and shot the gendarmes who had taken my beloved, guiltless Sammy. Indeed, for a moment I could see myself standing there shooting them:

"Take that for Sammy, and that for my mother, and that for all the Jews you torture so much!" I was ready to be killed at that moment, if only to take revenge. I was even angry with my father, then, for his pretence that it would not happen to him. Oh, if only we had gone to Palestine!

But this was only for a moment. Afterwards it was as if I had suddenly grown up and the whole bitter reality hit me in the face. Would Father really have been able to prevent the gendarmes from arresting Sammy? Was it really in Father's power to defend us? This belief in Father's strength had always instilled us with happiness and security, and here, in a moment, everything had collapsed in front of my eyes, like a house of cards.

Mother, although she was greatly weakened, saw my furor and tried to stop me, putting out her hand; Fritzi was very panicky, but she was the only one who seemed to understand me and to trust me, as her older sister.

Like a hurricane, running crazily, I burst into the street, which was empty but for two Jews slowly pacing to synagogue. I paid them no attention. These were Jews who had recently come from the villages, and we had nothing to do with their fate, as it were. But as I ran it dawned on me that we did, indeed, have one fate, and only the punishments would differ. Only yesterday, our lot had been better than theirs and in a matter of hours the wheel had turned and we were in trouble... I wondered who else would be arrested and whether it would be worthwhile mobilising all the families to fight for the release of our dear ones...
I continued running. I had already passed several streets. Suddenly I heard Uncle Izziu's voice: "Annike, Annike!" I stopped. My uncle hurried towards me with rapid steps. I shouted to him: "Uncle Izziu, they've arrested Sammy!" He noddded as if he knew,

and coming over to me he gripped both my hands and looked around. He was also upset; "I know, and I'm on my way to your place." As though certain that I had been running to find him, he tried to pull me back with him. But I annouunced that I was going to free Sammy, no matter what. With a bewildered look, he again gripped my hand, trying to pull me along with him: "Annike, come home to mother and we'll see what can be done." Like Dr. Premminger, he hoped that Sammy's innocence would be proved and he would be released.

I shouted at him: "Do you also believe we have to prove to them that Sammy's innocent? Don't you know that they themselves invented the story in order to wring bribes from us?"

My uncle looked stunned and at a loss in the face of my outburtst, but to my surprise he admitted the truth of it and said: "That's right, my girl, but for lack of choice, we'll pay whatever they impose on us just to get Sammy released". "Shame on the goyim that are always demanding ransom and shame on the Jews that are always ready to pay up!" I shouted again.

My uncle looked miserable and pitifully helpless, thinking I was running to the gendarmes. Only after I explained that I was going to Colonel Vasilio did he calm down and unwillingly let go of my hand: "Be careful, Annike, God help us!"

I asked him to hurry to Mother and again began to run along Fratautzer Street, where I came across some Jews stepping along to the synagogue. They tried to block my way, amazed and bewildered: "What has happened, child? Tell us what's happened?"

I went on my way without answering them and I heard one of them say:""Poor child!" Was I the only unfortunate one? What about them? Were they less unfortunate? Forgetting they were in the diasporah and not in their own country...

I crossed the market square, which was empty, and came to Kirchen Street: some gendarmes were walking about, swinging their clubs. I slowed down to avoid drawing their attention. One noticed me and called to me to stop. I stopped for a moment, breathing deeply. I expelled the air from my lungs and turned my head in his direction, and as quietly as I could, replied: "Sorry, sir, I'm in a hurry." He did not let up and, in a mocking, surprised voice, asked: "And where is the young lady hurrying to?" as he approached me. With a pounding heart, continuing to walk, I answered him curtly, "Well, sir, I'm going to Colonel Vasilio's

house." For added importance, I asked, "Do you know him, sir?" His expression altered somewhat and saluting apologetically, he said in Rumanian: "Arrive safely, miss!"

When I drew close to the cavalry stables, I could see the huge gate, beyond which stood officers in cavalry uniform, their spurs jingling and clashing. Some of the officers were holding the bridles of beautiful black horses that gleamed in the light of the rising sun. Happily, I did not attract their attention and passed right by them without any trouble. The hippodrome was over the road. There was already a big crowd on the gigantic field. Mounted soldiers were galloping around. A few were sitting on benches and some boys were jumping on the bench-slats. I prayed I would arrive in time to find the Colonel at home. I rehearsed what to say to him all the way, how to apologise for coming so early in the morning, the delivery of my lecture regarding the purpose of my visit. I knew the Colonel well, he was, in general, a tough man without any particular sympathy for Jews. He regarded Sammy as a wonderful lad, "not at all like a Jew" . And when Uncle Izziu once pointed out to him :"Colonel, you don't know the Jews", he had nodded his head, saying " I know them, oh yes, I do".

Uncle Izziu and the late Aunt Eva, his first wife, had lived in the same neighbourhood as the Colonel. We had spent a lot of time at their house when we were six. My aunt, who was childless, was a piano teacher, and we, Fritzi and I, had received our first music lessons from her. We also used to play the big baby grand piano that stood in her living room. The Colonel's only daughter, Sandra, was one of the children who used to take piano lessons. She was three years older than me, but still childish. She would come to the lessons with her big doll in a pram, and she used to rock it and talk to it as if it was her little daughter, during the lesson. My aunt used to push the pram away from the piano, asking me to walk with it. "Give Annike your little girl, because she's disturbing us," Aunt Eva would say to her seriously. Sandra would agree only on condition that I would take care that she did not cry.

I made friends quickly with Sandra. She was a sweet and merry girl. We played mainly with the toys and dolls which filled her big, pleasant room, with its large balcony overlooking a garden of green lawns, flowerbeds and decorative trees. Sandra's mother did not impose any limits, and we were free to play and jump from the wooden railing of the balcony into the garden and run around the house on the gravel path. Even when I discovered that it was possible to climb the chestnut tree and reach the window of Sandra's parents' bedroom along one of its branches, to jump inside and go wild on the double bed which stood near the window, she did not check us, and even warned us when the Colonel arrived home. Sometimes I used to join Sandra and her father when they went to the hippodrome for school festivities celebrating Rumania's national holiday, on the tenth of May. It was also King Karol II's Coronation Day. Mother would have our national costume,

in which we appeared at the festivities, ready in good time. There would be rehearsals in the school yard for weeks beforehand, choir singing for king and country. Singing in the choir aroused my emotions and gave me the feeling of belonging to a great and courageous country. Our participation in the folkdancing had also been quite natural. The blouse embroidered in blue thread which I had been making all year in handwork lessons at school was finished the evening before the holiday. My black patent leather shoes and white socks were also ready for the big day.

Later, in secondary school, I joined the Scouts movement. In the white shirt with the blue triangular scarf under its collar tied with a tie-knot, and the scout badge. A pleated blue skirt, with a wide leather belt and a round buckle with the motto "Cercetari" engraved on it, this badge was also on the white beret we flaunted. We arrived at the hippodrome with the higher classes. The boys' schools also turned up on the other side of the field. After the performance we would meet Sandra on the reviewing stand, where the Colonel and his wife were seated, and Mother would fetch us from there when the crowd dispersed. Sammy also used to come to the reviewing stand where he became acquainted with the Colonel and Sandra. At one of these meetings, when the crowd was making a noise on the field, the Colonel invited Sammy to visit them, hinting that he had heard from his friend, General Nastasi about his son's success at his studies owing to the private lessons he had received from Sammy. As a result of this meeting, Sammy began teaching Sandra mathematics and physics and he had swiftly become "one of the family" as the Colonel said.

My friendship with Sandra assumed a different character in time. She had already begun to acquire the status of a young woman

and boys began to court her. I was proud to be her confidante, and listened inquisitively to the stories of her success among the students. Ever since she had met Sammy, Sandra confessed to me, she had been in love with him. I promised to keep her secret this time, as always.

But when I arrived home, I could not contain myself and told Sammy the great secret. His reaction disappointed me. He neither blushed nor asked any of the questions I had planned to answer in detail. He merely smiled and asked: "Did Sandra tell you that?" "Yes," I had replied, disappointed. "And can you hold your tongue?" "Yes," I answered him, ashamed and insulted, "on condition that you honestly tell me whether you love her, too." "Yes, Annike, I like her, too," adding with characteristic simplicity: "when you're a little older, you'll understand."

Sometimes, but not often, I would go to her house at Sammy's request, and after a reasonable time, I would leave and she would follow me out, with the excuse that she was accompanying me. Then she would meet Sammy in the municipal park, while I, bored, stood on guard, until I finally told Sammy I had had enough and was resigning from the job.

He accepted my resignation with understanding and hinted to me that Sandra's mother knew of their friendship and even supported it. Thus he visited their house unhindered. Sandra told me this as well. Sammy had called it "liking" and "friendship', while Sandra had spoken of love.

Later, when I was 14 and Sandra 17, I understood the meaning of their ongoing friendship. Despite the age difference, despite the fact that her relationship with Sammy had come out into the open and they no longer needed my assistance, Sandra remained my great friend. I was sorry to hear Father, more than once, arguing

with Sammy about his meetings with Sandra. In the end, Father eased his pressure on Sammy a little. "There's no point arguing with him," I heard him say to Mother once. "Being in Jassy will keep him away in any case."

I now stood in front of Sandra's house, not hesitating to go in and ask her father for help. I banged the door-knocker loudly, not caring about the noise it was making. I heard Mrs. Vassilu call to her maid: "Helena, go and see who's knocking like that". When the door opened I burst inside without saying good morning. Mrs. Vassilu was coming towards me, too. They were both surprised at my unexpected appearance, I myself was surprised at my unplanned and bad mannered invasion, and everything I had rehearsed on the way was forgotten. I stood breathing heavily with my hand on my chest to restrain my pounding heart. The thin cotton shirt I had hastily put on when I left home lifted and fell with my heartbeats: "Mrs. Vassilu, Sammy's under arrest! They've arrested Sammy!" -- I cried.

For a moment she seemed not to take in what I had said and stood dumbfounded. But then she immediately took my hand and pulled me towards the kitchen where the smell of cocoa and yeast cakes hung in the air. The Colonel was sitting at the table in his dressing gown, relaxedly sipping his cocoa. When he saw me, he stood up and before he could ask anything, his wife cried; "Georgi, get dressed quickly, they've arrested Sammy."

I breathed deeply. I thanked Mrs. Vassilu in my heart for sharing my fear for Sammy. Sandra also came running, in her long nightie, with a book in her hand. She put the book on the table and I whispered in her ear: "Sammy's under arrest." She did not lose her head; it was as though she had been expecting this news. She ran to her father and wrapped her arms around his neck, asking

him in a pleading voice to hurry. If I had had any doubts about the Colonel's readiness to help, they now melted completely away. I knew the nature of his relationship with his daughter. "He succumbs and melts like snow at her least request," Mrs. Vassilu used to say. And indeed, he gently pushed her from him, looked into her beautiful face and then turned to look at me: "When did it happen? And how?"

I told him how the gendarmes had come, presented a pink slip of paper and taken Sammy, who had only managed to put on a pair of trousers. I also told him that they had struck Mother. "And who did you leave your mother with?" he asked. I told him that Dr. Premminger, my sister Fritzi and our neighbour, Mrs. Nikiporiuk, were with her.

The Colonol ordered the carriage to be brought to take me home, while he went off to his room to dress. Sandra informed her father in no uncertain terms that she was going with him. He nodded, merely telling her to hurry.

In a quarter of an hour we were already sitting in the carriage, facing the Colonel. I silently asked God to forgive me for riding on the Sabbath, pleading that I was sorry and had not planned to desecrate the Sabbath. But I remembered Grandfather saying to Father, prior to his going away, that God forgave it when it was a matter of saving life.

I took great pride in having so easily succeeded in moving the Colonel to act, without having had to humiliate myself by pleading. As the carriage passed the gendarmes I put my head out, searching for the ugly one who had stopped me earlier, so that I could give him a triumphant smile, but he was standing too far from us.

Next to the gendarmerie behind the Kirchen Street, Vassily

stopped and the Colonel got out, kissed Sandra and, in a soothing voice, promised both of us to see to Sammy's release. When the carriage was again underway, I felt Sandra's hand on mine, pressing strongly. I returned an affectionate, thankful pressure. For the first time since she had become friendly with Sammy she gave me a kiss, whispering in my ear, so that Vassily would not hear: "You're going to be my sister-in-law, aren't you?"

I did not know what to answer, whether it was so or not. But I felt an inner joy. I loved and admired Sandra. But our different religious affiliations worried me very much. I was sure of but one thing, which was that I could confidently say that Sammy would be released immediately, and that he was already protected. I was intoxicated with triumph and happiness at that moment.

When the carriage entered our street, I tried to dwarf myself inside it, so that our Jewish neighbours would not see me. I did not know that there had been many more arrests in the meantime, in our street as well, among the refugees. Everyone was running about in panic and anxiety about their sons' fate. Nobody was interested whether it was me or a gentile riding in the carriage. All eyes were on Vassily, who was in military uniform.

Mother and Uncle Izziu were peering through the closed window. Mother's face lit up on seeing Sandra and I alighting from the coach, and she ran out to us, her head bound in a kerchief. When I shouted to her: "Mother, Sammy'll be home soon! She collapsed, weeping into my shoulder: "My little girl, my little girl," pressing me to her heart. Everyone came out, ushering us inside ahead of them. Fritzi crowed with happiness and said to Mother: "I knew Annie would do it, I knew it!"

Aunt Rachel, Uncle Moshe and Grandfather were in the

house, too. I was a little embarrassed by Sandra's presence. But her natural behaviour and frank sharing of our feelings, made it easier for me and all present. Before noon, a soldier came bearing a note from the Colonel in which he wrote that he had met Sammy in the prison and that he was fine. He asked Mother to have patience and again promised to free Sammy as soon as possible. A second slip of paper the soldier gave us was a permit for Mother to visit Sammy at four o'clock.

Sandra and I accompanied Mother. At exactly four, we were standing in front of the gendarmerie. Parents whose sons were being detained clustered around the gates. It was terrible to see mothers and fathers silently crying and pleading with the duty officer to let them see their sons. He roughly shoved them into the street, threatening them with arrest if they did not disperse.

The happy ones with permits, and we were among them, went in to the yard. It was the first time I had been inside the gendarmerie, which I had passed many times, seeing the heavy iron gates where there was always a soldier on guard with a rifle in the sentry box.

We crossed the big yard and entered the building. Mother walked faster, Sandra and I following her. A soldier sitting at a door examined the permits, and waved us through with a contemptuous gesture. I stood behind Sandra and heard her say: "You, move aside, I'm looking for my father, Colonel Vassilu." He began to stammer and apologise for not recognizing her, telling her that the Colonel had been here an hour earlier, but before he could finish his sentence, we were inside. Sammy was already in Mother's arms when we discovered them in the big room which to me looked, at that moment, like the most horrific place on earth. Young men, their torsos bare, sat on the floor against the walls

with their heads lowered. Some of them, stood embracing their parents, whispering mutual encouragement. The two gendarmes walking around with clubs in their hands seemed to belong in a circus.

Sammy saw us and broke away from my mother. I fell upon him, holding him tightly. He tenderly stroked my hair, whispering in my ear: "Thank you, Annike, you were really brave this time, and now let me go a bit, so that I can go over to Sandra and thank her, too."

They did not say a word, and I, in my innocence, thought that this was the ~~first time he had~~ ever embraced her, putting his mouth to hers in a long kiss, and in front of mother and all the prisoners, too. Even the gendarmes alertly guarding the detainees and their visitors stopped in their tracks, but they did not react.

I recognized Pessah, our new neighbour. He and his family had recently come from Seletyn. He was sitting on the floor like the rest of the detainees, with his hands on his knees and his head resting on his hands. Our eyes met for an instant, and he looked down. We had never exchanged a word although I had met him in the street many times. I went over to him, moved by some inner compulsion, and almost sat down next to him, without knowing what to say to him.

He looked up at me with a charming smile that was at odds with the place, and rose briskly to his feet: "You're our sweet little neighbour, aren't you?" and he put out his hand and introduced himself without waiting for my reply. I answered him in embarrassment: "I know your name." I saw immediately that I had said something out of place and I blushed. Again he extended his right hand and with a wry smile, said: "I'm pleased that you know

my name, and I almost know yours, I'm just not sure whether you're Annie or Fritzi. Which are you?" "Annie." He was still smiling: "If I get out of here alive and well, I won't forget your name." "Have your parents been to visit you?" He became serious: "You can see with your own eyes, Annie, that they haven't."

Pessah was about twenty, his hair was frizzy and he had smiling brown eyes. I asked him if he wanted to send a message to his parents. I had suddenly remembered seeing them in the room with the other parents who were not being allowed to enter, but so as not to upset him, I did not tell him this. He seemed to guess my thoughts: "You won't find them at home, they're most certainly running around trying to get me released, but I'd be very happy if you would let them know that I'm well, without going into any worrying details."

I saw congealed blood like a dark red worm clinging to the full length of his right shoulder. He tried to hide it with his left hand: "Its nothing. There are some people who can't move because of the blows they received," and he gestured with his eyes in the direction of a fellow not far from him; crouched, he sat with his head back, covering it with his hands. His hair was matted with blood and his torso was full of bruises

I was horrified at the sight of him. When he turned his pain-filled gaze in my direction, I recognised him. It was Dashku, the brother of Fraulein Gertner, who used to give us French lessons. I wanted to go over to him, as well, but Pessah indicated that I should give up the idea. "He's in shock and hasn't come out of it yet, a few gendarmes beat him with their clubs and a rifle butt."

I lowered my gaze so as not to see, and I was even glad when the two clowns with the clubs in their hands announced the end of the visit. I quickly said goodbye to

Pessah and he promised to come and see us when he was released. I asked Sammy if they had beaten him, too. He indicated that I should be quiet and I realized that it had been foolish of me to ask, with mother there. I just clung to him again, praying in my heart that I would see him at home, with us, today. When Vassillu returned to take Sandra home, she refused to go with him, asking him to tell her parents that she would only come home with Sammy.

Evening came, the first stars appeared in the sky, heralding the end of the Sabbath, and Grandfather stood up to pray. When he had finished he blessed us with "May it be a good week" to which we all replied: "May it be a good week and may no more tragedies befall the People of Israel and may we have no more worry."

Aunt Rachel and Uncle Moshe went into the kitchen to prepare dinner, trying to pursuade Mother to join them, but she evaded it with the excuse of a headache and the need to rest. My aunt served stuffed fish, slices of sabbath loaf and stewed fruit, urging us to eat. All of a sudden I did feel hungry, I had had no food all day. Mother also came to the table, out of a sense of obligation. The evening hours crawled slowly by, seeming like an eternity. Uncle Izziu went home to see my aunt and Mozziu, intending to return to us. Grandfather dozed in the armchair and Fritzi on the sofa. Mother asked Sandra and I to lie down and rest, too, but we refused. We sat talking. But mostly I listened to her optimisatic words and I envied her for her joy of life, and for knowing Sammy better than I did.

It was one in the morning by the time Uncle Izziu came back. He told us that Yossl, the Spiegel's only son, had also been detained and Mrs. Spiegel had sufferred a heart attack, but had recovered. The Spiegels were Uncle Izziu's neighbours.

"When will this nightmare end?" Mother groaned.

I felt paralysed until I heard Mother cry excitedly, "Sammy's coming, Sammy's coming! I heard the wheels!" at which I revived immediately. I jumped to my feet and they carried me straight to the already wide-open door. I heard the carriage wheels scrape to a halt outside our house. It was three o'clock in the morning, the streetlight in front of our house had gone out long ago, and only the pale moon was making its last mournful night round, as though apologizing for not being able to give more light in the last hours. But I was inwardly grateful that it had managed to light Sammy's way home.

"There's no sorrow without joy, and no joy without sorrow." One of Grandfather's sayings. Indeed, this was joy after a long day full of sorrow. Mother held Sammy in her arms and her tears flowed like streams, wetting his wrinkled, stained pyjama top. In these moments of happiness even the Colonel looked different, to me. He stood at the door, moved and baffled, and his bony face bore a faint smile of participation in our joy. And when Mother thanked him for his noble deed, he continued to smile and even made a joke: "Well, and now may I have back the deposit I left with you, Mrs. Faust?"

Sandra, who had been holding Sammy's hand with both her own all this time, broke away and ran to cuddle in her father's arms. On the Colonel's advice, it was decided during those early morning hours that Sammy should go to Father in Bucharest. Before leaving, the Colonel promised to take care of all the necessary arrangements, including an assurance of Sammy's safety on the train. It was decided that Sammy's Rumanian friend, Yunel, would accompany him to Bucharest, wearing the Iron Guard uniform and carrying his membership card in his pocket.

"I'd never have believed that that goy would take his fate in

his hands to save a Jew." Uncle Izziu said, and with a heavily significant wink he instructed Sammy: "Be careful, don't forget who you are!"

The thought that Sammy would be leaving home in a few hours gnawed at my heart like a worm. I sat on his left, on the sofa, and Fritzi was on his right with his arm about her shoulders. I had freed myself of his embrace in order to see his face properly, and to listen to the story of what had happened to him during the day of his arrest. He tried to be calm and to speak quietly of the horrors of that day: "Those monsters made sure while we were still on our way that we wouldn't arrive sleepy -- they beat us with their clubs." He went on to speak about the well-staged interrogation and about the tortures and humiliations they had employed in order to extract confessions about the "shooting at Rumanian soldiers." It suddenly became clear to me why Sammy had removed my hand from his back when I had tried to carress him. Warily, as though sneaking into the world of horrors, I turned up his shirttail. After a hasty glance, I re-covered his back, which was a network of red, swollen weals. All three of us were anxious at the thought that Mother would enter his room and discover what we had seen. Mother and Aunt Rachel were fussing around in the kitchen preparing a hot bath for Sammy. Only Uncle Izziu had noticed what I had done, he gave me a rebuking look, flicking his eyes in the direction of Grandfather, who was sitting in the armchair nervously rubbing his fingers, pursing his lips from time to time.

That morning, Sammy said, they had released Yossl Spiegel together with him -- Spiegel's father had not budged from the gate of the gendarmerie the whole night -- and before letting him go, the duty officer had given the order that he was to be "sent off

with a really good parting kiss". They had not touched Sammy again, had even behaved well towards him, knowing that the Colonel was waiting for him outside. During the night they had moved some of the refugee boys to another place. I did not dare ask what had become of Pessah. But Sammy, going on with his story, confirmed my fears by asking me:"What's the smiling fellow's name? (That's what we called him). The one you were talking to? Pessah? They took him, too." "Where to?" I asked, but was left unanswered. Many years later I knew he had been taken to a place from which there was no return. Sammy looked tired and dazed as he rose and went to bathe and get ready to leave on the train departing for Bucharest at 11.15 in the morning.

Mother sat down to rest, trying to ignore the pains in her head. Dr. Premminger arrived to change her bandages and expressed his satisfaction, saying that in two or three days they could be removed entirely, and she would feel much better, "but you have to rest, Mrs. Faust!" It all seemed like a nightmare to me. The town of Radautz and its serene inhabitants, which I had loved so, had turned into a monster which was slowly but surely hunting its prey. No two days were alike, and as for rest for Mother and the other Jews -- there was none.

I thought a lot about Pessah's parents. Poor people! First they had turned them out of their home, and now they had taken their son. The picture of his parents weeping and pleading in their attempts to get their son released kept coming before my eyes. The bitter fate of the rest of the parents also saddened me, but the fact that I did not know them somewhat dulled the pain I had felt on seeing them standing weeping and grieving at the gendarmerie fence. I had not yet come to understand the world and what goes on in it, nor the man-wolf.

Mother did not take her eyes off Sammy all morning, as though she would never again see him in his suit, his new shoes. And after his bath and shave, his face looked fresher and more beautiful than ever. His lopsided, warm smile had not been harmed by the events of the last two days, and he looked as if he was setting out on a pleasant journey from which he was soon to return.

He held a small suitcase in one hand and the new white raincoat, bought for his journey to Jassy, was folded over his other arm. The carriage had arrived with the Colonel, and was waiting outside. Sandra came in to call Sammy and she told him That Yunel was waiting for him at the railway station.

The parting was more restrained than I had expected. Mother, who had not budged from Sammy's side, parted from him with a kiss and a hug -- and a smile, and all she asked of him was that he should write. Grandfather also managed to overcome his emotion. He parted from Sammy with a kiss on the forehead, while his lips murmured the blessing for the road over his firstborn grandson.

Only after the carriage had drawn away did Mother burst into tears, "Who knows if I'll ever see my son again?" She was inconsollable. She had prophesied -- not knowing that her prophecy would come true in all its cruelty.

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CHAPTER NO 9

THE YELLOW BADGE

The summer vacation had ended and the new school year began. Fritzi and I were back at our desks. I was not in exactly the same desk as the one I had sat in for our first three years at secondary school. During those years, my place had been in the fourth row of the central column. My desk-mate was Bertha and Mitzi and Rita had sat in front of us. Elsa and Marta, who were shorter than us, were in the front row.

On the first day the principal, Mrs. Paduraru , the apostate, came into the classroom to convey her greetings for the start of the school year. "Last year," she began her speech, "studies were conducted under the shadow of the Russian invasion of a considerable area of Rumanian soil. Dear pupils, I hope, among other things, that this year we will be able to carry on our studies under the sign of the liberation of our conquered country, and to uproot the enemy sitting in our midst."

At first I did not understand what she meant by "the enemy sitting in our midst", but the continuation of her words left no doubt in my heart. In a screeching voice, as though flailing the "enemy", she ordered all the Jewish pupils to rise. There were eight of us, and we got to our feet one by one.

Her gaze hostile, she counted us with her finger, and turned to our homeroom teacher, Mrs. Constandinidi, to say in a hate-drenched voice: "We've received instructions from the Ministry of Education to seat these 'Hebrews' on the back benches, as they deserve! There are still enough of them!" and she left.

Silence reigned. The pupils looked at us as though at an evil plague. I felt humiliated and choked down my rage: "We have to get

away from these idiots," I whispered to Bertha, who was standing next to me. Bertha smiled, motioning me to keep quiet.

I expected Mrs. Constandinidi to instruct us to change our seats, but to my surprise she told us to sit down, as though nothing had happened. She continued to give us the year's program of studies, and asked us to take out our diaries and make a note of the timetable. After a short break, Mrs. Wearenca, the French teacher, whose nickname was "half-fish, half-human", came into the classroom. She was short and shrivelled, and thick tendons showed beneath the dry skin of her hands. Her bulbous nose, covered in large pores, had hair in the nostrils. Her hair was clipped like a man's. The smooth skirt she usually wore emphasized nothing other than her short, thick legs, and she strode about the class like a soldier throughout the lesson. We had heard her express herself in antisemitic vein more than once over the past year. Now, on entering the classroom she did not hide the satisfaction she derived from the instructions she had received to move the Jewish girls to the last row. She did so with open joy.

We spent the first days in class in an increasingly antisemitic atmosphere. The only lessons we attended without a feeling of inferiority were the religious studies with Dr. Rabiner Stein. Two of the Jewish girls left the class and so the lessons were conducted in the form of a conversation with the professor. They then combined the two classes, mine and Fritzi's, and we were eleven all together. Unlike the year before, when we had studied Genesis in the lessons, the profesor now conducted talks with us about the meaning and identity of the People of Israel, with the emphasis on the future. He read to us a great deal from the Prophets, in Rumanian. I expected to hear about Ze'ev the youth leader's Land of Israel, which was much more real and closer to me

than that thousands-of-years-distant Holy Land and its people who awaited the coming of the Messiah. In one of the lessons, when I asked the professor why he had not gone there, and why he did not encourage Jewish activity in the town, influencing Jews and urging them to go to Palestine, to escape from the diasporah, he answered me in a soft voice, that "the time has not yet come, and only with the Messiah's coming will the People of Israel gather from all corners of the earth -- not only from Radautz," he stressed, ironically. He had a name among the Jews of the town for being very progressive, and the extreme orthodox Jews had dubbed him "The Unbeliever". In the middle of September, 1941, before the start of lessons, the principal, Mrs. Paduraru, appeared in the classroom with her stern expression, and wordlessly waved a piece of yellow cloth, whose shape we could not discern from where we sat on the back bench, and called the names of the six Jewish girls in an aggressive voice. We got to our feet again, as usual, and after a short glance in our direction, without batting an eyelid, she declared in a harsh voice, clearly intending to insult: "We have prepared this badge for you, which you will receive after the lesson from Madam Professor Carbona, who is standing beside me." And raising her voice: From tomorrow, you have to wear it here," and with her left hand she placed the piece of cloth on her right sleeve, demonstrating how to sew it beside the school badge. "You owe ten li for the badge, it must be brought to my office tomorrow."

We stood trying to make out the shape of the badge, which seemed to be a star, from a distance. To explain to the non-Jewish pupils what was unique about the badge, she waved it above her head, holding it in two fingers: "This is a 'magen david', the Jews' symbol." After her successful demonstration, she put the

symbol on the table, with revulsion. Her bony face twisted in a venomous smile.

That same evening, Professor Stein called an urgent meeting of his pupils from all classes, together with their parents, in the Temple's big prayer room. It was the first time I had participated in a meeting. It was supposed to be attended by many people, but the hall was half-empty and only a few score parents and pupils, including high school pupils, sat in the front rows. Even before he mounted the podium to deliver his speech, arguments for and against the professor could be heard in the audience.

Everyone already knew about the letter the professor had received informing him of his dismisal and the cancellation of the religion classes, and it was mainly about this that the discussion raged. I heard Mitzi's father say to the person sitting next to him: "What's all the fuss about? Who needs the religion classes anyhow?" And someone else called the professor a "troublemaker", and asserted that this was no time to express opinions, since we were anyway in big trouble and the best we could do was lower our voices and efface ourselves as much as possible.

Silence prevailed when Professor Stein stood on the podium. His presence always impressed everyone, even non-Jews, because of his height and erect bearing, his beautiful face and little cropped black beard, and his big eyes expressing so much human warmth that everyone must feel it. None of these availed him this time, and he had no more than begun to greet those present, when some of them rose and left the hall.

He made no mention of his letter of dismissal, speaking only of the increasing humiliations inflicted on the pupils and the Jewish community in general. Never had I heard him talk in so emotional a voice as he warned his listeners of a national tragedy

lying in wait, as he said, at every Jewish door. He mentioned the many refugees who had recently arrived in our town: "They were all left homeless and without even minimal sustenance. They're living cramped in the synagogues and in houses put at their disposal by warm Jewish hearts ready to help unfortunate brothers."

My heart warmed on hearing his words, which he seemed to be directed at my mother, who had extended the hospitality of our home to a family who had been expelled from their village.

They had arrived in Radautz about a month earlier with the masses of refugees. The head of the family, Mr. Schwartz, who was about thirty-five, his wife Surra, and their five year old boy, Liebl, all lived in Sammy's room and ate at our table.

Mother treated them like her own family. Many other homes had adopted refugee families. The small, neighbourhood synagogues were also full of refugees, and the local Jewish communities supplied them with hot meals and food supplies. "Clothes were also abundantly donated by the Jewish community," the professor said, deeply moved, "but what will happen if, God forbid, they decide to expell us, too, tomorrow morning?" We did not then know just how clearly he was seeing what was being born, nor how quickly his prophecy would come into being.

I did not exactly follow what action he was proposing, but his words were so harsh and persuasive, that I was prepared to sacrifice myself there and then if only to act. But many of those present reacted sharply, as though this sorrow had only come upon us through the professor's words. When tempers had calmed down and they allowed him to continue, he apparently decided to let the matter drop, and went on to the subject of the "yellow badge" imposed on the pupils. According to him, this was the first of many decrees to come. When he spoke the words "yellow badge", a

girl in one of the higher classes interrupted: " Not a badge, Professor, but the Jewish symbol, it's the Magen David, after all!"

The professor hesitated a moment before saying, in a fatherly voice: "I know my girl, I know what our symbol is and what it denotes". He breathed deeply, as though to overcome some pain: "We'll wear this symbol in a dignified way and at the correct time, to enhance our Jewish identity. Let us not help our enemies to turn it into a badge of shame!"

There were more responses of one kind or another, and the professor, tired of the arguments being hurled against him, apparently decided to conclude. He proposed that the schools should be boycotted starting from the following day, and that lessons should be conducted in private homes until the decree was rescinded. Mitzi's father stood up and shouted at the audience: "You decide what you like, I don't care if my daughter does or does not wear the badge. I will not allow her to leave her class!" Some tried to argue with him. Mitzi lowered her eyes and tried to avoid looking at the other pupils. I was also most uncomfortable. It was finally decided, by those still left in the hall, to boycott school and return the yellow badges.

Thus it happened that I stood in front of the principal's door, hesitating to knock. For the umpteenth time, I rehearsed what I was going to say and imagined her furious gaze. To my joy, my friend Bertha also arrived with the badge in her hand, trembling in fear and shame. Bertha was by nature a very shy and insecure girl. She was fatherless and was her mother's only child; both of them lived in her grandparents' house. They always tried to protect her. When I would visit her at home, her grandmother, ailing and carrying the burden of the household on her shoulders,

would ask me to be Bertha's friend and take care of her. And she would say to Bertha: "Look at Annie, she isn't shy like you." She would lift Bertha's chin with two fingers, gaze directly into Bertha's eyes -- bespectacled since early childhood -- and in an aggressive tone, to convince her, would say: "You are also a pretty, clever girl like her." The truth was that Bertha was better than me at school, but because of her shyness she would whisper the answers to the teacher's questions, and always came out a loser. Those who copied the lessons from her notebook got high marks.

Now, as she stood beside me I felt compelled to justify what her grandmother had said of me, and I knocked on the door very bravely. The principal's voice invited us to enter. I opened the door and went in with Bertha behind me. The principal's look was as I had imagined, and worse. Without asking the purpose of our visit, she furiously pointed to the door; "Get out of here at once, how dare you appear in school dressed like that?"

Her face was red with anger. I almost passed out. I was gripped by palsy when she put her hand on the ruler that always lay on her table. A light knock was heard at the door, and the principal let go of the ruler and, still in a voice of restrained fury, bid the person to enter.

The door slowly opened, and Mitzi appeared, dressed in school uniform and holding ten li in her hand. She greeted the principal in a low voice: "Kiss your hand," and extended the coin, saying in a subdued voice: "I've brought the money for the badge."

At that moment I placed Bertha's badge and mine on the table and made for the door. Bertha did as I did, and when I reached the door I called out to the principal: "Fritzi and I aren't coming to school anymore!" and I slammed the door behind me. Bertha went out

without saying anything. When we had left the school yard and were outside, Bertha fearfully asked me: "Why did you say that to her? Why did you say you'd left school? Yesterday, with Professor Stein, they only spoke about a strike. How can you take back what you said, now?"

I had no answer to her question. Neither of us knew that this was the end of our studies at secondary school, anyway. After a week, they sent home all the Jewish high school students, at which all illusions about continuing our studies came to an end.

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CHAPTER NO 10

THE EXPULSION

At the end of August, Father managed to come and spend a week with us at home. I was happy to see Father day by day, hour by hour, in the house! Despite Sammy's absence, and my longing for him grew each day, I deluded myself that we were again a united family.

Mother had come to terms with the idea of the move to Bucharest and had even begun making preparations, in consultation with Father. They decided together what they should take and what leave behind. Father included Uncle Izziu in these consultations, and Uncle Izziu promised to take care of all the arrangements. The moving date was set for the end of November or the beginning of December, and it was not far off. Father was not sure if he would be able to come home till then, and Uncle Izziu took on the task of helping us.

After Father's departure, Mother mailed the first parcel containing bed linen and warm winter clothing for Sammy and Father. Mother began packing, sorting and re-packing belongings well before Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, and everything slowly turned to chaos in the house. My happiness knew no bounds. I was now certain that we would indeed be moving to Bucharest. Father and Sammy added their encouragement by writing that they were eagerly awaiting our arrival, and that a beautiful flat on St. George St. was ready for us. In my imagination I embarked on the sweet life that lay ahead of us in the capital, the beautiful clothes Father had promised me, the secondary school we would attend, and above all -- being all together again.

Rosh Hashanah. Not a happy one this time. Many of the refugees who had recently arrived from the villages and who were now a familiar sight in the town, began to disappear. Nobody knew where to. Rumour had it that they had been sent into an "exile" from which nobody ever returned. More families vanished every day. Very few attended the synagogue where my mother prayed, and the atmosphere was one of dejection. People prayed in tears, broken-heartedly beseeching heaven to take pity on the vanished refugees, their own families, and themselves.

Immediately after Yom Kippur, Fritzi and I were roped in, under Mother's command, to pack the first crate. Mother had prepared a pile of papers and towels for the purpose. We padded the bottom of the crate with an old woollen blanket. Porcelain dishes were strewn on the table in the big room. We wrapped each dish in a kitchen towel. It was a 24-place dinner service that Mother was very fond of. "I received these dishes from my mother for a wedding present, and she received them from her mother. This dinner service has been passed from generation to generation of eldest daughters in our family, girls," Mother said.

Mother was particularly careful of the glassware. She personally checked every crystal glass before we placed it in the crate. When she took the big crystal vase that had stood for years in the centre of the table in the big room, Mother stroked it lovingly as she slowly began to pack it. For the first time, we heard the history of the vase which we had till then regarded merely as part of the table. When she was eighteen, a year after WWI, Mother had visited her cousin in Radautz, where she met Father. It had been love at first sight. However, her parents had waged a long battle to prevent her marriage to Father, since they thought the match unsuitable for their daughter because Father was

an artisan whereas Mother's family were established merchants. After Mother had won the battle, Father had been invited with his parents to her parents' house, and he had brought the expensive vase, with a bunch of red roses in it, as a gift for her. "Since then," said Mother, "the vase was always filled with flowers, in my room, until it found its place of honour here on the table."

Uncle Izziu and Grandfather finished the job, closing the crates securely. We had two weeks left until the eagerly anticipated journey. One day after the holidays, I was sitting with a Christian friend of mine, looking through the new school books she had just received. My blue school coat was on the arm of the chair, the yellow badge uppermost. My friend took the coat, in order to hang it up. Her glance rested a moment on the yellow badge sewn on the lapel, "Annoucha, do you like the badge?" I asked her. She smiled at me with closed lips. "To tell the truth, it doesn't seem so bad," and she ran her hand over it.

I was not ashamed of the yellow badge, nor of my Jewishness. My friends knew I was Jewish and had never bothered me. But at that moment I felt the need to explain to Annoucha that this badge was the Jewish symbol, that it was called the Magen David, and I tried to tell her the little I knew about the boy David who fought against Goliath the Philistine giant and beat him, and about David the man -- King of Israel.

"If so, why didn't you want it?" she asked in amazement, "Why didn't you accept it from the principal? Why did you even defy her?" There was no trace of sarcasm in her voice and I knew she had not meant to insult me. But I had no answer, specially since I had no desire to carry on talking about the subject. It was obligatory by law for every Jew in the town to wear the badge. Those displaying the badge in the

town seemed like a select people to me. This must have been a sort of consolation that I had dreamed up for myself, but when Annoucha's mother came into the room I felt uncomfortable and stood up to leave. Just then I heard Fritzi's voice calling me in panic. I took my coat and left at a run.

Fritzi was standing at the gate, her face white: "Annike, come home quick!" she shouted. And before I could ask her what had happened, she hurried me along: "Come quickly, they're throwing us out of the house!"

At first I did not know what she meant. When we arrived at the house I found my mother in tears; "The worst has happened. The very worst. Its a disaster! What can I do?" She hugged the two of us, and I felt that she was losing control: "Fritzika -- run to Grandfather," she said, "and see what's happening to him. Tell him to come to us quickly."

I was gripped by fear and anxiety when Mother told me that the gendarmes had just been, with an order for us to leave the house and report to the railway station at five in the morning. Before Fritzi set out for Grandfather's house, we heard the towncrier beating the bass drum that hung around his neck when he was "on duty". I ran into the street with Fritzi. A big crowd, mainly Roumanians, had already gathered around him. The crier stopped beating the drum and his rich voice came splitting through the loudspeaker he carried: "All Jews are to report to the railway station tomorrow morning at five. You may bring as much baggage as you can carry. Be sure to lock your houses." And after a slight pause: "Whoever has cash money must please deposit it today at the town hall where clerks have been appointed to attend to this."

Our good neighbours crowded whispering around the crier, as though awaiting a further announcement. But he slung his

loudspeaker over his shoulder, cut a path for himself through the crowd and paced away in the direction of the next street, beating the drum with his big drumsticks.

Stunned by these evil tidings, I stood surveying the dispersing crowd until I heard Fritzi calling: "Here comes Grandfather!" and the two of us stormed over to him. Walking with energetic steps, agitatedly banging at the cobbles with his stick as he came towards us, but with a calm face, he said: "Let's go home, to Mother."

Mother was sitting at the table with her face in her hands. She was crying quietly. When she removed her hands from her face, we saw a look of terror in her eyes, which frightened me more than her noisy crying before we had left the house. Cries of despair broke from her as she fell upon Grandfather's neck, and she began whimpering again: "Father, Father, what are we going to do now?! And Moshe? What's going to happen to Moshe? And my Sammiku?" Grandfather embraced her. For the first time I saw big tears flowing from his tired grey eyes. His voice sounded subdued, as he said to Mother: "Calm down, Rivka, it isn't the end of the world yet." Fritzi and I supported her to a chair. Grandfather sat beside her: "They want to throw us out! With the High Holy Days behind us... And after all, didn't we pray more than once to God: 'Do not cast us out in the time of our old age'? So, Our God in Heaven," he shouted, "promise I won't have to leave home in my old age, no matter what!"

Meanwhile, the Nikiporiuk family and the Rotars and the Marchenkos had turned up. Their faces looked as though they had come to condole with us on a bereavement. By the time Uncle Izziu arrived, Mother had regained her clarity of mind behind her tears, and she had begun to discuss with Grandfather how to escape the

calamity.

She had put on her coat, preparing to go to the post office to place a call to father at Uncle Shmulik's house. "Maybe," she said with a trace of hope, "Moshe will be able to get Mittike to come and take us tonight." I thought, with great sorrow, that perhaps if Sandra and her parents had still been in town, the Colonel could have intervened to save us from this dreadful decree. But the Colonel and his family had moved to another city a month earlier.

When Uncle Izziu burst like a tornado into the kitchen, mother wrung her hands and received him with a renewed outburst of tears. Uncle's face was pale and his voice seemed beyond despair. He told us that he had heard about the decree in the early hours of the morning and had been running tirelessly from the town hall to Rabbiner Stein's house, and from there to Mr. Kunstandt's house ever since. And so had many other Jews. But nothing had changed so far, and the danger still existed. He had also tried to get hold of Uncle Shmuel and Father on the telephone, at the post office, but he had been told that all outside lines were busy and it was impossible to make any trunk calls. When he had also tried to book a call to Sammy, who had meanwhile started his studies at the university and was living at the students' residence, he had received the same answer. "We're cut off from the world!" he cried hopelessly.

Mother took off her coat and, beyond despair, like someone whose powers of resistance had been worn down, said: "Then nothing remains but to get ready for the journey. Mrs. Nikeporiuk stood next to my mother stroking her shoulder and tried, in her uncertain voice, to say words which refused to emerge. The others who had come began to disperse and Uncle Izziu started giving

instructions as to how to pack and how much we should take. "The rumour is that they're sending us out of town, most probably not far from here, to labour camps, and there's some hope that we'll be returned home soon."

Grandfather had another version, he claimed that we were being sent straight to our deaths. "But its possible that you're right, my son. I can't decide for you. But I'm old and I haven't the strength nor the wish to take up a wanderer's pack and staff. Despite their fury, I'm staying home, and if they wish to shoot me -- let them come to me. I won't save them the trouble!"

No amount of pleading from Uncle Izziu and my mother, who had momentarily forgotten the extent of the tragedy and were now concerned only with pursuading Grandfather, could budge him from his absolute refusal. Mother sighed deeply and, as a last resort, said: "Father, if we are destined to die, as you say, wouldn't you rather we all died together?"

Here his stubborness deserted him. "As you wish, Rivka," he said submissively, in a tired voice, "I'll go with you".

Aunt Rachel and Uncle Moshe also came running, confirming all the evil rumours. They both looked as if their world had fallen into ruin. Aunt Rachel, trying to choke down her deep terror, urged her husband to hurry to her sister Esther's house to make arrangements to leave together with them.

Uncle Izziu also arranged with Mother and Grandfather to leave at the same time and join them. After they had gone, Mother began organising for the departure, her hands busy with packing while she gazed vacantly into space. She took everything that came to hand and concentrated it on the kitchen floor. Mrs. Nikoporiuk, Fritzi and I helped her. A strange fear enfolded me, but I never opened my mouth, and tried to do as Mother instructed.

Annoucha and her mother, Mrs. Marchenko, also came to help us carry out the task imposed on us. The crates that were standing packed and ready for the move to Bucharest were transferred to the Nikeporiuk family's house. Mother's two sewing machines, inherited from her mother, and valuable oil paintings were also transferred to them. We sewed three packs -- one for each of us -- out of the wool carpets in my parents' bedroom and filled them with as many clothes as we could. We packed candles and food supplies -- bread, noodles, smoked meat, dried fruits, sugar, nuts -- into three large baskets. We also prepared the big enamel pot of goose fat for the journey. We made three bundles of blankets, cushions and eiderdowns, with cooking utensils and clothes inside, and tied them with rope.

Night came. The first snowflakes were falling and mother, in the warm, pleasant kitchen, lit the oven to bake more bread for the way. Annoucha and I sat on the widowsill watching the big, white flakes falling obliquely. Ursu emerged from his kennel and barked at them ceaselessly, trying to catch them on his long tongue. I thought about him with pity, because he, too, was going into exile, with the Nikeporiuk family. I tried to delude myself that Father would arrive with Mittike in the truck before morning and would manage to rescue us and get us to Bucharest. And if not? Maybe we would meet them somewhere on the way. It just was not possible that everything could collapse in the space of one day and that, as Grandfather had said, "they would put us to death".

I heard Mrs. Marchenko saying: "Annoucha, the time has come to say goodbye to Annie and Fritzi, because maybe we won't see them again and you have to go home and get ready for school tomorrow morning."

Something peculiar happened inside me, and a terrible

foreboding crept into my heart. "Another minute, Mother," Annoucha said, and together we sang a song of parting that had been widely popular during the past year. We went over the words and adapted them to our own situation; I also hurriedly took out our souvenir book, which I had put into the pack with my diary, and Annoucha wrote some parting words for us next to those written by my good friends who had left during the year -- enough to fill the pages. When Annoucha had gone, I opened my diary, to write down the day's events. Turning back the pages, I read on the last one: "I received a letter from Dutziv wishing us a good journey to Bucharest and hoping that he'll come and see me one day." And on the empty page following this, sitting at the table in my room, I wrote: "The last night at home. I do not know where we're headed, but I promise to tell you, as always, what happens to us. My heart is full and I don't know what else to write about. Till tomorrow."

Meanwhile, Mother offered us her bed, with all the bedclothes we had not packed. After drinking some milk we sank into a pile of cushions and eiderdowns, and when mother came to cover us, I saw tears in her eyes again. "Goodnight," she burst out crying, "who knows if we'll ever sleep in a warm bed again." I awoke to the sound of Mother whispering over me. "Annike, Fritzike," and I opened my eyes trying to remember where I was. I was confused and everything that had happened to us yesterday seemed like a bad dream, but when I saw my mother's tired, tear-reddened eyes, and heard her tired and defeated voice, I soon returned to reality.

It was still dark in the room and mother's face was illuminated by a candle she held. Fritzi also woke up and we quickly jumped out of bed. "You needn't rush," said my Mother, "Its only three in the morning, I've finished all the preparations and I've prepared a meal for you in the kitchen. When mother lit

the big lamp that stood on the table, it illuminated the room, which was entirely empty. The floor was bare, the closet doors stood open on emptiness. Walls and windows were also bare, and a feeling that the whole world had emptied and stood nakedly exposed encompassed me till I shuddered. "We've moved everything to the neighbours," Mother said, "when we come back they'll return it all."

I ran to the kitchen hoping to find the warmth of yesterday. But here, too, everything was different. Apart from the fire dancing in the stove like the last sign of life. Mother set a pot of cocoa, and another full of eggs, on the stove. Food for the journey. The bundles, packs and baskets stood ready on the bench and floor. But the worst thing of that morning was still ahead: when I looked out the window to see the snow that had piled up during the night, I suddenly saw Urso's empty kennel. My mother hurried over to me, put her hand on my shoulder and said: "He's already moved to his new home -- with the Nikeporiuk family." Tears burst from my eyes and I began to cry wildly, against my will. I begged Mother to let me go out and say goodbye to him, but this time she was firm and no amount of pleading helped me. She would not allow me to visit Urso, our dear friend.

When we sat down to have our cocoa and bread and butter, Mother told us that she and the Nikoporiuk couple had worked all night to move our belongings and prepare the bundles we would take with us. In answer to the question as to whether we should go and call Grandfather Efraim, Mother said it would not be necessary, since Mr. Marchenko had also moved Grandfather's belongings to our house, and Aunt Rachel and Uncle Moshe were with him, having helped him to pack.

At exactly four o'clock Grandfather arrived with his velvet

phylactery and prayer-shawl bag under his arm. He clasped it as the last thing he was carrying with him from the world he had lived in. He had already said his morning prayers, and he told us that Uncle Moshe and Aunt Rachel had gone to Rachel's sister, Esther.

Dawn had not yet broken, and the street was deserted when we went out to Mr. Nikeporiuk's cart. After we had loaded all the bundles, we took our places on top of them. Then Grandfather shouted in a powerful, commanding voice, "Come Rivka, hurry up, in case we are late for death!"

I wanted the cart to start moving as quickly as possible away from the house and the barking of Urso, left to guard it. I blocked my ears and when Mother climbed onto the cart, Fritzi and I buried our heads in her lap. The street was empty and deserted. White snowflakes hung on the trees and fences. The snow turned to watery mud on the road. The air was cold and wet and the cart moved slowly, with a lamp at the front and the rear to light the way. In Pretor Street we saw other carts making their way to the railway station, like ours, and more and more joined all down the street, appearing from side streets. The caravan grew longer and longer, but the frightening silence was unbroken. Even the Roumanian cart drivers did not dare to break it.

Our wagon left the line and stopped outside Uncle Izziu's house. Their cart was already loaded; Aunt Rosa sat at the back while Mozziu, wrapped in a blanket, slept calmly in her arms. Uncle sat next to the driver, and when he saw us, he called to Grandfather: "Father, everything's alright, Max and Janet have left with the Sheffer family." The two carts continued together to the centre of town. In silence, all the carts behaved as though they were at a mass funeral, and only the wheels hammered at the

stones in the road.

I saw the Big Temple behind me, swathed in darkness, silent as a cemetery in the night gloom, with nobody in it. On normal days it would surely have been thronged with worshippers at this hour of the morning. The school we had attended was also dark and further on we also passed the deserted market. Kirchen Street, the main street and location of most of the shops with illuminated windows, and of Steinmetz's restaurant, which emitted the fragrances of goulash and potato pancakes, was locked and deserted.

The silence was broken as we approached the central railway station. There we found noise and tumult and mounted soldiers armed with rifles, with clubs in their hands, directing the carts to the big lot next to the platform. Over the way, railway freight cars with wide open doors could be seen.

Uncle Izziu jumped down from the cart and came over to us first. He helped Grandfather to alight and urged us to get down, too, and stay together so as not to get lost. Fritzi and I helped Aunt Rosa to get down from the cart, taking Mozziu, still sleeping the sleep of the just in his blanket, from her arms. We went, with him, to sit on one of the bundles we had managed to take down. I looked at his calm face, and dared to touch it. A smile of content appeared at the corners of his little pink mouth. Suddenly he opened his big brown eyes and, seeing Fritzi and me, he broke into happy cries: "Annie, Fitzi," I pressed him to my heart and whispered in his ear: "Mozziu want home?" His half-asleep eyes were roving around as though looking for the reason for his being here in this place. Suddenly he discovered the grown-ups of the family, busy with the unloading. He sat up, and called out: "Mammy, Pappy," but his voice was lost in the noisy screeching of

the soldiers frenziedly commanding: "Into the carriages! Into the carriages!"

The soldiers' horses snorted and wheeled nervously about. Men, women and children laden with baggage were rudely shoved towards the carriages, calling out and staying close to one another, so as not to be separated. Near one of the railway carriages I saw Uncle Moshe and Aunt Rachel approaching the door, where Rachel's sister Esther was standing with her infant son in her arms. Her husband, Mr. Strelling, beside her, was lifting the bundles being passed to him by Aunt Rachel and Uncle Moshe.

The people behind them were pressing them to hurry. Uncle Izziu and Grandfather began calling out to them: "Moshe, Moshe," but all at once Uncle Moshe left his place, having managed to lift up Aunt Rachel and the child. He forged through the crowd followed by Rachel's cries: "Moshe, Moshe, hurry, there won't be any room for you!" And when she discovered us, she cried: "Girls, girls," but her voice was swallowed in the sea of cries. Uncle managed to reach us; he kissed the two of us and baby Mozziu, calling over to Mother: "See you at the end station. It'll be alright, Rivka! Father prayed all night long!" Then he turned to the carriage again and with an agile leap managed to get on. Immediately afterwards the two heavy doors were bolted.

I got into the carriage first, and Uncle Izziu held Mozziu up for me to take, as I stood in the opening. Half the carriage was full already, and I found a place in one of the corners. Aunt Rosa and Fritzi came after me, and they lifted in the bundles that Mother and Uncle Izziu handed them, transferring them to "my corner". Mother and Uncle Izziu helped Grandfather to get in. He had difficulty climbing up and had to be lifted. They gripped him under the arms, and Aunt Rosa and Fritzi pulled. They got him up

with an effort, and Mother and Uncle came up after him.

The carriage filled with people and bundles, and the crush began to be felt. People sat on top of the bundles that were piling up on the filthy floor of the carriage. Mozziu, who had at first expressed joy at being with us, began to display signs of fear and soon began to cry: "Don't want here, want home!"

The first rays of sunlight had already begun to break through the morning air outside. I could see a clear blue sky beyond the open doors, despite the chilly air that penetrated the carriage.

> How lovely my town, how beautiful your gardens, with the carpet of leaves spread at your feet, in the autumn morning. How beautiful Nature, which God laboured to create, together with Man to rule over it, except that this ability to rule Nature was beyond him and Man ruled over Man with an evil and oppressive hand.
>
> And Cain arose and smote Abel: And so in all generations. He created everyone in His image and likeness, after all -- I had not given any thought to this until now. Only when the heavy doors were being shut on us by these evil people, and the darkness in the carriage cut us off from the light of the sun outside it, and the weeping of babies enhanced the sense of suffocation -- only now did I feel the full horror and helplessness. 14.10.1941.

So I wrote, afterwards, in my diary.

The train began to move and slowly got underway with a clicking of wheels striking the rails at a quickening tempo. The people in the carriage, adapting to the darkness, began calling to one another, while the air filled with the sighs of the old and ailing, the crying of babies and the mothers' attempts to comfort them. Some began a discussion about the destination of the

journey, with a few repeatedly asserting that we were bound for annihilation. From one end of the carriage came the hysterical crying of a baby, and in spite of the advice everyone gave the parents, they could not pacify the child.

After a while, people began to take out food. Aunt Rosa took out a bottle of porridge from which she fed Mozziu, who had meanwhile reconciled himself to the journey.

The real problems began after the journey had lasted for some time, when the need for people to relieve themselves began to be felt. It began with the little children asking for "pee-pee" and "ka-kee"; the adults tried to restrain themselves, but could not do so for very long.

Someone managed to reach the high, narrow hatch and open it. Cold, sharp air rushed in, stunning the "travellers". After they had recovered somewhat, pots of urine and excreta were passed overhead, and the man at the hatch emptied them. Some found a solution for privacy: two of a family would hold up a sheet, behind which the others performed their bodily functions. The residue adhering to the pots began to stink, and the stench in the carriage intensified sevenfold.

People began to drop off to sleep after it began to be relatively quiet. The snores ensuing from all sides combined into a frightful chorus. The senses of smell and hearing were employed to the full. "Man has no pre-eminence above a beast" -- the verse (which Professor Stein had once read to us in both Hebrew and Roumanian) came to mind, and I felt the swiftness of the process of man's brutalization more clearly than ever before.

A sudden, strong screech, shocking the inhabitants of the carriage, announced the halting of the train. After a while, the two heavy doors were flung open and we, accustomed to the darkness

by now, were blinded by beams of light from torches held by armed soldiers. We were ordered out of the carriage; people rushed to the opening, trampling one another and creating a bottleneck.

The first ones out began to collect the bundles thrown down to them. Uncle Izziu also managed to push his way to the opening, pulling Aunt Rosa, with Mozziu in her arms, behind him. Fritzi and I helped our aunt to get down and then passed Mozziu to her. Then I jumped down and when I looked around me at the tumult the soldiers were deliberately causing by forcing people to get out of the train in a hurry, shouting and using their clubs, I was overcome with fear and dread. I clung to my uncle's coat so as not to fall. He drew me to him, managing to whisper in my ear: "Annike, you're a big girl now, help me to get Grandfather down."

I looked at the carriage opening I had just left, where people were still handing down children and throwing parcels into waiting arms. I saw Grandfather, standing erect, but with a wide-eyed look, as he searched for us. When our eyes met, he signalled to me that he was remaining where he was to help Mother and Fritzi to unload the baggage. With the agility of a man whose strength has suddenly returned to him, he began to lift one bundle after another and throw them to us. My uncle caught the bundle in both hands and I rolled it over to my aunt, who had set Mozziu down among the bundles she had already managed to concentrate in one place. When all had been unloaded, Mother and Fritzi supported Grandfather and got him safely down from the carriage. People who had not yet alighted were roughly shoved or pulled and thrown to the ground by the soldiers. Mothers continued to throw their children into men's outstretched arms. I saw a printed sign: M

too, to be thoroughly mashed into the slush caused by their swift melting. Each parcel thrown onto the ground was soon soaked in mud and damp, making it heavier.

The last of the deportees had left the train and were trudging along the viscous, muddy road, loaded with their belongings, behind the soldiers, while other soldiers brought up the rear. Uncle Izziu and the Dikman family had managed to get hold of a cart on which they had loaded the baggage, on top of wqhich they had seated Grandfather, Aunt Rosa and Mozziu, while we marched along behind it with all the others, not knowing where we were headed.

The darkness was thick and neither the soldiers' torches not the lamps of the carts were much use. After about a half-hour's walk, like an eternity to us, the first houses of Marculesti were seen. When we approached the little, huddled houses the order was given for us to go inside.

There was a faint spark of hope that we had reached the end of our journey. The houses were uninhabited, empty of belongings, and they had no doors or windows. We knew at once that these were the houses of the local Jews, who had been expelled just as we ourselves had been expelled from Radautz.

The house we entered had two small rooms, a clay floor and a ceiling so low that I was afraid it would fall on us. A ruined stove stood in the extra little room that had apparently once served as a kitchen. Scores of people crowded into the two small rooms, trying to settle themselves and their belongings, family by family.

The confusion lasted a long time, the place was too small and narrow to contain us. Uncle Izziu succeeded in finding a place on top of the wrecked stove, to which he lifted baby Mozziu, wrapped

in a blanket, and put him down to sleep between Fritzi and me. He began to cry again, "Home, I want to go home!" and my aunt comforted him as though she was consoling herself: "Sleep my little boy, sleep. Good angels are watching over you. Mummy and Daddy, too. Sleep my Mozziu. Fritzika and Annika will also stay with you."

He gazed at us as if he was asking: Where are we? Why? Where's home? And so on until he closed his eyes and went to sleep.

Mother, Grandfather, my aunt and my uncle sat crowded on the bundles containing the bed linen that hadn't been unpacked. Gradually people began to fall asleep as they sat, with their children's heads in their laps. Nobody undressed or removed their shoes. For the first time in my life, I spent the whole night in my shoes and coat, with a woollen hat on my head. I was trying to lean on my arm, to make myself more comfortable in the stove, when my hand encountered a glass jar. I managed to extract it. It was a big jar full of jam. I wondered how a jar of jam had come to be inside the stove. When I held it out to my uncle, he examined it and discovered gold coins hidden in the jam. He stood up and carefully returned the jar to its place, covering it with a loose brick from the stove. This aroused my mother's fears that they might confiscate the jewellery she had with her, and she began to discuss with my uncle and aunt how to conceal it. Grandfather objected to every suggestion they made on the grounds that it could endanger our lives. If they had so easily succeeded in taking us from our homes, he thought, they would have no trouble at all in finding the jewellery. But my mother was adamant, and while they were still arguing, she took her jewellery box from her pack, made Fritzi and me stand up on the stove, with me in front.

She loosened my hair, took the diamond and gold ring I had received from Aunt Wexler from the box, and nimbly braided it into my hair, and bound the first braid with a simple shoelace, instead of the ribbon, and so with the second braid, in which she had concealed another diamond ring. She hid yet another two rings in this way in Fritzi's hair, too. Everyone was amazed at what she had done, agreeing that there was no chance of our braids arousing any suspicion.

Some people, mainly children, had managed to fall asleep. Those who had not, began to discuss the remarks made by one of the women sitting on the clay floor with everyone else. "One can die of being so crowded," the woman had said. "We'll certainly find other abandoned houses in the morning, and we'll be able to spread out. I assume we'll be able to find something better than this," she had whispered to her husband. "You mean with a door and windows?" the husband had asked. "No, not only that," she had said, "there must be some with wooden floors." "My dear lady," someone had interjected, "let's hope they leave us in this house." Thus the discussion had been taken on and expanded. Grandfather was also among those arguing: "If they leave us here, we'll at least have a roof over our heads."

A faint light crept through the clouds, announcing the morning of a new day -- Friday. The gallop of horses was heard in the narrow street, and a soldier called through a loudspeaker that everyone was to leave the houses and go to the gendarmerie square with their belongings.

There was panic again, nobody knew where the square was. We gathered our belongings, and my uncle took the sleeping little Mozziu from the stove. The baby woke up and before he could cry or complain, my aunt took him in her arms, still wrapped in his

blanket, and pushing a square of chocolate into his mouth spoke

reassuringly to him as she stepped after us into the street, which was already thronged with people.

There were carts waiting outside; they were quickly filled and we were among those who did not manage to get one. We went on foot dragging our bundles and assisting Grandfather, who needed to be supported all the way to the gigantic square.

It was full morning. Snow was falling intermittently. Some Roumanian officers were seated at the official table and at an order over the loudspeaker, everyone approached and placed their jewellery and other valuables into bowls on the table. The officers were not content with what was handed over and conducted a painstaking search of the people's bodies and among the bundles.

Mother personally removed my earrings and those of Fritzi and handed them over, to prevent the soldiers' crude touch on our earlobes. One of the soldiers commanded me to take off my hat; my heart pounded with fear lest he also want me to unravel my braids. but luckily he was content with a search of the hat, which he returned to me, saying with an evil grin: "Have the hat back, it suits you!" That same morning we left Marculesti on foot, leaving half our belongings on the square, taking only what we were able to carry. We put our packs on our backs. Fritzi and I carried clothes and baskets of food. Grandfather also took a bundle of bedclothes on his back. Aunt Rosa carried only a small shoulder bag with Mozziu's clothes, and a big carrier bag full of sweets, from which she periodically took chocolate for her baby. She put him down from time to time, to rest her arms, but she carried him most of the way.

Towards evening, when we were near the rumoured stopover, a strong downpour began, and the soldiers guarding us began to heap

wild abuse on us because we were the cause of their suffering. In the dark, which descended suddenly, we continued to walk until we came to the primeval Casauti Forest, and there, among the high, dense trees we settled down for our night's rest.

The wet earth was padded with rotten leaves which gave off a smell of mould. Each family began to make its preparations for the night. My mother unpacked the bedclothes, spreading blanket on blanket with some pillows on top, and here we seated Mozziu. My aunt took warm, dry clothing from her pack and after she had changed his clothes and covered him with an eiderdown, the baby wearily closed his eyes and fell asleep. My uncle and Mr. Dikman gathered twigs and made a fire near us. The other people did likewise, and the campfires, which seemed small among the high trees, soon gave light. For a moment I imagined that this was the picnic to which I had been invited by Dutziu in Suceava , but my anxiety immediately returned on seeing the sorrowful scene.

We changed our clothes and spread the wet ones before the fire, hoping to dry them. Mother, my aunt and Mrs. Dikman began preparing a hot meal: they boiled water in a big pot and cooked noodles. While these were cooking, they lit two candles, to receive the Queenly Sabbath.

The rain stopped. The forest was illuminated with campfires and sabbath candles. New hope crept into hearts. Grandfather took the prayerbook from the folds of the prayer shawl and began praying with some other men standing among the trees. After the prayers, we sat around the fire to eat our "sabbath meal". We ate the hot noodles in salt water, smoked meat and bread spread with goose-fat. Baby Mozziu also woke up, looked around in amazement, and again burst into tears and despairing cries of: "Mozziu wants home, home!" Uncle Izziu took him in his arms and, as though

telling him a secret, whispered in his ear: "We have no home anymore, my little boy, we're going to look for a new home. Now the campfire's keeping us warm." Grandfather also tried to comfort him, but his voice betrayed him, and he weakly muttered through his teeth: "What is this tender baby's sin? How will he survive? God Almighty, how have your flock sinned?"

The hot noodle water, which Aunt Rosa fed drop by drop into his mouth from a big spoon, soothed Mozziu and he swallowed it lustily. The campfires slowly went out. The voices of people calling members of their families in the darkness also slowly died out and they huddled in their coats and blankets and wearily fell asleep.

The Dikman's son was lying next to me and we began to talk to each other in the darkness. He "analysed" the miserable house we had stayed in the night before in Marculesti, and told me that he had planned to hide and stay there. But he had not had the strength to part from his parents. "It was a silly idea," I replied, but at heart I thought differently and I even admired him for his daring thought.

"What would you have done afterwards?" I asked him with deep interest. He gave me the details of his plan to hide among the deserted houses until everyone was gone, and the soldiers with them. "And then," he said, "I would have walked back to Roumania, where there must surely still be Jews with whom I could hide." He was also certain that most Roumanian Jews were unaware of our fate, and he would be able to mobilize them to help us. He spoke in embarrassment, as though he himself did not believe what he was saying. But I actually liked what he said and I secretly determined to carry out his plan. To escape and hide and try to reach the place he had considered reaching without success.

The next day, at dawn, heavy clouds covering the scraps of sky showing between the treetops, foretold a cold, rainy day. People again started collecting their bundles in preparation for another march. The soldiers that arrived began shouting: "Move on, move on!"

I managed with difficulty to re-pack the bedclothes and the baskets of food, and we stuffed the clothes we had dried into our packs. At first light, the column began to make its way out of the forest. Suddenly our eyes gaped open, we were thunderstruck: close to where the women had lit the sabbath candles and pleaded for deliverance, and where the men had prayed and received the Queen Sabbath; where we had eaten the "Sabbath Meal" and warmed our weary and frozen limbs at the campfires -- a huge, open pit lay exposed before us. In it were human corpses naked as the day they were born, lying piled one on top of the other: men and women and, among them, the corpses of tender babes.

The weeping and screams of horror which burst from the throats of the living people standing around the pit were not stopped by the soldiers, who stood aside, no longer hurrying us on. The sky also opened and a heavy rain cut through the trees, shaking the whole forest. When we left that terrible place, accompanied by the soldiers, the young people in the column looked old: they were stooped and stumbling and carried their loads with difficulty. The old ones, on the other hand, looked like living dead, dragging their feet as though blown before the wind, and the little children, in their mothers' arms, looked like chicks being brought to slaughter.

And thus, under the opened sky, in the pouring rain, the column dragged its way like lepers shedding limbs as they walked. With each step their shoes filled with sticky mud and became

heavier and heavier on their feet. Peasant women appeared at the roadside, holding pails of hot soup which they dished out in mugs in exchange for a dress or some other clothing. Peaople began running towards them, taking out their best clothes and exchanging them for a mug of soup, which looked like dirty water with a few chunks of potato floating in it. But the steam rising from the pails aroused the appetite.

Thus we continued to march all day and, towards evening, when fatigue was beginning to tell, even little Mozziu began to accept the decree. He stopped complaining and thirstily gulped the cup of water my uncle had found for him. Grandfather also forgot his complaints and began to egg us on like a battle commander: "Don't fall behind! As long as we're still breathing, hope isn't lost!" He maintained this spirit all the way and encouraged us all. After a march of endless kilometres, when our legs were failing with weariness, and night was falling, we arrived on the banks of the Dniester. The sight of the grey, turbulent water struck us with terror, and when the column halted some rafts lit by a few lamps appeared and stopped opposite us.

How terrible it was, the boarding of those rafts! People were pushed one after the other into the knee-high shallows and in this way, pushing and being pushed, we reached the rafts. Soaked to the marrow, we climbed onto them. The crush increased and people began to fear they would be drowned. When the raft moved off and began to be swung by the tumultuous water, one of the men began to screech: "Bella, my little Bella! My little Bella's fallen into the water with the baby!" But his cries were swallowed in the noise of the torrent, together with his wife and child. I had already heard about Dante's Inferno, yet had not managed to read it. I thought to myself that the work must ring false, since human

imagination could never compete with the cruelty of reality.

When our feet trod on dry land again, we were on the other bank of the Dniester. We stayed there all night under the open sky. We again took out the bedclothes, all wet, and spread them on the mud and, freezing cold, our teeth chattering, we huddled close together for warmth. The dark and rainy night swallowed us. When morning came, the sky seemed to be taking pity on us, beginning to clear. The soldiers had not yet appeared and there were houses in the distance, on a hill. Smoke began to rise from the chimneys. There were still happy people in the world!

Mother started wringing the bedclothes dry and then, with Grandfather's help, she rolled them into bundles again. My aunt began to feel ill, with pains in the head. Fritzi and I helped her to her feet and we offered to carry Mozziu. When the soldiers appeared and ordered us to move, we were among the first in the column, with Fritzi and I taking turns at carrying Mozziu on our shoulders, on top of the packs. My uncle supported my aunt and my grandfather and mother carried most of the load.

Today's march also started in the clinging mud and the improved weather was of no help to us at all. Here, too, the peasant women began to appear at the roadside with the pails of hot soup, loaves of bread and sweet pumpkin pies. They spoke Ukrainian, and for the first time, I learned the word for "exchange".

My uncle took a woollen suit from the pack, for which he received hot soup and pumpkin pie for all of us. After this princely feast, my aunt began to feel better, insisting that she was strong enough to carry Mozziu, and she took him from me. I was relieved and my pack suddenly felt lighter. I remembered a joke of Grandfather's about a teacher who learned to appreciate the

space in his small room by introducing and then removing a goat from it, on the rabbi's advice.

I straightened my back and turned my head, surprised to see the very long column of people. They were almost collapsing beneath the heavy loads on their backs, but there were a few carts at the rear of the column.

Uncle Izziu also turned to look back. "Maybe we can also get hold of a cart, or part of one," I said. "They must be very heavily loaded," he said dismissively. I insisted on going to the rear of the column, perhaps I would find place for our load on one of the carts, and if not -- maybe for Grandfather and Mozziu. My uncle reconsidered, and when Mother intervened to ask what it was all about, they both agreed that I should go back and find out.

I turned on my heel and began to make my way through the crowd. People looked at me curiously and wonderingly: "Where are you going, child?" I did not answer, so as not to draw their attention to the carts, and slipped past quickly. I also took care not to draw the attention of the soldiers who were busy rounding up the people who had gone into the fields to perform their bodily functions.

Before I could get near the carts, of which there were four, loaded to capacity with bundles, they suddenly veered to the right and galloped crazily into the open field, from where they began to drive back in the opposite direction.

The people whose belongings were on the carts, and who had paid in advance for the transport, began to run after them in despair: "Robbers! Robbers!" but the soldiers' clubs immediately turned them back to the lines, and the more they shouted and tried to rescue their belongings, the more the soldiers' bestowed their clubs on them. I found myself caught up in the yelling, beaten

crowd, being drawn backwards instead of moving ahead. My only way out was to pull aside. There was a deep ditch separating the highway on which the column was marching from an orchard of dry, bare trees. I rolled into the ditch and fell directly into the rushing water. At first I felt as if knives were cutting my legs. But when I managed to get to my feet I sank into thin mud on the bottom. There the intensified shouts of the people reached me, together with the sound of shots. Scared to death, I clung with both hands to the side of the ditch with the filthy water up to my waist. When the voices died down, I tried to lift myself and see what was happening. I managed to get to road level, from where I saw the column in the distance, almost out of my field of vision. Some people lay in the middle of the road, covered in their own blood. I stayed a while longer in the ditch, shivering with fear and cold, the lower half of my body beginning to freeze and my feet growing heavy. I could not move them, in case I would collapse. I do not remember how long I remained in the ditch, but I was fully conscious and contemplating death, which I had been seeing in front of my eyes for the past two days. Would I really die here, like those we had seen in the open pit in the forest? And what was going to happen to Mother, Fritzi, Mozziu and the uncles and aunts?

I raised my eyes to the sky, which was all I could see, and I prayed to God to come down and save me. But heavy, threatening clouds looked down on me and filled me with deadly terror: the skies were again about to open and fill the ditch to overflowing -- and here in this lower hell my grave would be. I felt myself growing weaker. My frozen hands forced me to lower them and blow on them. The thought occurred to me: if it rained and the ditch filled, perhaps I would be able to swim? But where to? In any

case, the thought of swimming in the ditchwater frightened me. I attempted to move my legs -- in vain! They were as heavy as lead and I could barely feel them.

Grandfather's words calling on us not to fall behind echoed in my ears. His daring voice rang clearly in my ears now, shaking me out of my terror. "No! I won't die here in this ditch!" I cried in my heart. "These heavy legs are mine. So are these frozen hands -- mine!" And then my body began to lift itself up, but again I subsided. I tried over and over again. I imagined I was an experienced athlete doing exercises, until my confidence returned and with all my remaining strength I pulled one foot and then the other, and without thinking began to drag both feet along the ditch.

I was dragging my feet one after the other. Making progress! The ditch seemed endless to me and getting out of it seemed an impossiblity. When I would attempt to raise myself to the edge, my body slipped down. The surrounding silence was terrifying.I encouraged myself by dreaming that the ditch would lead me back to the Dniester, where I would fling the pack off my back and cross the river by swimming. In my thoughts I went even further, imagining I would return home and do what the Dikmans' son had planned to do, without succeeding.

I continued triumphantly to walk along in the freezing water of the ditch, telling myself, "Look, its getting warmer under my feet!" I bumped into a floating branch. I grabbed it and pulled it towards me. Then I leaned it against the wall of the ditch and climbed it, the climb seeming relatively easy to me. I had reached the top! Once more, my feet stood on the muddy ground. I looked into the ditch; it was about two metres deep and I could see from the flow of the water that it was getting deeper. At first, when

I had stood up in the ditch, I had been able to see the surface of the ground, but from this point I could no longer see anything at all. It was good that I had managed to climb out!

I took a look around, hoping not to be near the river; my earlier certainty that I would be able to swim across it had receded. Nor did I want to face the temptation. In the darkness of approaching evening I could see the town we had passed in the morning, when we had left the riverbank. A broad field stood between the town's houses and me, and I directed my steps towards it with the intention of crossing it and reaching the houses. There was nobody but me in all that open space, which looked like a desert to me. I lowered my pack, which had luckily remained dry. I withdrew from it a pair of shoes, socks, underwear, a pair of gym pants and a towel. I removed my wet clothes and dried myself from head to foot and put on the dry clothes. I wrapped the wet clothes in the towel and put them into the pack. Then I examined my braids: The rings! They were still intact! I began to march energetically towards the houses.

When I reached the first of them I searched for a glimmer of light in a window, but the houses were in darkness. When I drew closer, I discovered that the houses were empty, without doors or windows, as in M . But here they were tall, built of red brick and with high windows. Undisturbed in the thickening darkness, I moved among the absolutely empty houses. I entered one of them, a double-storey, and began to wander about the many large, empty rooms. I found nothing and went back down the creaking wooden staircase to the lower floor and into the first room I came across. A door still on its hinges was open. It was totally dark inside the room. I felt my way across a wooden floor which also creaked. I bumped into something that seemed like a

mattress. I felt along the length and breadth of it and knew I had guessed correctly: it was a torn mattress with the springs bursting out of it. I took off my wet coat in the dark and hung it on the sill of a window I found by the draught coming from it. I also took my wet shoes and clothes from the towel and spread them near the mattress. Then I wrapped myself in one of the sweaters I had in the pack and lay on the mattress. I closed my eyes at once, and the day's hardships befuddled my dreams.

I woke to the sunlight piercing the two broken windows of the room. My hanging coat waved before me recalling all the terrors of the day before; and then hunger began to trouble me. I rose from where I had lain and went over to the window. Nothing had changed even in daylight. Everything appeared deserted and abandoned and not a living soul was to be seen. I collected my clothes, as wet as ever, only the coat having dried a little. I put it on and went out into the narrow, deserted street with my pack on my back.

I stood a while longer in the street, looking around, not knowing where to turn. I began walking and walking among the houses without meeting anyone. What a strange Robinson Crusoe I was, on what a peculiar island! Except that the Angel of Death lay in ambush for me around every corner! God, how many faces and eyes did this black angel have! I longed for my mother and all the dear ones I had left yesterday, but fear of the many faces of the Angel of Death which accompanied me about these streets made me forget even my longing.

Suddenly, in the distance, I saw two female figures approaching. Was I right? Not mistaken? Maybe I was lost in the wilderness and was seeing a mirage? A trick of the imagination? But no. I was seeing clearly that these were two women. And it was

not in the nature of women to do harm; I took strength and walked towards them. By their clothes, I identified them as two peasant women when I came close to them. I wished them "good morning" in Roumanian. They retreated, then measured me from head to foot and, apparently reassured, began talking to me in Ukrainian, which I did not understand though I was familiar with the sound of it. They explained to me in sign language that there was nobody in the area. They pointed to a house in the distance, aimed imaginary rifles and said "Pouf! Pouf!". I thought I understood that they were warning me against soldiers in that house.

One of them took half a loaf of bread from her bag and offered it to me. I thanked her a thousand times in deaf-mute sign language and there and then revived my strength by eating it. They went on their way and I turned to the field I had crossed the night before, in the hope of finding my family again. Beside the muddy highway I saw a column of Jews with armed and mounted soldiers alongside them. They were getting closer to me. When they came up to me, I joined the column on its way northwards.

I found a family from S who knew my mother, and I travelled with them for three more days. At night we camped in the open fields. On the third or fourth night we came to one of the stables in the area of the town of K . I began to move among the crowd crying in despair, "Mama! Fritzi! Fritzi! Mama!" and suddenly I heard my mother's voice shouting, croaking, "Annike, my Annike!"

They had set out to find me, as I had set out to find them, with despairing cries, among the hordes of people. I fell happily weeping into the arms of my mother, who was also weeping. "I'll never ever again leave you!" I cried.

Mother pressed me to her, unable to part from me, mumbling

over and over again: "God, my God, I thank you for watching over my treasure!" And as though she couild not believe her eyes: "Where have you been, my child?" and not waiting for an answer: "God, God watch over them for me, they're all I have!" Fritzi also clung to me, refusing to move from my side, saying: "Where were you, Annike?!" over and over again. They did not let me tell them where I had been. I remembered a joke from Grandfather's treasury of Jewish jokes:"When is a Jew happy? -- When he loses and finds." And we had lost and found each other. We were happy. Delighted. The happiest day of my life. No. I am not exaggerating.

I looked for my uncle and aunt, Grandfather and Mozziu, who were always with Mother and Fritzi, but I could not see them. "Where are they?" There was no reply. Again I shed tears. Like ceaseless rain in the forest. We walked towards the stables where the people were crowding for the night. It was very crowded and we had difficulty making a way for ourselves to reach our dear ones. People lay folded and huddled together, and there was no room for us to place our feet. Not to mention paths or corners. It looked like one solid lump of bodies, living dead, whose souls were finally about to leave their bodies.

I recognized Aunt Rosa with Uncle Izziu among those lying there; her head was in his lap and he was stroking her hair and her forehead. Little Mozziu was between them: "Mummy! Mummy!" his cries were faint and weak. Grandfather sat behind them, leaning against his pack. When he saw me he called to Mother in a choked voice: "Have you found the child? Thank the Great God Who has shown us compassion." But he did not move from his place, and only his voice showed that he was relieved to see me. I held out both hands to him, and he took them and kissed them: "My children, my granddaughters!" We sank down beside him and he kept on mumbling:

"Don't let them kill you!"

I sat behind my uncle and hugged his back. He did not respond. I understood that something dreadful had happened in my absence. But he immediately put his hand behind him and pressed me to his back. Then he turned his head and sighed:"Annike, praise God!" And I knew he meant my return.

I suddenly realized that Aunt Rosa was very sick; I bent and put my hand out to her, stroking her forehead. She was very hot, and beads of perspiration stood on her beautiful face. I could not see Mozziu clearly, because of the darkness. He called over and over again, in his thin, weak voice: "Mummy! Mummy!"

I asked my uncle to hand him to me, I wanted to hug him and feel him, confirming that the baby was still alive and among us. When my uncle passed him to me I put my leg over Fritzi's, and we seated him between us! Mother explained: "The child's in shock," I tried to stir him, to make him laugh, but he did not respond. I did not know what shock was. But I knew for sure that this was not the same merry baby full of life that we had taken from home, from his warm bed decorated with embroidered cushions, who had drunk warm cocoa every morning, had eaten cornmeal porridge, butter and egg yolk. I put his head in my lap and covered him with his blanket, trying to warm him by stroking his little body and head.

Fritzi told me that when I had turned back to find a cart, they had heard the uproar that had arisen as a result of the flight of the looted carts, and the shots. When Mother had tried to run in the direction of the tragedy, the soldiers had entered the ranks of people, firing into the air, forcing them onward with their clubs.

She also told me they were certain I had been killed, and only after another day's march did they hear the rumour that the

dead were three men, at which they had begun to hope to find me alive. Mother calmed down a little and even laughed at the joke about a Jew being happy to lose and then find again: "Really, where were you, Annike?" I told her about the town which, as I had learned from the two Ukrainian women, was called Jampol. And I told her about the hardships I had been through.

Everyone left the stables and various other nooks and crannies at dawn and the march northwards began again. Uncle Izziu, who could barely stand, lifted Aunt Rosa to her feet, wrapped her limp arms about his neck and put his arms around her waist, and Mother put the pack on his back as well. And thus the two of them set out.

I walked behind them, my pack on my back and Mozziu in my arms. Grandfather, with Mother supporting him, and Fritzi followed. When we came to the muddy highway, The peasants again received us with the pails of hot soup and everyone fell upon them. People had ceased to bargain, and pulled whatever came to hand from their packs and bundles. They paid for a cup of water with a dress, trousers or other clothing. My Mother managed to obtain a few mugs of soup, which she poured into a pot hanging from her pack, and she shared out the half loaf of bread she had also managed to get, breaking it with her hands as we walked. My uncle tried to feed my aunt from the pot of hot soup: "Eat my Rosale. Open your mouth." He put the pot to her lips, but she refused to eat and asked only for water. In her clear-headed moments, she said that there was a fire raging inside her.

After two more days of walking, we came to some stables again, where we settled for the night. On that night, Aunt Rosa died. During the day, she had had no strength to drag her feet after my uncle, and he had carried her on his back, almost

collapsing under the burden; other people had also begun to collapse here and there, dropping out of the column. These were mainly old people, who had not had the strength to get up after the night's rest. They were shot by the soldiers, their bodies remaining beside the stables and on the roadside. That afternoon it had begun to snow heavily on the bare heads of the deportees. Frost almost froze our blood, which flowed sluggishly in any case. The road became even more difficult and doubt as to whether any of us would live to reach any destination gnawed at our hearts. All talk and discussion had ceased completely, and people dragged their feet and their weakened bodies, sagging under the few remaining packs, as though their fate was sealed.

The snow had piled up by nightfall and when we approached the stable our feet sank into the soft snowdrifts. My uncle managed to put my aunt down on the one remaining blanket, which Mother had spread. After a night of hellish torment, when we had risen to collect our belongings and move on, my uncle had tried to lift my aunt, but she had sunk onto the cold ground; my uncle crouched over her, trying to rub her hands to warm them. Grandfather had also bent over her. "Izziu, my son," he had said in a strangled voice, "God has delivered her." My uncle had then carressed her cold body for a little while longer, whispering words of parting, and before we left, he buried her in the deep snow that had fallen during the night.

Grandfather was with us for a few days after my aunt's death and then one night in one of the stables he informed us that he was going no further, since he had no strength to carry on. "My legs are paralysed and my body no longer obeys me." His wasted body, which bore his proud grey head upright still, no longer obeyed him.

During the night, Grandfather read from Psalms and, wrapped in his prayershawl, spoke his confession, and when he grew tired, he lay down and murmured ceaselessly: "Hear O Israel, Hear O Israel!"

In the morning, when the sounds of the soldiers' shouts and the loading of the rifles began to be heard, Grandfather handed his prayerbook to Mother: "Give it to the children to keep." And to us: "Take care of it, children, and promise me not to give in. Do it for me!" His face was pale and sunken and his eyes started from their sockets. Uncle Izziu and Mother still tried to move him and lift him up. With great difficulty, they managed to pull him to the opening of the stable. Fritzi, holding Mozziu, and I moved out of the stable. When we looked back, we saw uncle Izziu and Mother coming towards us, without Grandfather. "Where have you left Grandfather?" I shouted. "Grandfather is dead, Annike." Her face was quiet and subdued. Only then did she bury her face in her hands and burst into bitter weeping.

The soldiers prodded us to move on, warning shots separated us from Grandfather forever.

Uncle Izziu grew weaker by the day and could no longer help us to carry little Mozziu, who was also very weak.

Fritzi and I took turns carrying him on our backs and Mother took care of Uncle Izziu and of finding the hot soup, which had become a matter of life and death. The peasant women had found a new system for selling us the morsels of food: they demanded payment in advance before filling the mugs, and then, as though by arrangement, the soldiers would chase the people back into the column, while their belongings remained in the hands of the women, without their having received the mug of soup in return. Mother was always on guard, taking care to be among the first. She

revealed herself to be strong of body and spirit and encouraged us to carry on. When the lice began to appear in our clothes, sucking our blood, Mother worked ceaselessly to try and prevent them from spreading, seeing to it that we undressed at every night stop and changed into other clothes, while she buried the infested ones in the snow to freeze the lice. She would then nimbly remove them from the seams.

Heavy snow continued to fall. Baby Mozziu, his body even smaller now, pressed against me. "Mozziu darling," I whispered into his frozen little face: "Your Mummy is in heaven, and so is Grandfather Efraim. They'll look after us." Suddenly, Aunt Rosa's words in Marculesti -- when she had still been beautiful and healthy, and Mozziu was still crying and licking the chocolate she gave him -- rang in my ears: "Annie and Fritzi won't leave you, my child." These words now had a different significance. Did her heart foresee that it would not be strong enough? I hugged him and promised never to leave him.

Uncle Izziu also did not have the strength to continue. After a few days and nights when he burned with fever, he sank as cold as ice by the roadside. My mother tried to rouse him, but on feeling his pulse, she laid his hand on his chest, and covered him with her body. Our beloved uncle had also been "delivered", as Grandfather had said. Like the many others who had fallen by the roadside, he would never rise to march beside us again.

Our little, tender Mozziu also passed on after he began to suffer from diahorrea and vomiting each time he ate the bit of food he was given. He was taken from us despite the fact that he had suddenly begun to cry again, and my mother had been happy, saying the child was recovering. He asked for his Mummy and Papa. His eyes and his mouth opened and he began to recognize us and

call us by our names: "Annie", "Fitzi" and even "Auntie 'Becka", he said. Then, during one of the nights, he closed his eyes and went to sleep for eternity.

At the beginning of the month of December, or maybe it was the end of November -- time had become an unreal value as the the march dragged on -- we reached the village of Somilova on the banks of the River Bug.

* * *

CHAPTER NO 11

STABLE OF DEATH

We arrived with our last remaining strength, in the middle of the night, at the stable in Somilova, a village on the banks of the River Bog. Once again, we had been brought to an empty, filthy stable. The large quantity of snow piled up around it seemed to be there to keep out most of us, and people pushed and were pushed in the crush. The fear of being left outdoors spurred people to get into the stable as quickly as possible. Fritzi and I, clinging to Mother, also searched for a way to reach the path in the snow which led to the stable doorway. In the last few days the soldiers guarding us had been reinforced by gendarmes, and their high-pitched shouting now accompanied us.

Shoved from the rear by the soldiers, we reached the large, wide entrance. The wave of stench that greeted and enveloped us from the interior was enough to suffocate us. The air hung heavy with a breath-stopping, compacted odour of manure and rot. Nevertheless, we pushed our way inside, since nobody wanted to remain outside at the mercy of the intense night cold.

Mother found a place against the wall facing the doorway, beneath a trough on which some candles were stuck, affording a little light across the width of the stable. She began to scrape at the filth on the floor with a stick she found under the trough, and Fritzi and I gathered it in our hands, trying to make our way through the people to throw it outside.

There were some people at the opening still, trying to make room for themselves; suddenly I heard the crazed scream of a man who was going past me. He was waving both hands in the air as though trying to grasp it, shouting: "I'm choking, I'm choking!"

And then he fell to the ground like a stone, lifeless. Although I had become used to seeing people drop, this time my strength failed me and I flung the dirt from my hands and fled back to Mother while I was still able. The cries of the man's wife pursued me terrifyingly: "Rahmoness, menschen, Rahmoness! -- Have pity, people, have pity!"

My mother continued to clean the floor, removing the dirt herself. Fritzi and I stayed to guard our place. Human sounds suddenly issued from inside the trough, and the question was asked, in Yiddish: "Where have they brought you from, Jews?" When we replied that we were from Bukovina, another voice from within the trough responded: "We're from Bessarabia," and the first sighed, "And this terrible place is known as the Stable of Death." That same night we learned that we were to remain in this terrible place.

Mother unpicked two of the packs she had sewn out of carpets on the night of the expulsion; she spread them on the area she had cleared and which from now on was to serve as our couch. As our headrest, we placed the remaining pack, in which we had stowed away everything we still possessed. We covered ourselves with coats.

I did not know who was lying next to us, and when I felt a body lying back to back with me, I asked "Who is it?" and a woman's voice replied: "Don't be afraid, child, I'm also a mother." In the darkness, the woman and my mother began to talk to each other. That is how we came to know Mrs. Rudich of Czernowitz and her two children, Lala the eldest, who was a girl of my age, and her little brother. On my mother's side lay Mrs. Mormorush, whom we also got to know that night, and her two children -- Rosie, who was also my age, and her little brother.

We also got to know the many rats that frequented the stable. Before the candles went out somebody came to the opening and closed it with a heavy, solid door. The candles then went out and soon after shouts of terror were heard: "Rats! Rats!" Of all the natural blights and all the plagues of Egypt which were our lot since we had been driven from our homes -- pollution, cold and hunger, etc. etc. -- the rat plague was the worst.

Although the Bessarabians shouted from inside the trough, maybe in all seriousness, maybe in mockery: "Quiet, quiet, the rats won't touch living people!" the people continued to screech. Nor did the rats overlook us, and when they began to jump on us, as in a devilish dance, Mother sat up and started to chase them off with the stick she had used to cleen the floor. Fritzi and I fell asleep from fatigue, and Mother stayed awake to protect us from the rats. I awoke later when Mother sank down on us, completely overcome by weakness and tiredness. When daylight came, people began to make their way outside, with various belongings in their hands, to obtain the hot soup from the peasant women who were standing at a little distance from the stable with their pails of soup.

This was the first morning the soldiers did not appear in order to move us on. Mother also went outside with two dresses over her arm, returning with a loaf of bread and a pot full of hot soup. Before we sat down to eat, Mother sent us out to wash our hands and faces in the snow, and to run back and forth on the snow. Only after we had done this did she give us each a mug of soup and a slice of bread she cut with a pair of scissors taken from the big pocket of my blue school coat, where I also kept a few pencils and the diary I had brought from home. I closed the pocket securely with two big safety pins.

As soon as we had finished our breakfast, the corpses of people who had died during the night were taken out. The Bessarabians undressed them in front of their families, who screeched and begged them to leave something of their dear ones' belongings for them, too. They slung the naked bodies into a gigantic pit dug beside the stable.

The situation in the "Stable of Death" grew worse every day. The number of corpses removed every morning increased. More and more people remained stretched out on the filthy floor. Their stacatto groans were the only sounds to be heard. The Bessarabians, who had tried to organise things at first, asking people to go outdoors to perform their bodily functions, gave up the struggle and many who had run out of strength urinated and defecated where they sat.

Mrs. Rudich also remained stretched out beside me, and one night I felt her body cold and motionless next to mine. In the morning I saw her lying spread-eagled on her back; her eyes had been gouged out and her ears and nose had been gnawed by the rats. They undressed her too, in front of her children who lay beside her, watching, silently weeping. Lala and her little brother accompanied her to the big pit, which the Bessarabians called the "Fraternal Grave".

The same fate claimed the mother of Rosie and her little brother. Some time later, during one of the nights, Lala's little brother also died, and parts of his body were also gnawed away. In the morning, Lala had lain embracing her dead little brother, and when they came to take him out, she wept bitterly: "Look, look what's left of my beautiful little brother!" In place of his lovely, clever eyes, were two big, gaping holes and all that remained of his little nose was a wound and rat droppings. They

threw his little body into the big wheelbarrow on top of the adults' corpses collected that morning.

We continued to go out every morning and rub our faces and hands with snow and to run along the path despite the weakness that assailed us as a result of the daily intensifying hunger and cold. Mother still dipped the clothes in snow every morning, then shaking them in the belief that the lice froze to death and dropped off, except that they multiplied and located themselves in the seams and in the woollen padding; the wool carpet we had spread beneath us also acquired lice and stuck to the ground because of the filth.

When we no longer had anything to barter for the soup, which constituted our sole daily meal, Mother tried to cash in on one of the rings she had hidden in Fritzi's and my braids. The morning that Mother went out to the peasants to sell the ring, the man we called "the bad man" was in the stable. He was a cohort of the village head and of the local gendarmerie and would spot property belonging to the inhabitants of the stable and they would see that it was confiscated. Among other things, they would extract the gold teeth from the mouths of the dead. He was also in charge of the burial squad; he would himself pile up the clothes they had removed from the corpses, and the squad would receive their payment directly from him. In return for his collaboration with the gendarmes and the village head, for whom he also acted as go-between, he received a special permit to go out and to visit the village, later even renting a room there, where he went to live with his wife and two daughters.

While my mother was standing outside bargaining with one of the peasant women, explaining how valuable the ring was, "the bad man", who kept an eye on everyone who left the stable to get a bit

of food, approached her. He noticed the treasure in Mother's hand and demanded that she give him the ring. Mother refused, and the man tried to take it from her by force. Mother struggled with him, calling for help. The only person in the stable who could still stand on his feet and who always gave whatever help he could was Mr. Erdmann M , a panel-beater by trade, called Shmilke at home. He was short, stocky and broad-shouldered. He was in great demand in the village, as a panel-beater, and had even received a permit to stay there. He was mainly occupied with repairing the tin roofs on most of the village houses and in installing tin heating stoves. In return he received various foodstuffs, with which he sustained his family and also fed many of the orphaned children; his nickname in the stable was "the good man". On hearing Mother's cries for help, Mr. Erdmann went to her assistance and managed to overcome "the bad man". He rescued Mother and the ring stayed with her. That day and on several days following, no food passed our lips. Mother was afraid of the bad man, who had promised to take revenge on her. Mother taught us to eat snow during that time, to 'deceive' the empty stomach.

One day, Mr. Erdmann informed Mother that she could go with him to the village on the following day. According to him, he had spoken to one of the peasant women who was prepared to let Mother work for her as seamstress. "And in payment," Mr. Erdmann said, "you will receive two meals and a few supplies to take back to the stable with you".

Our happiness knew no bounds. Mother called Mr. Erdmann the "angel of good tidings" and covered him with emotional words of thanks. But Mr. Erdmann dismissed her words with a wave of the hand, saying humbly: "I do the best I can, Mrs. Faust. After all, I know you from Radautz! Let us wish that we'll yet see you as you

were, and more, madam: don't forget, Mrs. Faust, that your husband, Moshe, did me a favour more than once". Father's name made me shudder, and Mother said, in a voice tremulous with sorrow: "Yes, a lot of time has passed since then, perhaps an eternity. Who knows if I'll ever see him again. " Mother never again cried as she had at the beginning of the march. Her longings had also ceased. Of all the feelings we had once had, only physical hunger remained, and that we could not appease.

"Only till tomorrow, my girls," said Mother. "Hold on until tomorrow. Tomorrow we'll have food. God hasn't abandoned us yet." Over and over again, she placed her trust in God and what the morrow would bring. We licked our fingers and believed her. Only that morning, when the "bad man" came, he had stopped beside us and again threatened us: "This isn't Radautz, Mrs. Faust, here I'm the one that counts!" his voice held the arrogance of one who could do anything: "If you don't hand over that damned ring of your own free will, you'll beg me to take it, you'll see!" Mother was not alarmed and answered him bravely. Her words frightened us and we pulled her towards us, to stop her from answering him, but she continued to talk strongly to him: "Yesterday isn't today, today isn't tomorrow, and tomorrow, when the crown's knocked off your head, there'll be someone to take care of your head as well." He laughed satanically and said: "There won't be any tomorrow for you, to knock my head off." "Not me," Mother answered, "the devil who crowned you will be the one to punish you." He spat in our direction and left. In our hearts, the hope that Mother would really bring us plenty of food tomorrow strenghthened.

Night fell, and until the Bessarabians lit a few candles along the trough, utter, ominous darkness reigned in the stable. Someone at the other end, his voice sounding as though this was

his last night before being thrown into the pit in the morning, pleaded in German: "Mr. Bessarabia, Mr. Bessarabia! The rats!" Begging them to light the candles because the rats were climbing on him already. "The rats understand your language, they're German offspring!" one of the Bessarabians teased him. When they had locked the door, they lit some candles. Then there was a sudden loud banging at the door and a rough male voice yelled from outside, in Ukrainian: "Open up! Open up! Gendarmes!" The voice was threatening and full of evil intent. The people began pushing themselves underneath the trough. Mother grabbed the two of us and shoved us towards the a little room, next to the doorway, in which Mr. Erdmann lived. As we came close to the stable door, we saw some tall, burly men bursting in. Their faces were masked and they held pistols in their outstretched hands. They shouted at us to snuff the candles. Mother managed to push us into the little room before Mr. Erdmann locked the door. Directly afterwards, shots and cries were heard. Fritzi began to shout: "Mother! Mother!" but Mr. Erdmann put his big hand over her mouth and gestured us to keep quiet. He himself was as pale as death and he ordered his son Max to snuff their candle. We could hear the shouts of the crazed hooligans and the groans of the inhabitants of the stable, through the heavy steel door.

We were in a state of terrible fear until silence finally returned, and until Mr. Erdmann said: "They've gone," I felt as if I was choking. Someone knocked at the door and shouted: "Shmilke, open the door quickly, they're gone!" I was afraid of the scene that would reveal itself. I had a foreboding that Mother had been injured. Fritzi pressed against me, mumbling: "Mama, Mama," but when Mr. Erdmann re-lit the candle and opened the door, I heard Mother's voice calling our names.

All the candles had been re-lit and in the weak light I saw Mother sitting next to the door, holding her bruised and bleeding head in her hands. Fritzi and I kneeled beside her and with our last remaining strength, with our bare hands, tried to wipe away the warm blood flowing down her face. Mr. Erdmann revived somewhat and began shouting and administering first aid to the injured. He ordered people to open the door and bring snow from outside. Fritzi and I also ran out and brought handfuls of snow with which we washed Mother's face. Afterwards, Mother took a handful of snow and rubbed the gaping head-wound she had received from one of the hooligans' clubs. We bound the wound in a rag Mr. Erdmann gave us. "I'll get over it, don't worry children, tomorrow I'll bring you food!" Mother promised and apologised. I was not thinking of food anymore, I was anxious about what would happen to Mother. "Please, God, let us still have a mother tomorrow." I prayed silently.

There were a number of dead under the trough. They had been killed in the shooting, and they were taken out by the burial squad during the night. Nobody closed an eye in the darkness. When the candles went out, the sound of despairing groans and stifled weeping, already at their peak, now deepened and widened like a crater. The hooligans who had broken in had demanded gold and jewellery, shouting, "Where's that woman?" in Ukrainian. Mother said they had gone directly to our place where they had searched her body and that of the woman beside her and, not finding anything, had beaten Mother on the head. The woman next to her died the same night. Finally, they had discovered the girl, Giza, hiding under the trough and they had found some jewellery on her. They left after taking it.

We had no doubt as to who was to blame for the incident, and the Bessarabians also knew. Next morning "the bad man" turned up

with an innocent face, behaving unlike his usual self in the mornings, when he would pass among the people sprawled on the cold, filthy floor, superior, not bothering to cast even one slightly humane glance at them, his sole interest being to count the dead and collect their clothing. This time, however, he asked with hypocritical concern: "What happened last night?" But the Bessarabians played dumb and nobody answered him. Neither did Mother have any answer when he turned to her, and when Mr. Erdmann called her she quietly rose, despite the pains in her head, which she tried to hide from us as she followed him.

Mother returned in the evening, with Mr. Erdmann and his two young Bessarabian assistants, who earned their bread through his good graces. I was shocked when Mother's figure appeared in the doorway, only now did I realize how thin she had become. She was staggering under the sack she carried on her shoulder, and with the kerchief around her head looked ageless. She was only forty-two. But it was her own smile that appeared on her lips as we ran towards her and as she called out to us: "I've brought food for you, children!"

Mother had brought a few potatoes, a packet of lentils and a half a loaf of bread from the village. She had gathered some twigs on the way and with her characteristic energy commanded us to bring some snow in our only pot, and had commenced to build a campfire near our place. When I came back with the snow the little fire was already ablaze and Mother placed the pot on it. She sliced some of the bread for us to eat while the potatoes were cooking: "Eat! I'll put the rest of the bread in the pack under our heads, and you'll eat that till I get back from the village tomorrow". Her face shone with happiness. She had put four potatoes into the pot after cleaning the skins in snow. The

swiftly melted snow had turned into too little water in the pot, and Fritzi went outside to bring more in Mrs. Friedman's pot.

Until last night, Mrs. Friedman and her two sons, Haim and David, had lain at the other end of the stable. Until the night of terror, we had not known they were here, nor had they known about us. When Mother was injured by the hooligans and had sunk down next to where the family had settled, they had met for the first time since the expulsion from home.

At home, our family and the Friedmans had lived two streets away from one another. There were four sons and two daughters in the family; Mrs. Friedman had arrived at the stable with two of her sons. Her eldest son Izziu and his brother Eliezer had crossed to Czernowitz, to the Russian side, before the expulsion. Mrs. Friedman did not mention her husband or her two daughters, she just sighed. The third son, Haim, took care of his mother and his little brother, David. The two women were now sitting in front of the little fire, exchanging memories. "It's hard to believe that those times ever really existed!" sighed Mrs. Friedman and Mother nodded without saying anything.

The next day, mother set out for the village again, going to the peasant's houses. Mother made new clothes for them out of the clothes they had acquired in exchange for their pails of soup, after they had laundered and unpicked the garments. In return, she received lentils and potatoes. Even though the fire went out before the potatoes were done, and we ate them half raw, we felt that we had triumphed over fate, and that it was favouring us.

Those few days when food was "assured" and the miserable little fire warmed us, the images of Father and Sammy came to my mind. Mother also began to mention them and a spark of hope that we would be together again was ignited in her. When Mother was in

the village and Fritzi and I were sitting with Rosie and LaLa, I took out my diary to record the date Mother had told me that day, 12.1.1942, and to describe the stable and its inhabitants. The diary was damp and dirty, the pages were stuck together into a sort of stiff lump. I tried to separate them and decipher my writing, blurred because the ink had run owing to the damp. I turned page after page and each one reminded me of that so distant, different world I had known before. I imagined feeling and living in this dear remote world now vanished without a trace, except for the pages of my diary, which were already beginning to smell of mould.

I found the beginning of a story about an evil, cruel world on the last pages. All the horrors of the Kasauti Forest were here before me; the death of my beloved Aunt Rosa, Grandfather's death. My eyes were cruelly and unwillingly drawn to what was written in my own handwriting. "We are left with a souvenir of Grandfather, which I will keep forever," and my heart twinged when I remembered Grandfather's prayerbook with the quotations from Psalms at the end of it, and the sheet of paper between the pages, which he had bequeathed to us and which had slipped from my hand into the mud when I was carrying little Mozziu during the march. I had tried to bend and retrieve it, but was shoved by the rifle-butt of a gendarme behind me. The prayerbook was left in the mud not far from Grandfather's body. So much time had passed since then! I sharpened my remaining pencil on the blade of the scissors, but when I poised it over the page, I felt confused. I did not know who or what to write about, but some hidden compulsion forced me to hold the pencil, and then I knew that I wanted to write to Father and Sammy. I wrote swiftly, in one breath:

"Somilova, 12.1.1942. Here, everything has died for our

beautiful, clever and courageous mother. Her cheeks are sunken

and she is all skin and bone, but she is still strong enough to stay on her feet. She works as a dressmaker for the peasant women in the village for the food that keeps us alive still."

I wanted to mention the names of Sammy and Father in my diary, but something inside me prevented me from doing so. These messy, damp pages were now part of the befouled "stable of death", whereas Father and Sammy belonged to another world, a world that had been our world, too, an eternity ago.

Only Mother mentioned them out of deep feeling and longing and hope mixed with fear for their fate. There was something pathetic in what she said to Mrs. Friedman: "My Sammy..." and after a pause and a deep sigh: "My Sammy's studying medicine." A tear appeared at the corner of her eye. The uncertainty in her voice betrayed her thoughts. Perhaps, like me, she thought that this was the end of the world.

I tried to describe the stable. I let my eye rove the length and breadth of it while trying to find the right words:

> "How my senses have dulled! The air we breathe is saturated with the smell of urine, feces and rot; is it possible to describe all this in writing?! In the vicinity of corpses and rats that are not afraid to emerge in the light of day to hunt and gnaw at the bodies, leaping onto the corpses and among the human skeletons in whom the breath of life still weakly flutters? It looks as though they are already gnawing at them, too!
>
> The darkness Mother talks about is not a physical darkness that can be banished by striking a match to light a candle or a lamp. It is the darkness of blocked senses, which can

be seen in the stable-dwellers'blank eyes, gaping in their sockets, with nothing behind them to give back light."

Mother went to the village again. It was snowing and I watched the big, soft snowflakes falling thickly in a kind of curtain over the doorway, drifting down to form a high white pile that blocked the opening. There was a second of spiritual uplift in observing nature about its business, not withholding its grace from us, when suddenly, in the doorway, sinking deep into the white snow, the figures of "the bad man" and the village headman appeared. They were both wearing long coats with fur collars, hats with earflaps and high boots. I had a moment's anger at the beautiful snow which had come to tantalize me and then bring these two to remind me not to enjoy the beauties of nature. On entering the stable they began marching to and fro so swiftly that they were almost running, as if someone was driving them from behind, yelling in panic in all directions. The panic that gripped them indicated that something peculiar was about to occur. "The bad man" commanded the burial squad and everyone else still able to stand on their feet: "Get out at once! All of you!" and: "Leave them," he screamed when they wanted to carry out the corpses. "Clear the snow from in front of the stable, all of you, quickly!"

Panicking, the people began to take spades from Erdmann's corner, hurrying outside. "The bad man" paced about as if he was in a cage, screaming as though he had gone crazy:"Quick! Quick!" The work was carried out feverishly. "Widen the path!" he yelled in his madness, "Lengthen the path! Lengthen the path! Longer! Even longer!" I said to Lala, who was sitting next to me:"It's obvious from his screeching that he means to connect us to the village," but she didn't respond.

I had risen to go and see what was going on outside, when my

ear suddenly caught the voice of Dr. Hennig, a dentist from Radautz who was lying next to us. Dr. Hennig had not been up for several days already, huddling in his coat, his head wrapped in a big woollen kerchief. Last night Mother had fed him some hot soup, and he had said: "Mrs. Faust, this is the last time I'll take any soup from you, I do not have many hours left". I also heard him say, "You are very good to me, I want you to have my coat after my death." A cold chill passed through me. Dr. Hernig had been one of those who had fought with all their might to keep on their feet, screeching at Mother, "Don't lie down, Mrs. Faust! Those who lie down don't get up again!" And now he had been down for a few days already, unable to get up. "No, its no use anymore!" Now he called my name and gestured to me to come to him. I kneeled beside him and tried to understand the words issuing in a dry whistle from his throat:. "What's happening, Annike?" "They're clearing the snow, Dr. Hernig," I leaned over him so that he could hear. A twinge of a smile appeared on his face. "I can still hear and see, Annike, and I'm not suffering; that is death's mercy." His throat continued to whistle: "God has finally remembered us, the Red Cross is coming."

When I was standing at the doorway, I could see the long, wide path the people had cleared under threat from the head man and "the bad man". And when a sled hitched to two horses galloping in the direction of the stable appeared on the path in the distance, "the bad man" began to chase the people "Get back to your places! Get back to your places!" I fled for my life, getting back to my place before he could see me. Lala, Rosie and Fritzi were also waiting to see what would happen. As I was telling them, with a spark of hope, "Perhaps its the people from the Red Cross," Fritzi pointed to the door.

Three soldiers of the German gestapo were standing there with the head man beside them and "the bad man" a little way off. The Germans stood erect, wearing long, green coats that came below their polished black boots that glinted against the background of white snow. Revolvers bulged from holsters in the black belts around their waists. They wore fur caps with earflaps. The "bad man" stood cringing like a stupid dwarf compared to them. With a hand in a big leather glove, one of the soldiers signalled him to approach. He sprang like a rat in their direction: "Jawohl, Herr Offizier!".

"How many Jews are still left here?" he asked.

"Very few are left, officer, sir." answered "the bad man" in german.

The Germans exchanged a glance and, as if on command, removed their gloves, took large, white handkerchiefs from their coat pockets and bound them over their mouths and noses. Then they put on their gloves again, and marched over the threshold, followed by the head man and "the bad man". With quick steps, they passed along the length of the stable, obviously satisfied with the situation. One of them raised the handkerchief from his mouth, and I heard him say complainingly: "There are still a lot left here." Right after this they left the place as they had come. When they had gone, the burial squad began removing the corpses, saying mockingly to themselves: "Bitte shein, danke shein".

Mother already knew about the Germans' visit when she came back from the village in the evening. Her peasant employer had informed her that she could not employ her in future, since she was afraid of the German soldiers who had come and settled themselves in the local municipality building, where the Roumanian gendarmerie was also accomodated. Mother also told us that the

gendarmes had warned all the villagers not to shelter any Jews. "But we have nothing to be afraid of, girls," Mother said bitterly, "they won't harm us." Mrs. Friedman also shielded her sons with her arms: "I won't let my little Haimke go into the village. The fear of hunger nested in every heart. Mother said: "The Germans won't come back here to destroy us, the cold, lice and hunger will do the job for them. Remember Grandfather Efraim?" she asked, hugging the two of us, a glint of life in her eye. "We won't die, we'll live. In spite of them!"

At night, when the candles had gone out, Mother removed a ring from my braid. She had arranged with her employer that tomorrow, early in the morning, she would bring to us, here, a loaf of bread, a pail of boiled potatoes and a few pumpkin pies, to tide us over till the fury abated and she could go out to work in the village again. Mother rose early and, together with Mr. Erdmann with whom she had made arrangements the night before, opened the door and went out to the peasant woman to barter the ring. When she returned with the provisions, it was still dark in the stable. Mother announced that she thought we should ration the food and that we should be responsible for apportioning it. She divided a little of the provisions equally between us, and whatever was left she put in the pack that was now completely empty. She put it next to us for us to keep for the days ahead. We hid it well under the coats, to guard it against the rats.

The food lasted us eight days. Like the oil in the Temple which lasted for the eight days of Hanukka. We prayed that a Hanukka miracle would befall us, too. But the presence of the Germans in the village had chased away the last of the peasant women who had frequented the stable. We again sought a food substitute in snow, but it was no use this time. We were hungry

for days at a time, and we were sure that one night we ourselves would be food for the ravenous rats.

Mother decided to take her life in her hands and go back to the village to ask for work from door to door. She also took two rings with her, just to be sure. I began to hallucinate about food after she left the stable. I imagined I had a raw potato in my hand, which I rubbed and rubbed between my fingers to soften it a little before putting it into my mouth. I hesitantly closed my teeth on it and felt a pain, because it was my lower lip I had bitten into. Fritzi noticed this and grabbed my arm, shaking me: "Annike, a little more hunger won't kill us, Mother will be back soon!" "But till then I'll die, and maybe you will too." I knew that she was as hungry as I was. But Fritzi knew how to console herself: "Mother will most likely not find work and then she'll sell the rings and be back with the food right away." Lala and Rosie, next to us, occupied themselves with picking and squashing lice. The red blood congealed at once on their fingernails. Mrs. Friedman went through her son David's hair. Amazingly and luckily, the lice did not find shelter in our hair. Neither Fritzi's nor mine. Our hair was filthy dirty, but free of lice.

I waited avidly to see Mother appear at the entrance with the sack on her shoulder. I saw myself warming up in front of the little fire that slightly allayed the intense cold, with a hot potato in my hand. When she went out to the village, Mother was wearing her black coat and I was wrapped only in my own coat, feeling the cold like a knife in my flesh, as I had then, in the ditch. Lala also complained of feeling extremely cold and revealed that the lower part of her body was wet. As though justifying herself, she told us about a strange dream she had had during the night: she was in a house with many rooms, and in each room there

was a crowd of people. "I was dying to make pee-pee, and I ran from room to room to find the toilet, until I came to one with a door. I quickly sat on the bowl, letting all the pee-pee out. I had a warm feeling around the bottom part of my body. Then I woke up all wet, and when the dream was over, the nice warm feeling also went and I felt the cold pee-pee sticking to me." Poor Lala! There was no way her wet panties, her only pair, could dry and she sat there shivering with the cold. We looked for something else to talk about, to distract us from the cursed hunger that was almost driving us crazy, but we always came back to the one topic -- food.

We had already gone out twice to eat snow. The third time, a powerful snowstorm was raging. Clouds of snow were flying about and the terrifying wail of the cold, wild wind drove us indoors to our places. I looked out again and suddenly felt the full awe of the verse: "And there was chaos on the face of the earth"; a great anxiety about Mother's fate arose in me. If Mother is outside now, I thought, she is likely to be swept along by the storm and will lose her way, and then -- be caught by the Germans. In my imagination one disaster after another, each worse than the last, befell us. The clouds of snow rising mightily outside now began to sweep into the stable. Someone hurried to close the door. I was panic-stricken and cried out in despair: "Don't close it! My mother's outside!" Fritzi joined in my despairing cries, and we both dashed over to the door, to stop the man. But opposing cries arose: "Close the doors, we're freezing!" We were defeated and returned to sit down. The deep worry that gnawed at me had succeeded in making me forget my hunger. Not many minutes had passed, when desperate knocking was heard outside. Fritzi and I got up and ran over to the door, where someone was already pulling

it open. Mother managed to get across the threshold and then -- she sank to the ground.

Mother lay burning with fever and unconscious for two days. All our efforts to revive her were fruitless. We sat beside her for two full days. We covered her with all three coats so that she would be warm. Tirelessly, in the furious storm that had been blowing now for two days, we took turns to go out and bring snow to cool her feverish, fiery forehead. On the third night, when I had fallen asleep against my will, our Mother was defeated by fate. She who was all we had, she who had fought tooth and nail against death, which had annihilated so many before her. I damned the Germans in the Holy Tongue, cursed them in my heart with the curse I had learned from my father: "Yimach Shemam Vezichram!" -- May their name and all memory of them be obliterated!

Then the burial squad arrived and undressed her and loaded her body on the barrow.

On that bitter day Fritzi and I remained crouched in our place, clinging to one another. It was only the next day that we dared go out and cast a last look at our beloved mother. She was lying flung out on top of all the other corpses in the pit, her body protruding above the edge. Her face was as white as the snow, and her wide-open eyes gazed at us with a frozen, glassy stare. A stare that has followed me all my life.

We still had one ring in our possession, the one from Aunt Wexler, and it was our last hope of getting any food.

We had tried a few times to get Mr. Erdmann to take the ring and sell it for food, but he put us off, saying he was afraid to endanger himself. He would give us a potato or a thin slice of bread: "This is all I can do for you." One morning, I went out of the stable and was surprised to see a blue, clear sky. The wintery

sun, so long delinquent, was sending out warm, carressing rays.

Mother's "Fraternal Grave" had been covered and I imagined that the sun was also carressing the carpet of snow spread over the grave. With this warm feeling I took a few more steps. As if intoxicated by the fresh air, I carried on walking. My feet, wrapped in rags, sank into the soft snow, taking me away from the stable. I came to the path and continued dragging my feet in a slow, pleasant walk, unaware of the passage of time. I turned to look behind me. From a distance the stable looked low and almost completely sunken into the snow, until it vanished from the horizon. The first houses of the village now appeared ahead of me. Now, now I was getting very close to them. My heart began to pound and I did not know what I was going to do there. I couldn't speak Ukrainian and I knew nobody, having only Mother's description of the peasant woman she had worked for:."The woman with the silver teeth." It was she who had bought the first ring from Mother.

The houses of the village were low and scattered at a distance from one another. They were surrounded by wooden fences on which the white snow had piled up. The trees in the gardens were also sagging under a covering of snow and thick white smoke rose in great swirls from the clay chimneys that stuck out of the tin roofs. Oh, how happy those people were, sitting in these houses warming themselves in front of stoves with fire burning in them and pots of soup and dumplings on top of them. I stopped in front of one of the fences, not daring to go in, when suddenly a gigantic dog on a chain appeared, barking wildly at me. God, if only that chain would not snap! I tried to withdraw slowly, with my face to the dog, but a woman came out of the house: "What do you want?" she asked in Ukrainian. I wanted to sell her the ring

but did not know how to say so. "Bread, bread," I said in Roumanian, aided by gestures. She gestured at me to wait and went indoors. She then emerged with a package wrapped in paper. It contained some baked potatoes and a few slices of bread. In her other hand was a cup full of hot lentil porridge. I took the cup with a shaking hand and gulped at the thick hot porridge. The woman, standing on the other side of the fence, gaped when she saw me finish the porridge in one gulp.I returned the cup to her and she handed me the package, indicating that I should wait. She brought me another cup of porridge, which I also finished in one gulp. I thanked her: "Spasivo". The only Ukrainian word I had learned from Mother. I turned back to the stable. Incredible! I was walking like a real human being. Like once upon a time...

I found Fritzi still sleeping. Fritzi was sleeping a lot lately, and this worried me very much. Too much sleeping in the stable, as everyone knew, were the first obvious signs of the beginnings of eternal sleep. I therefore woke her up in alarm, and she opened her eyes and looked at me wonderingly. "Fritzike, Fritzike, I've brought you some food!" She looked at me as though she did not believe me and I pushed a potato under her coat. Still lying down, Fritzi quickly swallowed two slices of bread and two potatoes. I had eaten my share on the way to the stable.

The food instilled new life into her, as it had in me. "Did you manage to sell the ring?" I told her and Lala about my wonderful adventure. The next day I set out for the village with Lala. Lala understood Ukrainian, which gave us more confidence. We were lucky and returned with a packet full of cooked potatoes, some slices of bread and even some pumkin pie.

Fritzi began to recover and she accompanied Lala and I, on weak legs, to the village. We wandered around the village all day,

calling at the peasant women's doors. Now and then we were lucky, and received something. But there were also many who chased us away with crude curses and threats. We went back to the village a few days later and, this time, we were particularly successful. I had gone into one of the yards to ask for bread and when I received no answer, went around to the back of the house to look for the owners, however, I found nobody there either. There was a basket full of potatoes with some eggs on top of them, next to a wall. I gave way to the temptation to take a few without permission. I filled my bag with potatoes and then, hesitantly, also took two eggs, which I also pushed into the bag. I ran quickly away from there. Fritzi and Lala had come back first, and each had half a loaf of bread and some potato peelings they had taken from a pigstye, in their pouches. I told Fritzi and Lala that I had stolen, "What have you done!" Lala responded in alarm, "don't you know that anyone who steals eggs brings disaster on himself?" This was a superstition of theirs. Fritzi was afraid, too: "All we need is more disaster!" I calmed the two of them, saying they had nothing to worry about, the disasters had happened in advance of my stealing the eggs. I drank the egg greedily. Lala adamantly refused to have any, but I pursuaded Fritzi and she also drank some. We ate the potatoes raw, and they tasted sweet. We also learned the way to the pigstyes, where we found cooked potato peelings and soaked bread meant for the pigs.

The month of March was at hand. I knew this from the pages of my diary, in which I recorded the date every day. Without adding a single one of my experiences. From time to time when I opened the diary to write about Mother's death, the words with which I wanted to express my deep sorrow failed me and the hand with which I wanted to record the day of her death became paralysed.

I had had the courage only once to page through the diary. To remember what that world was like, the one before this one, here in the stable. Fritzi encouraged me, as though guessing my thoughts: "Annike try to read me what you wrote before, at home." I opened the diary at random. The writing was blurred:

"11th August 1941. Isidor, Fritzi's boyfriend, visited her at home, with Mother's permission. Fritzi was very excited. Fritzi hid something in the table drawer. It was a photo of Fritzi and Isidor. They look very funny in the photo. Fritzi is standing like a "fraulein", as pretty as a bride (they're both really beautiful). And a note at the bottom: Why did Fritzi hide the photo from me?"

Fritzi sighed: "Where's Isidor now?" I carried on reading over the page:

"21 August 1941. Father was at home. He sat on the padded bench in the kitchen with Mother. They didn't notice me coming into the kitchen. They were both bent over the photo Mother was holding. Father was smiling: 'Time passes so quickly! The girls are big already!' He put his arm around Mother's waist, pulling her to him, and they kissed. I fled from the kitchen (I blushed furiously at seeing my parents kissing)."

I came to an empty page. It seemed to wink at me with some hidden cruelty: Write, write about everything you feel! I gripped the pencil and rapidly wrote the date: 20 February 1942. And in German, the language we used to speak with Mother:

"Dear Diary, you are the only one I have left. I don't know who's going to read you. Its also hard for me to write, but silence is harder. I hope that whoever finds you will find the way to Father and Sammy in order to give you to them and

you'll tell them about our dear Mother's death at the hands of murderers only one month before she turned 42. And only one day before Fritzi's and my sixteenth birthday, on the 2nd of February. Mother died on the floor of the stable on February the first, 1942."

I wanted to add the details of how our beloved mother had died, but I had no more strength and quickly returned the diary to my coat pocket.

The beginning of March. The snow was beginning to melt outside and a terrible stench issued from beneath it. I do not remember very much about those days, but I recall that after many days without any food in my stomach, I stood on my weakened legs, which had become extremely thin, in order to go to the village. I reached the stable door with faltering steps. The stench from outside hit my nostrils. I managed to notice the streams of water flushing the filth and sewage that had piled up under the snow during the winter, and was now fully, stinkingly exposed. My eyes suddenly dimmed, everything spun around me, and all at once my legs gave way under me.

When I opened my eyes again, I saw the blurred image of Mother kneeling beside me, and I felt drops of warm liquid on my lips, going down my throat.

It was my sister Fritzike who was kneeling next to me, feeding me warm milk. I recognised her only after I had revived a little. She was bending down and whispering in my ear: "Annike, drink the milk, Annike, drink the milk." I could tell by her alarmed voice that something terrible had happened to me. It flashed through my mind, which was still not quite clear, that I was already dead. Apparently I also mumbled something. Afterwards, Fritzi told me that she had run to me as soon as I fainted by the

door and had tried to pick me up, but I had been very heavy and she had not had the strength to lift me. "I was sure you had died." When I told her I had thought so, too, Fritzi smiled happily: "You kept whispering: I'm with our Mother, I'm with our Mother!" I had lain unconscious and feverish for a few days. Luckily, Fritzi had found the peasant woman with the silver teeth and had given her the diamond ring. She had brought us warm milk every day, and bread and soup which, according to Fritzi, had saved my life. When I fell asleep again, I distantly saw the figure of Aunt Wexler as she put the ring on my finger: "May you reach my Mother's age, Hannele." I woke up remembering the dream and a spark of hope was ignited in me that I would indeed get out of here and reach some sort of age.

The following days were days of fasting again. I did not get up to try my luck at finding a scrap of food in the village. And Fritzi, Rosie and Lala returned empty-handed, saying that the women would slam the doors in their faces for fear of catching the gastric typhus which was rife among the Jews in the stable, and they would give them nothing. We sat all day with our legs folded under us, sucking our filthy fingers. Every few days Mr. Erdmann would bring a single potato, or a thin slice of bread for the four of us. At night we lay huddled in our coats, which we never took off. We lay with our knees pulled to our chins. We did not have the strength to go outside to perform our bodily functions, either. From sitting for so long with our legs folded, the thin, transparent skin that covered our bones stuck together. Running sores appeared behind our knees and on our thighs and we were unable to straighten our legs anymore. Lala's dream began to visit us, too. The pleasant warmth we felt as we urinated turned into a source of cold and stench.

There were only a few left in the stable, all in a similar condition to ours. Mr. Erdmann and his family had found a room in the village and had moved there. The Kromholtz family, who had all remained alive, also moved with the father, saved by a miracle from the clutches of "the bad man", who had hovered around waiting for his clothes. They were old acquaintances, and when Mr. Kromholtz was lying on the floor with the fever choking him, but still fully conscious, he had called "the bad man" and begged him to promise him, as his old friend of many years standing, that when he closed his eyes for eternity, his clothes would go to his family. "But its my only income," his "pal" had answered him. Fortunately for him, Mr. Kromholtz had recovered and had gone with his family to live with one of the peasants in the village, where he and his eldest son Jack had found work.

Ahrele, older than me by three years, lay next to us. He had come to the stable with his mother, who was sickly to begin with, and Ahrele was her only support. We had come to know Ahrele and his mother in the early days of our arrival. He was a tall, beautiful and visionary young man.

In addition to supporting his mother the whole way, he had carried a huge pack stuffed with the family's clothes on his back. He told us that one night, when they had stopped at a stable, his father had risen early in the morning and gone with his daughter, Ahrele's older sister, to find some hot soup for his sick wife. That morning the soldiers had also risen early to move them on, and Ahrele's father, who had gone far from the stable, had not managed to get back. His father and sister were left behind somewhere, and Ahrele and his mother and thirteen-year-old sister had moved on against their will. Aharele also told us that the little sister had fallen by the way and only he and his mother had

reached Somilova.

The devoted son had amazed even the inhabitants of the stable, and our Mother had had a particular affection for him. She had sometimes longingly compared him to Sammy. "Your Ahrele, Mrs. Brecher, is very much like my own Sammy." When the situation worsened and Ahrele's pack was becoming empty, Mrs. Bercher would sigh: "Who knows if they have anything to eat." Neverthelkess, Mrs. Bercher never gave up a single hot meal, and Ahrele would say in excuse: "My mother was very pampered by Father."

Ahrele himself became thinner and more wizened by the day, and when the pack was totally empty, Mr. Erdmann took him along with him to the village as an assistant panelbeater. After Mother's death, when I had "discovered" the village, Ahrele had joined us in going from door to door. By then he was already extremely thin and weak and could barely drag his feet along. He shared the little food he received from the peasants with his mother, who continued to lie covered in her coat. Her condition became serious and she began to be feverish. She also lost consciousness at times, and would revive screeching and calling the names of the members of her family who had passed into the next world along the road to Somolova. Ahrele had kneeled at her side through many long nights, putting snow to her hot lips, and cooling her forehead with a rag dipped in snow. He would trip and fall every time he went outside to bring the snow.

When I was over my illness, Fritzi told me Ahrele's mother had died. Ahrele remained lying next to us. His body was so cramped and huddled that he could hardly be seen under the coat. Only his skeletal head was to be seen lying outside the coat. Now and then I would wipe the thick slime that drooled from his mouth, and in the midst of his dazed state, he would murmur: "Thank you,

Annike."

One day at the end of March, a cart hitched to a horse appeared and came to a halt outside the stable. A burly peasant alighted from it and before he even reached the doorway, shouted: "Is there anyone here called Ahrele Bercher?" He pronounced the name "Berker". Ahrele tried to identify himself to the man and started screwing up his eyes, but the man did not look in his direction, but continued to call Ahrele's name, like a towncrier. Only after Lala's, Fritzi's and my efforts, when we shouted "Here he is, over here! Over here!" and pointed at Ahrele, did the man address his question to us: "Where's he, where's he?" And we again pointed to the bundle that was Ahrele. The peasant went over and stood right next to him. We saw the shock in his wide eyes. Without stirring from where he stood, he asked: "Can he stand up?" And when Ahrele made a sign with his hand, which was skin and bone, and which he withdrew with difficulty from beneath the coat, to show that he was unable to get up, the man stood stunned, immobile. Luckily for Ahrele, one of the Bessarabians turned up to take spades from what had been Mr. Erdmann's niche.

The Bessarabian, who spoke Russian, questioned the peasant and informed Ahrele that his father was in the Bershat ghetto, and it was he who had sent the man to fetch Ahrele. Only Ahrele's eyes expressed emotion and finally, with difficulty, he asked: "Where's Father, where's my father?" It emerged that Ahrele's father was working in the Ukrainian's house at Bershat. He was working there as a tanner, since he was an expert in the trade. They had become friends and the father had told him about his lost family. Since the man drove around the villages looking for skins, he had promised Ahrele's father to enquire into the fate of the family wherever there were Jews, and had made a note of Ahrele's name.

"I've been to many places before arriving here," the man said despondently, but he was determined to take Ahrrele with him. Transferring Ahrele from the floor to the cart involved an effort, and the Bessarabian called Mr. Erdmann from the village for the purpose. Together, they moved Ahrele from where he lay. His body was in the process of dissolution and his bones were sticking to the filthy floor. When they had moved him, they wrapped his body in a blanket the Ukrainian brought from the cart, first undressing him. The Bessarabian took the small body in his arms and carried him to the cart. When they passed us, Ahrele called out: "Au revoir, girls!" His eyes glowed with happiness.

After the cart had left, I asked Mr. Erdmann where was Bershat? What did the Jews do there? According to his description of the ghetto in Bershat, which was in , the Jews there lived in paradise compared to our stable. "Mr. Erdmann," I said, "tomorrow morning I'm going to Bershat." He looked at me for a long time, unbelievingly: "Meidele, little girl, Bershat is about 25 Km from here; you won't be able to." "I will!" I said, "I just want you to show me the way there." And indeed, Mr. Erdmann promisaed to come next morning and instruct me how to get there. After Mr. Erdmann had gone, Fritzi sat silent and unresponsive. But we both knew that if we stayed in this place we would end up dead. If we did not want to die, we had to try. Finally, Fritzi said: "Annike, I won't, but I'm sure you'll do it."

That same day, before darkness fell, I began to do leg exercises in an attempt to stretch them out in front of me. Not managing, I crawled on all fours to the door of the stable and back until darkness fell. My sore-covered knees began to hurt and burn, I tried again. I straightened up, I squatted, I put my feet

down flat and walked like that. "Even if it takes me a month, I'll move step by step till I get to the Bershat ghetto. Firm in this decision, I lay down for my last night in the "stables of death".

I saw the first light through the open door of the stable, which they no longer bothered to lock. Nobody came to the stable from the village anymore. The head man and his cronies had also stopped coming, and the only Jews who still came were the burial squad who arrived now and then to remove the corpses.

I touched my sister lightly, so as not to alarm her: Fritzike, I'm going." She woke up immediately, took in what I was saying, and tears welled in her dry eyes. We embraced wordlessly. I began to crawl and she cried after me: "Good luck, Annike!" I promised I would see her soon. I crawled towards the door, passed it, crawled to the pit, my mother's grave, to take leave of her. I stood on all fours over the pit, and I thought that if anyone saw me from a distance, they would think I was a dog, or a cat. I then closed my eyes for a moment and I seemed to doze; I saw Mother rise out of the pit and she was as she had been in life, in those good days. She smiled at me and blessed my journey. I also saw Grandfather Efraim, whose place of burial was unknown to me, standing there and encouraging me on my way: "Don't give in, children!" I suddenly woke up and a new source of tears opened in me. They flowed down my cheeks. I rubbed them with my fingers in disbelief. I did not notice Mr. Erdmann standing behind me, in keeping with his promise. My tears amazed him, too, apparently, but he made as if he did not see them. "Nu, meidele, are you ready to go?"

He bound my knees and feet with rags and garlic (?) he had brought with him and gave me a little parcel of bread and boiled

potatoes. "Keep going south, all the time, Meidele!" He also measured my crawling pace and assured me that I would reach the stable at Ostia in the evening. "There you'll find a Jew named Catriel. Tell him that Shmilke sent you. Catriel's a good man and he'll help you and give you further instructions."

I cast a last look at the "stables of death" and swore to keep faith with my mother's and grandfather's injunction not to give in. When I had managed to crawl a few metres, doubt began to stir in my heart, Could I really do it? Mr. Erdmann had instructed me: "Don't be tempted to rest!" I knew any rest would rob me of valuable time, but I felt weak and my palms hurt -- I decided to rest a bit. I then carried on a few more metres and rested again. Hunger began to trouble me more and more, but I continued to crawl without touching the food. I knew that if I would be seduced into eating before the time I had set for myself, I would succumb later in the journey as well, and this was a trial for me -- to overcome hunger. "A little longer. Another metre or two," I told myself. A spring sun was shining on high, encouraging me to carry on, to carry on.

Melted snow water flowed under my knees and lumps of ice floated in the furrows, drawing my eye and distracting me from the hardships of the long way still ahead of me. In one of the furrows I noticed a lump that looked like a potato and began digging with my fingers, I gripped it and it yielded easily and came out of the earth. It was a sugar beet. After washing the mud off it in a puddle, I ate it peel and all. It tasted sweet. Between my teeth I could feel little splinters of ice in the beet, which had appeased my hunger a little. I looked behind me and could not see the stable; I had covered a fair distance. I opened Mr. Erdmann's parcel and rationed myself a slice of bread and a potato. I then

carried on crawling south, with short rests. And I began to change the way I moved after each pause. Sometimes I would crawl in a crouch, with my feet flat on the ground and my knees bent, and sometimes I would crawl on my hands and knees.

The day was declining and I was still in the open field with no village or settlement on the horizon. I was exhausted. My palms were bruised from clods of earth and fragments of stones and they hurt me very much. I again began to be afraid that I would not reach the next stable. I began to be worried about the purpose of this 'walk'. What would I do in Barshat? Who would help me there? And what, actually, did I hope to achieve? And the fear of being left alone here all night. I do not really know what fear gives rise to. What it aroused in me was heartache and sorrowful thoughts. To distract myself I began to search for sugar beet. When I found yet another one, I took heart and carried on. Every additional beet signfied another lap of the journey behind me.

When darkness fell I discerned a faint light in the distance, coming from a structure I recognised as a stable, and I knew I was on the right track and close to my destination. When I reached the Ostia stable I found Shmilke's friend Catriel right away. He took me into the stable and, with his wife Yente, began to take care of me. They could not believe their eyes: "But how did you get here, child?" Yente spread a little straw on the ground and told me to sit down. One lamp, hanging from a beam, lit the stable. A few candles were stuck along the trough and I thought: "Like in Somilova", but no. Here there was a different atmosphere. And different air. After I had told Yente and Catriel about the stable in Somilova , they told me that the villagers of Ostia, which was a Ukrainian village, were good people. The headman was also a good and easygoing man who had helped many of the stable

people. "In fact, the people of Somolova have the unsavoury reputation here of being evil, and robbers," said Catriel.

After giving me some foul hot water ("tea") with a few slices of sugar beet and a slice of bread, Yente brought a piece of pork fat and began to massage the skin at the back of my knees. At the touch of her hand on my skin, I felt as if it was being torn from me and I bit my lips in pain. "If so," Yente said, giving me the fat, "try doing it yourself." But my hands shook. "Slowly, slowly," she advised. However, after a few more attempts, I put the fat down and lay on the straw. My eyes closed in weariness from the journey, and I fell asleep for the first time on a thin layer of straw and a relatively clean floor. Catriel woke me early in the morning. He gave me a cup of "tea" with a slice of sugar beet in it and a cold, cooked potato, which I ate unpeeled together with the "tea". I sat with my legs under me on the straw, looking around. It looked like heaven compared to the stable at Somilova. Here, too, a few people were lying on the floor, looking like skeletons, but many walked upright and had risen early. Catriel and Yenta were among these. They helped me out of the stable and Catriel explained the how I should contiue on my way. Like Mr. Erdmann, he estimated my crawling speed and predicted that I would reach the next stable, which was close to Bershat, in the late evening hours. "In that stable," said Catriel, "you'll find Itzhak." I did not ask any questions. I understood that he was telling me that Itzhak would see that I had a night's lodging and would direct me to Bershat.

I thanked Catriel and Yente for their hospitality and started crawling. I heard Yente sigh and say to Catriel, in Yiddish: "That meidele won't make it." And he: "Who knows, God is our Father. How did she get this far?" These words rang triumphantly in my ears.

Slowly, slowly, I dragged my legs, leaning on my hands as on the day before. Time crawled and I crawled, again I rested, again I changed my manner of crawling and again I found myself in a field, and again I began to scrabble for sugar beets. Among furrows covered with thin, transparent splinters of ice melting into streamlets of water, I found the beets. The splinters of ice in them assuaged my thirst. According to what Catriel had told me, I should come to a river with a narrow bridge over it, with no railing, and he had warned me to be careful not to fall from the bridge; I lifted my aching head and neck every so often to look ahead trying to see it. I reached the bridge when the sun indicated to me that it was afternoon. It leaned over the river which flowed as noisily as a waterfall. I succeeded in climbing a rise and reaching it. I looked to the left of me, to the right of me and under me, at the threatening torrent of water. If I swerved one crawl to the right, I would be in that water. And if I moved slightly to the left, the water could swallow me. I therefore tried to stick to the middle of the bridge. The heavy planks began to cut into my flesh and I saw the rushing water through the wide gaps between them.

When I reached the middle of the bridge I looked ahead and saw the tremendous length of it I still had to traverse. Suddenly the sound of approaching horses' hooves and the rattle of wagonwheels reached me. I flattened myself on the bridge with my legs in the air, gripped by fear because of the dreadful thought that flashed through my mind: If the wagon passed over me it would crush me or cut off both my legs.

Luckily, the driver stopped behind me. I heard him talking to the horses, and when he came to me I turned my face to him and looked into his eyes, which were bulging out of their sockets at

the sight of my body lying flung in the middle of the bridge. After he had recovered from his astonishment, he addressed me in a tender, humane voice in Ukrainian, which I did not understand. I explained in sign language that I was unable to move from where I lay. He bent over me, and with his gnarled hands, gripped me under the arms and pulled me to the wagon. I felt the skin behind my knees tear, blood spurted from the wound which had just opened and began to flow down my legs. I tried to close the gaping wound with my hands, to cover the blood gushing from it. He noticed my attempts and said in a fatherly voice, something like: "Never mind, child," in his own language. I understood this from his expression. When he removed his gaze from my legs and lifted me onto the wagon, my body sank heavily into the prickly straw. Before climbing onto the driver's platform, he asked: "Where to, child?" I answered: "Bershat". He nodded and held out a parcel that was next to his seat, adding, his eyes still full of astonishment: "Kushi, kushi (eat)". He mounted the wagon and started his horses moving. I loosened the string and the smell of baked potatoes rose to my nostrils. There was also about half a loaf of village bread in the parcel, slices of pork fat and a few peeled onions. At first, I hesitated to take out the food that was making my senses spin, and only after he turned his head to look at me and showed me with his hands, that still held the reins, that I should take generous handfulls, did I dare take out two potatoes -- which I ate hot. The horses galloped over the narrow bridge, swaying the wagon so that I almost fell out of it. At the end of the bridge, on the steep slope that descended from it, the wagon bumped and the bread fell from my hand onto the pile of straw into which I had sunk. It was only when the wagon came onto a path in a field that I took the fallen bread and dusted it off

with my fingers. I also took a strip of pork fat and another two potatoes. I tasted the salt with my first bite of fat and it melted between my teeth. I ate alternatively from the bread and the fat and the potatoes. When my stomach was full, I re-tied the parcel and held it out to the peasant. He turned towards me and signalled me to go on eating. After a few more bites, I was satiated to the point of nausea. I felt dizzy and wanted to vomit. I restrained myself with difficulty, not wanting to make the good man nauseous, too. I buried the parcel in the straw under me and then curled myself into the prickling straw.

Suddenly I remembered that I was supposed to get to the next stable and find Itzhak, before goin on to Bershat. My thoughts were confused, but I clearly knew that I was in a wagon and did not know where it was headed. The pressure and pain under my chest confused me and however much I tried to think, my senses became blurred, until a heavy sleep finally descended on me.

The barking of dogs shocked me awake. It was still full daylight. I raised myself on my elbows to see where I was. The wagon was moving slowly through a village of low houses that had chimneys on thatch and tin roofs with white smoke issuing from them. From the greetings the wagonner called out to the people in the streets, I knew we were in his home village. The man continued to drive his horses forward. For a moment I thought he had certainly forgotten my presence in the wagon. I lifted myself up again and banged my hand on the side of the wagon to remind him I was there. He calmly turned his head and signalled me to remain where I was. The wagon slowed down and halted in front of a wooden gate.The waggoner jumped down and went to the gate and opened it wide. Then he led the horses by the reins into a big yard, calling: "Maroussia! Where are you, Maroussia?" From the

come in the morning with the barrow and taken her.
I took Giza's place, staying beside Bettika for a whole day, the two of us eating some more of the bread the peasant's wife had given me. The next day I again tried my luck from door to door. This time I was also very hungry. I mustered my courage and knocked at the first door I came to. Someone opened the door and, without coming out, passed me a piece of mouldy bread. I shoved the bread into the bag, and went on to the next door. It opened and the woman of the house emerged, scolding me: "They've been coming here since morning already, I've got nothing to give you anymore!" And she slammed the door in my face. I tried my luck at a few more doors, getting some more potato peelings and a slice of bread. With the food I brought back with me, Bettika and I staved off our hunger.

I begged from door to door for four full days. We huddled together at night and enlarged on the subjects of "Say we had a home"; "Say we had the same food we used to have at home, and didn't want to eat it"; "Say we were the cats and dogs at home, being given meat from our plates". Our sole interest was in the subject of food, which is surely the height of desire for a starving person. And with as many "says" as we had fingers, we managed to fool our empty stomachs. There was a moment when Bettike managed a smile, and even a laugh. The others then said: "Looks like they've got plenty of food, those girls, they're not short of anything!" On my fifth day in Bershat, in addition to the hunger and difficult living conditions, I began to be plagued by worry and longing for my sister, Fritzike. A longing I could express only to Bettike. My worry soon turned to great anxiety concerning her fate. She had been left alone in the stable, which one did not leave alive! She would not have the strength to get

to Bershat. That was clear to me! What to do? God! What was I to do, damn it! I had run out of ideas...

On the fifth morning I got up to do my rounds of the doors again. I had promised Bettike that I would not let her die. She, too, had begun to swell and could not move her limbs. "I'll be back with a full bag this evening," I encouraged her. I was determined to comb the length and breadth of the ghetto. I went to one of the alleys I had not been in before and knocked on the first door. It slowly opened, and in the doorway stood Aunt Rachel, a slice of bread in her hand. When she raised her head we both began to shout. We fell into each other's arms, "Annike or Fritzike?" she mumbled through her tears. "Where's Uncle Moshe?" I asked her. She pushed me slightly away from her: "He'll be back soon". And then again, with emotion: "Annike or Fritzike?" "I'm Annie," I said. When we had recovered from this unexpected encounter, Aunt Rachel took me inside, not letting go of me. She seated me on a mattress in the corner of the small room and sank down beside me. We sat stunned, neither of us able to speak. Suddenly she got up and began to prepare food for me. There was a tin stove standing in the middle of the room, its long chimney going up through the ceiling, and on it she placed a pot of water drawn from a bucket next to the stove. Her back to me, she pleaded in a tear-choked voice: "Annike, tell me! Tell me!". And then, while my aunt laboriously prepared the porridge for me,
I told her about Grandfather Efraim, whom she had loved so. About Uncle Izziu and Aunt Roza, about baby Mozziu, and about my mother. She kept quiet, trying not to interrupt me, and when I had finished telling her about my mother's death, she hesitated as though waiting for me to continue, and then fearfully asked: "And what about Fritzike? Where is she?" At that moment the door opened

and Uncle Moshe appeared. I just managed to say "Fritzike is alive". I almost did not recognise my uncle. His beard had thinned and his eyes bulged. His legs and arms had become thin and seemed to have just recently been attached haphazardly to his gaunt body. He had a pair of torn shoes on his feet, the soles tied to the uppers with string. This was not tall, marvelously well-groomed Uncle Moshe, the "handsome man Aunt Rachel had won". He bore no resemblance to Uncle Moshe, apart from his warm smile on seeing me. He leaped over to me, swung me up with laughing eyes. Amazingly, these were the same laughing eyes as always, and like my aunt, he asked: "Annike or Fritzike?" And then, with his characteristic humour, he asked my aunt: "Well, have you managed to feed the child yet? "And, in fact, the lentil porridge she had made was ready and she gave me a brimming cupful. Uncle Moshe merrily encouraged me to eat: "Eat, eat, you'll tell me yet." Aunt Rachel brushed this aside: "There's nothing to tell, I've already heard it all." Aunt Rachel also sat down near me and told me about the death of her sister Esther, her brother-in-law, and their little boy. She knew nothing about the rest of her family. When I was "myself again" as Uncle Moshe put it, he said to Aunt Rachel: "Get the soap ready, I'll fetch water." I looked around while my aunt put a big tin drum on the stove. There was a few rags and a mattress in the corners of the room. "Sylvia Reinhold and her brother Arik lie there," she explained. "Do you remember the Reinholds from Radautz? And there, in the second corner, lives a spinster, Fania (Fina) of Kishinov. The wide mattress over there is the address of a whole family: mother, father, and two children." Uncle Moshe had returned in the meantime with a bucket of water, which he poured into the drum. Then he sat next to me on the mattress and I told him about Fritzike, whom I had left in

the "stable of death". "Don't worry, Annike," he said to me in his confident voice, without any hesitation, "don't worry, we'll bring her here!" I knew these were not empty words and that Uncle Moshe would not leave Fritzike in Somilova. The water had heated and my aunt took a little tub from the wall and placed it in the centre of the room. My Uncle left the room and she closed the door after him, undressed me and seated me in the tub. Contact with the water soothed me, but the touch of the metal tub hurt my sores. So did the touch of the soap with which my aunt tried to soap me. So she soaped her hands and passed them over my body. With great effort, she took water from the drum and rinsed my body. Then she wrapped me in a white rough towel and unravelled my braids, washing my hair in the bathwater. She put another towel around my head, while she exclaimed in wonder that my hair had stayed long and lice-free. But it was an almost impossible task to get rid of the knots that had formed after months during which no comb had been near my hair. With exceptional gentleness and patience she unravelled knot after knot until my hair once more spread out to fall over my shoulders. "If only I had a little paraffin," she sighed, "but maybe uncle will bring some tomorrow." She dressed me in a patched dress and clean panties and also gave me a pair of Uncle Moshe's woollen socks, over which she bound dry rags, when Uncle Moshe came in, she said to him laughingly: "What a job we have ahead of us, Moshe, this girl's full of sores and her skin's as thin and transparent as tissue paper." I began to tell them about Bettike, whom I had left in the dark room. It was taken for granted that I would stay with them. Uncle Moshe even said: "Tonight she can sleep next to us and tomorrow I'll try to get her a mattress." When I told them about Bettike and said that I intended to go back to her, my uncle would not hear of it:

"Where's she?" I explained how to get there. "But Bettike can't get up and walk, I'll come with you and help." His good heartedness and humour had not deserted him :"Look who's going to help me!" Then he became serious: "Don't worry, Annike, your aunt knows how to make lentil soup, lentil porridge and even lentil bread. I'm telling you, its a delicacy!" He said he hoped the good days would come back yet, the days when we had licked our fingers after Aunt's cooking.

When he had gone, my aunt told me that Uncle Moshe went to the market where he found work as a porter every so often, and sometimes he would draw portraits of the peasants who came to the market. They occasionally came to the house with pictures of their relatives, which my uncle would copy on wrapping paper. She took a pile of drawings from under the mattress; they were drawn in charcoal and smeared with paraffin so that they looked like oil paintings. "He gets a lot of food for his drawings," she sighed. Not long after, Uncle Moshe returned, with Bettike in his arms. She was welcomed no less warmly than I had been. She was also washed and dressed and put down on the mattress. That first night I slept with Bettike on the soft mattress, covered with the blanket the peasant's wife had given me, while Aunt Rachel and Uncle Moshe slept on the bare floor. The next day, my uncle acquired a mattress at the market and placed it between ours and Fania's.

I had become acquainted with Fania the night before, when she had returned from the village, laden with supplies. She was a middle-aged woman. Despite her good appearance, she looked older than my mother. Born in Kishinow, she had been a lecturer in philology at the local university. She had taught German and French, mainly, and had also given a course in Russian. Here she

supported herself by teaching Russian to the children in the villages among which she roamed every day. She received food supplies in payment, some of which she sold in the ghetto market. The third corner held Sylvia and her brother, who lived by begging from door to door, as did most of the orphans.

During the following days, Aunt Rachel fed us from her meagre supply of food. When I was up and about I went walking in the ghetto. The small houses were very overcrowded. The local Jews rented rooms to refugee families, and every corner of each room was rented out. I passed through the narrow lanes and came to what seemed like the main street, on which I turned and went down a slope into another street, arriving at the market. I did not really know who and what I was looking for. I wanted to become familiar with the ghetto and the market Uncle Moshe spoke about. The market was thronged with people, horses and carts and shouting peasants making a fuss. The peddlars sat group by group, selling their wares. People gathered around big scales standing on the ground next to the peddlar, and he weighed out the lentils they bought. A little further on, two women stood with little sacks next to them, from which they sold flour by the cupful. The customers paid in roubles. People also sold old clothes. I stopped near a woman examining an almost new dress with brilliant colours and she asked me to measure the dress against her back. In the end she took out 20 roubles, a great deal of money, and paid. But most people bought the cheap, worn out clothing. Suddenly I saw Uncle Moshe standing next to a cart. He hefted a big, heavy sack onto his shoulder and then walked away, doubled over by the load, and I lost sight of him. I felt like crying, but I knew this was no solution. I decided I was strong enough to look for work of some kind to help support the household. I mingled with people and

heard the name "Dolina" mentioned. I remembered that little Moishele had proudly told me that he sometimes lived on the Dolina. Not for nothing was he proud of it: on the Dolina, I found out, each family had a room and was consdidered to be well-off.

The next morning, after Uncle Moshe had gone out to work, I also got up and drank the cup of porridge my aunt gave me and asked her to tell me where the Dolina was. She thought I was asking out of curiosity. It emerged that the wide street I had seen yesterday at the bottom of the hill was the Dolina. I went from house to house, looking for work. It was the Eve of Passover and on the Dolina, and only there, signs of preparation for the holiday were evident. I was accepted for work in one of the houses. It was a Bessarabian family and they had a large, spacious room. The woman was very pleased I had come and without asking me what I could do, she gave me a bucket of whitewash a ladder and a brush and pointed to the bare walls: "Can you whitewash the room?" I looked at the dingy walls and said without hesitation: "Yes." With the bucket in one hand and the brush in the other, I climbed the ladder, after moving it close to the wall, and began spreading the whitewah on the walls. All the walls had been painted by the afternoon. When I came in the morning, she had asked me whether I had eaten yet, and since I had nodded she had not given me anything. But in the afternoon, when I had finished whitewashing the four walls and was both tired and hungry, I waited for the lady to give me something to eat. But she brought another bucket, full of soapy water, and a rag, telling me to clean the four windows, the door and the floor. I worked tirelessly until the late afternoon. "You'll get some food soon," she would say every so often.

After I had finished cleaning the room, she gave me a big

hamper full of dirty washing and sent me to the river. "Go a little way and you'll see where the river is. You'll find plenty of washerwomen there." And when I asked how one did the laundry, she looked at me in amazement: "Don't you know? With stones." And she demonstrated how one rubbed the clothes on the stones. I was drawn by curiosity to go and see the river and the washerwomen there. I took the hamper and went the way the lady had shown me. It was a steep rise, and when I got to the top and looked down, there appeared a big river in all its splendour, and on the banks several women sat rubbing laundry on large stones. I went down and tried to find a big stone so that I could start washing. One of the women saw me and the hamper I had put down next to me, she called out: "What do you want here, child? What are you looking for?" And when I explained that I wanted to do the washing and asked her to show me how, she looked at me and in a commanding voice, said: "Take that basket and get back to your lady! How are you going to carry the wet washing back? The basket's bigger than you!" she said scoldingly. "Nu, nu, child, take that basket quickly, and don't wet the washing!" I realized that the woman was right, after all, I could not carry wet laundry on my back. Therefore I went back with the basket of dirty washing. It was dark when she met me with: "Well, you should have told me that you couldn't carry the basket!" And as if dojng me a favour, she put three boiled potatoes in my hand, an egg, and a cup of thin soup. I refused the soup and only took the potatoes and the egg and hurried out of the house before I would burst into tears. When I returned to Aunt Rachel and Uncle Moshe's house, they were worried out of their minds. "Where were you?" they chorused. Only then did I burst into tears and tell them what had happened to me that day. For the first time, I saw Uncle Moshe really angry. He was angry

and struggle all day to support all of you and to save enough to bring Fritzike to us, and you go out and exhaust yourself to earn a potato!" Next morning, before he left for work at the market, Uncle Moshe came to pacify me. "Don't worry child, I'll be able to bring Fritzike soon." My eyes filled with tears. My uncle looked affectionately at my aunt and me: "Look after the girls, Rachel!" and then he left the house.

I had faith in my uncle. Bettika had grown strong enough to sit and all that day she and I spoke about our homes and our mothers. Bettika also had also placed her trust in Uncle Moshe and expressed the hope that Fritzike would soon join us, "And then we'll be three sisters and Aunt Rachel and Uncle Moshe will be our mother and father." "Yes, children", my aunt said, her voice full of feeling, "let's pray that Uncle Moshe's strength holds out," and then, as if to herself, "I don't know how he still manages to stay on his feet at all." That day we again ate the lentil porridge that my aunt made sure to give us three times a day, in addition to the two slices of bread and, over the last two days, even some potatoes.

Uncle Moshe returned from the market in the afternoon in high spirits. At the door, where he stood with a big, full sack on his shoulders, he called out in a merry, joking voice: "Come and give me a hand!" and without waiting, he came inside and lowered the sack: "Today fortune smiled on me! I sold two pictures and I also did some portering." He sank tiredly onto the mattress. My aunt gave him a cup of lentil porridge and began to unpack the sack. Uncle Moshe suddenly put down his cup and began to dig around in his pockets, finally taking out a triangular newspaper parcel. His eyes shone: "Look, Rachel! See what I've brought you today!" And

he held out the parcel, which was full of salt. "But this is a priceless treasure!" she exclaimed. She tore the sheet of newspaper into ten pieces and put about 100 grams of salt in each one. From the big sack she took a full cloth bag which she estimated to weigh about 5 or 6 kilos. She unwrapped a slab of pork fat weighing about 2 or 3 kilos from its newspaper. The remaining half of the big sack was full of potatoes.

The next day, my aunt went to the market and on her return, told us that the salt had been snatched up and people had paid her a rouble for 100 grams, so that she had 10 roubles. My uncle saw this as a good omen, since this shortened the time he had estimated he would need to bring Fritzike to us.

Two days later Uncle Moshe went out to the market as usual, the afternoon went by, it was already dusk, it was getting dark and the alleys were emptying. We were beginning to worry and a feeling of uneasiness gripped us. My aunt was as pale as chalk. Bettike tried to soothe and distract her. We went through a terrible time when Aunt Rachel went to look for him, and stayed away for ages. She finally returned very late, and her appearance had altered. Her hair had whitened as though it was brushed with whitewash; the gendarmes had rounded up all the men in the market and streets of the ghetto and taken them away. It was said that they had taken them to Nikolievka, over the River Bog, where they were put to work in the stone quarry. "None of those taken before have ever returned." Neither that night nor in the nights that followed did we shut our eyes. I lay wakeful and alert to every faint rustle, hoping it was my beloved uncle. My aunt ran about the alleys of the ghetto for days at a time, and to the local community centre, trying to pick up his tracks, but in vain. She got nowhere. My uncle had disappeared. We hoped and anticipated

for a few more days and then, when we felt that all hope was lost, it seemed to me that my world had been destroyed.

After my uncle's disappearance, Fania began to draw closer to us and to give us encouragement. She also appointed my aunt as her agent in the market, to sell the supplies she brought from the village, and we were thus saved from starvation.

One evening, when Aunt Rachel was combing my curly black hair, Fania casually observed: "You look like a little gypsy." And after some thought: "Would you like to come to the village with me and be a 'vorozhnitza'? You could make a lot of money." Hearing that I could earn anything at all, I responded with enthusiasm, and only later asked her what she meant by a 'vorozhnitza'. Fania explained that it meant a fortune-teller, usually a gypsy.

Fania promised to take me to the village in two days' time. The evening before we were due to go, Fania came back from the village and said she had spread a story about a little gypsy girl who was the granddaughter of a famous Rumanian fortune teller. The girl had inherited her grandmother's gift, and even more: "I told them that apart from the skills you acquired from your grandmother you are also gifted with clairvoyance." Fania was well-acquainted with the peasant-women's thoughts and way of life. She had also obtained a pack of cards and she taught me how to lay them out and use them. There were 28 cards in the pack, she showed me how they should be shuffled, how to slowly arrange them in four rows, one below the other, seven to a row, and how to linger over each card with concentration, and how to pretend to be deep in thought, then again to concentrate and pretend to be unfolding the puzzle of each card, talking to it in Rumanian or German. I would be free to tell her what I 'saw' and she, Fania, would interpret for me.

I demonstrated to Fania what I had learned, and she kissed my

cheek and said in amazement: "You did that better than I thought, for a moment you had me convinced you were a real gypsy."

Next day, my aunt prepared me for my role. She oiled my hair with paraffin, combed it carefully and spread it on my shoulders, over the blouse Fania had lent me for the purpose. I wore the big, wide skirt I had been given by the peasant's wife, and which my aunt had altered the night before to fit my waist and reach my ankles. I wore my aunt's torn shoes (she had no others). They put the cards in a pocket my aunt had sewn into the skirt in such a way that I had to raise the skirt to get to it. When I was ready to go, Bettike looked at me in astonishment and cried: "Anna Borushka!" The name Anna also suited my new image and identity. I set out for the unknown with Fania. She knew the twists and turns of the roads to the villages and we were not in any danger of meeting Roumanian gendarmes.

We went into the first yard of the village, where we met the woman of the house. She received us well, and Fania hinted that the woman knew who I was and had been expecting us. By her expression and the excitement with which she turned straight to me and ushered me into the house, I could see that she had complete faith in me. We accompanied her into the house, and after she asked Fania something, Fania pointed to a bench next to a big table and the woman said: "If you please, if you please." Fania then indicated to me to be seated and sat beside me. I told Fania in Rumanian that I felt uneasy, but she advised me to relax. "It'll be alright." When the woman and Fania had exchanged a few words, she left the room and Fania stroked my hand in encouragement. Before we began what we had come for, the woman served us some food she had made and we ate our fill. The woman cleared the table and sat facing me, her gaze intent on me. I took

the cards from beneath my skirt, shuffled them well and began to lay them out according to the rules. With my full concentration on them, my confusion left me.

"If only Uncle Moshe would come back to us safe and sound," I said to Fania in Roumanian. She smiled and slowly translated it as something or other for the woman, who also smiled and hungrily swallowed every word. We carried on like this until she suddenly jumped up, crossed herself a few times and came and kissed me on my forehead.

Fania later told me that both her sons were at the front with the Red Army. My heart filled with sympathy for the woman. I remembered my mother, who had taken her longing for her beloved son to the grave with her. When I had gathered the cards, I gave the woman a sympathetic look as she left and came back with a generous supply of food.

We managed to visit several houses, where we were similarly received, and in the afternoon, before we left the village, we were assured that there would be others waiting for us the next day. On the way back to the ghetto, loaded with supplies, I prayed we would find Uncle Moshe at home safe and sound. But it was a vain hope.

Thereafter, I adjusted to my new role and developed an ability to observe my surroundings. I perceived the women's distress and understood what they longed to hear from me. I would look around, particularly at the pictures on the wall or on the sideboard and I would determine, by the age of the woman, whether it was her husband or son who was at the front. I no longer needed Fania to invent things. She now began to translate my hope-inspiring words exactly. I learned to classify the cards; those that were light-coloured denoted happiness, hearts meant longing,

kings and queens meant encounters, and so on. They listened to my words with deep hunger. Fania began to be convinced that I could tell the future, almost forgetting that she herself had made up the whole story. We divided everything equally. After my aunt had sorted the supplies we brought, she would put some aside for Betty and herself and the rest she would sell in the market. She saved the money she received so that we could bring Fritzike to us. Some ten days had passed since I began walking along village paths from house to house and the women had grown fond of me, nicknaming me "Varushka", that is, "bringer of good-tidings". I began to understand and even talk their language a little. Aunt Rachel, who was deeply concerned about Bettika, had managed to get her on her feet. I also grew a little healthier. My cheeks rounded a bit, I put a little flesh on my bones and my legs strengthened. I recall: In the first few days after I came to Aunt Rachel, my bruised bones had frightened her and Fania had consoled her: "Don't worry, Rachel, if there are bones there'll soon be flesh, too."

My aunt informed me that she had managed to save all the money required to bring Fritzike, twenty roubles, and had also found the peasant with whom Uncle Moshe had made the arrangement. He had promised to leave the next day to bring Fritzike. I could not fall asleep all night. Joy mixed with fear overtook me. About six weeks had passed since I had left my sister in that most dreadful of all places on earth. Nothing but bones, wounded, her legs doubled up, she appeared before my eyes, and a heavy fear crept into my heart; had she managed to hold on? At home, Fritzike had always been pampered and she had always been helpless under stress. I was the stronger of the two of us. Were I in her place, there in the stable of death, would I have had the strength to stay alive till now? Black circles danced in front of my eyes all

night long.

The peasant knocked at the door of our room before dawn. My Aunt jumped up and woke me, too. We met him next to his wagon. It was still dark outside and the alley was empty and deserted, only the lamp hanging on the front of the wagon dimly illuminated the place.

My aunt put a down payment of 5 roubles in the peasant's hand and I gave him a letter for Fritzi, which I had written in the margins of a newspaper during the night. The peasant was in a great hurry: "Its a long way and we have to be back the same day." At the last moment he remembered: "What does your sister look like?" "Exactly like this girl," my aunt pointed at me.

It was a fine morning with the spring sun of mid-May. The green, fresh grass in the village seemed to spring from the earth in every yard. The trees were in bud and my mood matched the wonderful morning. Anticipation of the evening and meeting Fritzi filled my heart. I began to hum a gypsy melody to myself. After a tiring day of selling illusions and hope to others, which I hoped would come true, Fania and I returned to the ghetto loaded with provisions. I thought about Fritzike all the way and prepared myself for the worst. I again saw the apparition of her as a heap of bones, bruised and wounded and devoured by lice, and I swore to myself never again to part from her and to tend her until she was on her feet again. When I told this to Fania her reaction was as expected: "Stop being afraid and stop thinking only of the bad. Your sister will arrive safe and sound." And as if to herself: "If she's managed to hold out till now." There was some doubt in her voice. "I'll help you, too," she said. Fania was very honest and truthful with us. In my heart I kept hoping that my uncle would also come. "After all, he must be there to share our reunion," and

I made plan after plan all the way home. But we did not find my uncle at home. And my aunt was very depressed, crying aloud and praying to God to have mercy and send her husband back safely to her. When we entered she wiped her tears and Bettike made signs to me behind Aunt Rachel's back. "Its good that you've come back early," she said. "I hope we'll soon see Fritzike, because the wagonner said he'd be here about now." There was a spark of happiness in her tear-reddened eyes.

As evening fell, I heard the wagon stop at the door. I ran outside as if I had been bitten by a snake. Aunt Rachel and Bettika came after me. I saw Fritzike raising herself in the wagon and before I could grab her, she got down by herself and fell straight into my arms. In the room, I looked at her. She was wrapped in a sack with a rope around her waist, and she was barefoot. But she was standing.

In the evening, after my aunt had made a sumptuous meal, which Fritzi ate voraciously, we sat on the mattress and listened to what had happened to her since my leaving her. Holding Bettike close to her, she said: "Where did you manage to find her?" and then: "The day after you left, Annike, I also began to crawl back and forth, and after me, Lala and Rosie. Gradually I managed to straighten my legs." And she told us how she had practiced walking all those weeks of my absence. She started going out to the village again and fed herself on frozen sugar beets that she found in the fields. "We weren't afraid to go into the fields, because the Germans were gone... The stable emptied. Because of the amount of work, the peasants mobilized everyone able to stand." Fritzike smiled bitterly: "After all, you know there weren't many left." And those that were, soon found a room and some means of subsistence. She, Lala and Rosie were among the very few to

remain in the stable, went out to the woods to gather wood and twigs, which they used to make fires in the stable, to cook the potatoes they got for weeding gardens. I also told her what had happened to me during those weeks. However her main excitement was over her meeting with Bettike, and she kept asking: "How did you find Bettike?" And when Bettike told her about her sister Giza's death, she turned to me: "You know, Annike, when you left everyone was sure you wouldn't make it, and only I believed you had succeeded. And you even managed to see Giza..." She did not know, nor did I tell her, what Giza had managed to see.

The next day I stayed home with Fritzike. Aunt Rachel and Bettike qwent to the market. I prepared breakfast for Fritzi. Potato puree and cubes of pork fat and a cup of tea sweetened with sugar beet. Afterwards, I put the big drum on the stove and filled it with water.

Aunt Rachel and Bettike came back from the market with a dress for Fritzi. It was a faded brown and had cost 2 roubles. After we had washed Fritzi in the tub, and my aunt washed her hair and rubbed it with paraffin and combed it, Fritzi put on her new dress. "Who's this? Fritzi? Incredible. It must be a beauty queen!"

With Fritzi's arrival, life in the ghetto became somehow bearable. Even though the walk to and from the village every day was difficult. Food was to be had and was even plentiful enough to be sold so that we could buy some clothes for all of us. Rumour had it that the clothes, which were in relatively good condition, had come in parcels from Roumania to the local Community Centre. There were other rumours, too. Life in the ghetto did not change much; the orphans continued to beg from door to door and wander about the streets. We supported them as much as we possibly could.

I had stopped thinking about the black day when we would face starvation again. As long as I continued to be a gypsy, the peasants' nice little Voroshka, I had no fear of the future -- on that afternoon late in May, as well.

We were on our way back to the ghetto, loaded with flour, potatoes, lentils and pumpkin pies, I was spilling out my heart to Fania about this war which was not our war; this war in which we never knew where the front line was; this war against defenceless Jews, who had never been an army and who had never declared war against their attackers. A war that had driven us out of our homes and murdered our innocent dear ones. "Why have they done this to us?" Fania was startled by my question, but I asked over and over again: "When will they free us and send us back home?" and "Will these fighters, who are nothing but murderers, ever be punished, and if so, who will punish them, hey, Fania?"

Suddenly I felt my heart thump. For a long time, I had not mentioned Father or Sammy, and it was only at night, when darkness overtook me, that I thought about them with longing and hope which I dared not speak of in the light of day. I surprised myself by speaking of them to Fania. "I honestly don't know," Fania said, "and actually, I've stopped thinking or dreaming about going home. And I don't know if that's good or bad..." We were still deep in conversation when we reached the edge of the village. We heard a man's voice shouting behind us: "Halt! Stop!" We turned our heads and to our amazement there were two armed gendarmes behind us. They ordered us to accompany them to the local gendarmerie. My eyes grew dim, I thought that we had reached the end of the road. "Which of them is the gypsy?" I heard one ask the other. I realized that they knew about us and had lain in ambush. They examined us closely and one of them pointed at me. His voice

sounded more curious than admonishing: ""Are you the gypsy?" I ignored his question and continued to walk next to Fania. Suddenly I heard Fania address them: "What are you going to do with us? Please, let us go." "You're being taken for interrogation. The duty officer will decide whether to let you go or not," one of them replied. Fania, who had also noticed his "humane" voice, began to tell him a story about being a widow who had left two sick children in the ghetto with nobody to support them. "And what about you, little gypsy?" the other asked. "Have you forgotten how to talk?" I played dumb and decided not to answer them no matter what. They continued to tease me, and when I did not answer, one of them said: "We'll see if she'll keep quiet in front of Giorgiu, too."

The officer, Giorgiu, who was sitting behind a desk, received us with a smile. He looked at me for a long time. "Aha! So you're the gypsy!" adding leniently, "the pretty gypsy." "Our situation isn't so serious," I thought to myself. "Can you tell me my fortune, too?" he joked. I lowered my eyes: "Don't pretend" -- "Am I pretending?" he asked in surprise. I was very shocked by my slip. "No, no," I hastily corrected myself, "and neither do I pretend." Fania took courage again: "Please," she asked, "let us go." And she began to tell her story again. He was almost pursuaded, when all of a sudden a Jew entered and, on seeing us, let out a cry of surprise: "Miss Fania, how did you get here?" he came over to her, both hands outstretched and said, again: "Miss Fania, how did you get here?" The officer's face grew serious. He raised his eyebrows and asked severely: "Moshe, do you know her?" "Of course," said this Moshe, who was apparently a collaborator with the Roumanians. "I know her from Kishinov. Professor Miss Fania. Why have you arrested her?" And the officer,

with a servere expression: "They've broken the law, Moshe." Moshe tried pleading with the officer. "Let them be, I know Fania, she's a spinster and has nobody to support her." "We'll try to support her," answered the officer, and he ordered the soldiers to give us 25 lashes. "Don't worry, Moshe, they'll live."

I went into the adjoining room first. The soldiers joked: "After one she won't be able to get up." "You don't know anything, but do you know how to yell?" I nodded and they promised me that if I shouted as if they were beating me, they wouldn't harm me. The first shout that came from my lips sounded too weak to them, but when they threatened me with their sticks, I shouted out in fear and they felt that my shouts sounded more genuine. After counting to 25 , they freed me and brought Fania inside. From her yells I understood that she was in trouble. At first, I thought of breaking in and "rescuing" her. I was in an aggressive mood. But I knew that it would be a "lost labour", as Uncle Moshe would have said. I understood, after a few shouts, that the blow landed just before each shout, and I counted the blows... I breathed in relief when they did not reach the ordained number. I also heard Moshe continuing to argue with the officer. When Fania emerged from the torture room, she was standing with difficulty, clutching herself where she was hurt. The officer called us again: "See that we don't catch you again," he warned and released us. Moshe, who accompanied us, apologised to Fania all the way, and advised us not to return to the village. Fania leaned on me and I carried the heavy sack, which the soldiers had not even opened. Fania was sighing with pain and when we came to a spring on the outskirts of the village, I lowered the sack from my shoulder and took the big kerchief that the cards were wrapped in, and ran to the spring to wet it. Fania lay on her stomach on the soft grass, and I laid

the wet kerchief on the painful place. I loved Fania very much, and shared her pain. All the way to the ghetto, I carried the sack on my shoulder, while supporting her.

Aunt Rachel, Fritzi and Bettika were worried. But Fritzi had encouraged them all the time, "There's nothing to worry about, nothing can happen to Annie!" Fania lay on the mattress and my aunt put cold poultices on her. Then we began to think about tomorrow and what we could expect. "Never mind, it's good that you've finished with that dirty work!" Fritzi and Betty consoled me. "We won't die of hunger." But I could see hunger very realistically before my eyes.

Days pass even when they are as drawn out as years. Once more we began to eat the lentil porridge aunt Rachel managed to buy from her profits at the market. When things grew worse, and Fania was also left without an income, she decided to go back to the villages, this time to the village of Barlivka, where she used to teach Russian. "Annike," she said to me, at the very last minute, "come with me, at least you'll be able to eat with me at the peasants' houses." I set out with Fania again. Fania hid the cards in her own pocket, just in case. On the way she tried to pursuade me to try my luck at being a fortune teller again. "They don't know us in Barlivka, it's true, but maybe we'll be lucky." And when she sighed deeply, "Oh, Annike, let's hope it doesn't last much longer!" I definitely agreed with her that it was high time we were delivered from the fear of hunger, and from the reign of terror by one man over another.

We reached the village. We stood hesitantly in front of the first house. Fania took the first step and I dragged after her unwillingly. An old woman received us, and when Fania told her who we were, she slammed the door in our faces: "I don't need any

witches!" We carried on. They asked me to tell the cards in a few of the houses, but I could feel their suspicious attitude. When we had collected a few supplies, I begged Fania: "Come home, now." She felt no better than I did, "But this is a war of survival, and continuing hunger is more bitter than death." Fania would not change her mind. I dragged after her. She knocked on a door. A middle-aged woman appeared at the door, she looked the same age as Fania, in fact. Her head was bound in a big, white kerchief and she was very neatly dressed. She had an aristocratic look. She was different from the other women in the village. She stood erect in the doorway. Fania was as confused as I was.

"Yes, what do you want?" Fania began to stammer, saying who we were. A man's voice came from inside: "Who's there?" "Its nothing," the woman said, and invited us in. She asked if we would like something to eat, and brought us a plate of cookies. Fania hesitantly took a cookie, and I did likewise. The woman sat facing us, sighing deeply: "We no longer need a fortune teller!" The man whose voice we had heard earlier came in and greeted us, going about his business in the room without paying further attention to us. There was a silence. I whispered to Fania: "Let's get out of here." But Fania indicated that I should stay. The woman asked who we were and where we came from. Suddenly I heard Fania telling our true story, hers and mine. The woman looked at me in consternation, called her husband and introduced him to us: "Andre, meet this woman, she's also a language teacher, like me." He gave Fania his hand and sat down. A lively conversation ensued about the profession of the two women. "And who is this girl?" he asked, "Is she yours?" "An orphan," his wife told him. They knew nothing at all about the refugees in the Bershat ghetto. Indeed, they had never given a thought to the reason why the refugees had

come, nor where they had come from. They were hearing from us for the first time about Bessarabia and Bukovina. The woman invited us to lunch and left to prepare the food. She signalled her husband to join her. It seemed to me that some legend was in the making here. The woman came back and invited us to sit at the table in the kitchen. During the meal the woman told us what had happened in the village in general and to them in particular. "Not far from the village there's a forest in which our partisans operated. Most of them were from this village." After a deep sigh and a short pause, and with a tear in the corner of her eye, she told us that their only daughter had also been there. "About ten days ago, the Germans discovered them. Most of the partisans managed to escape, and only our Neora and two boys were caught and executed by the Germans..." and she broke into unrestrained weeping. Her husband tried to calm her: "Enough, stop it, woman. Your tears can do no good." And then, for the first time, I felt where the war was being fought, and that it did not hurt only us. Our hostess took out a picture of her beloved daughter and showed it to us. She was a beautiful girl, dark-skinned, black-haired and with clever black eyes. The woman looked at me and asked simply: "Would you like to stay with us?" I did not understand what she meant. "I gather that the girl doesn't understand our Russian?" she said to Fania (I had in fact understood very well). "My husband and I have decided that if she agrees to remain here, we'll adopt her and she can take the place of our Neora. We're registered in the population register here at the gendarmerie as a family with a daughter. They've never seen her and so the adoption would be easy." Both Fania and I were moved. The woman and her husband were also still rather tentative. But of everyone, I was most confused. Was it feasible that I, a Jewish girl, should stay in their house with them, and

as their daughter, yet? The concept of "adoption" was not at all clear to me. I defined it as meaning that I should simply live with them in their house. As if guessing my thoughts, she asked: "Apart from your sister, (Fania had told her about my sister) have you any other family?" Then a flood of feeling burst from me. And I told her about Father and Sammy, whom I hoped to find after the war. The woman looked understandingly at me, and added with a sigh: "After the war". It was obvious that she did not believe the war would ever end. "We also have two sons, at the front, with the Red Army. God grant that they'll come home!" "Stay with us until the end of the war," her husband said in a practical voice, " and you'll always be free to return to your father and brother and family if you wish." Tears welled in my eyes. Without considering my words, I said: "I'll stay here, with you." I was agreeing to be their daughter, and they -- my parents.

I told them about Fritzike, Bettike and Aunt Rachel, and they immediately promised to look after them, too. We arranged that I would return to the ghetto with Fania and that Andre would come and take me the next day. Andre took us almost to the ghetto in his wagon.

I was excited and did not know what awaited me. When we arrived home it was already late, and Aunt Rachel received us with signs of anxiety on her face. When we told them about the adoption, they were also gripped by excitement. Fritzi was extremely worried and afraid of another separation. Even though we told her that both the man and his wife had promised that on their way to church every Sunday they would bring me to them, as well as food supplies for the week. But my sister wavered. The separation from me frightened her; Father, Sammy and Bucharest seemed like a lost dream to her. Our world had shrunk to the room we lived in,

and to the few people who lived with us. There was a Community Centre in the ghetto, but we had only heard of its existence, and they knew nothing about our existence. It was a situation of "catch as catch can", and nobody cared about anyone else.

"We have to survive, Fritzike, to save our lives, do you understand? Look at the orphans in the ghetto, running around half-naked and hungry, begging. Have you ever thought about what's going to happen to them?" Fritzi was somehow pursuaded. "Yes, Annike, that's the bitter truth, we have to escape from the death trap."

Early in the morning, Andre and Katrina arrived with a big basket of food. They came into our room, and Andre immediately found himself a place on our mattress, and Fania offerred our only chair to Katrina. They made an effort not to appear to be in a hurry and conversed with Fania. Andre related that he was the manager of the Kolkhoz, and had been since "our" time. Katrina told Fania about her work at the intermediary school, in the town, outside the ghetto. For the first time, I also felt released from pretence, because they accepted me as I was. Fania's face took on a different light. Her self-esteem was restored to her as she spoke to Katrina as equals. I was flooded with happiness, pride and love for her. Fritzi, Bettike and Aunt Rachel were also treated with respect. They sat with us for a while and then gradually and quietly went over to the subject of their visit. So my separation fom my dear ones became something natural and taken for granted.

* * *

CHAPTER NO 13

WITH KATRINA AND ANDRE

We arrived 'home' in the afternoon. Andre stayed behind in the yard to unhitch the horse, leading him to the big shed at the bottom of the yard. Katrina pointed to the doorway, inviting me to follow her inside. While I was sitting next to her in the wagon, she had tried to say something to me in her fluent Russian. I had tried to take in what she said, but had understood only a little. I could merely nod 'yes' or 'no', and my main response was "I don't understand, I don't understand." "Never mind, never mind," she had consoled me every so often.

In the kitchen, too, I did not understand most of what she was saying, and again she had responded with, "Never mind, never mind." I remained standing next to the door watching Katrina's movements. She briskly removed the kerchief from her head and hung it on a hook below which was a large chest with two book-laden shelves above it.

Katrina sat on a stool and began to remove her boots, asking me to go outside and call Andre. As I stood on the steps at the entrance, I was overcome by embarrassment since I did not know what to call him. Should I simply call him 'Andre' as Katrina had called him when she spoke to me, or maybe, 'Mr. Andre'? Andre was still standing next to the horse, feeding him a handful of grass. He turned his head to me: "What's the matter, child? Would you like to feed the horse?" I understood what he had said, but I paused for a while. Then I said: "Your wife is calling you."

He smiled good-naturedly at me: "And don't you know her name?" and he beckoned to me.

When I had come to stand near him, he pushed a clump of grass into my hand, which he guided with his own to the horse's mouth.

The animal began to nibble the grass. "See? Like that," he said in Russian. He added a few affectionate words to the horse and then said, "Come, let's go inside, you did say Katrina's waiting for us, didn't you?."

I threw the remaining grass to the horse and followed Andre into the kitchen. A big, high, wooden tub was already standing in the middle of the kitchen floor. Next to it was a large, empty tin drum. Katrina was on her knees in front of the stove, making a fire. When we entered she rose and asked Andre to fetch some water.

When Andre returned with the drum full of water, Katrina helped him to lift it onto the stove. I stood there all the time, not knowing what to do with myself, nor how to behave in the strange house, with these strangers I had met only the day before, whose language and ways were unfamiliar to me. I saw myself as an intruder into their home and lives.

After a few days, when I had already found a common language with them, particularly with Katrina, I confessed that on my first day with them I had been so miserable and helpless that all I wanted was to get away. Katrina smiled her good smile and revealed that she herself had been confused and helpless. "You know, Neoritchka, when you were standing there like a lump in the kitchen, I said to myself: Now what? Now what?" When we finished eating, I cleared the table on my own initiative, placing the pots back in the oven. She smiled, encouraging me: "Good, good."

She put the dishes into a little tin tub, and then helped Andre to take the big drum off the stove. They filled the big tub on the floor. Andre then left the kitchen and Katrina told me to undress and get into the tub. That was the most embarrassing moment for me: How could I undress and stand naked in front of

this stranger? Seeing the miserable look I cast at her, apparently guessing my thoughts, she turned her back. I made the most of the opportunity and swiftly removed my few garments, which I folded and laid beside the tub. While Katrina was putting yet another pot of water on the stove, I immersed myself to the neck in the tub water.

Some of my self-confidence returned to me in the hot water. Katrina came and sat on the stool behind me and began to undo my braids. I dared not turn my head, but sat rubbing the soap between my palms. But the soap did not make any suds. When I felt her fingers slowly parting my hair, I turned my head and said: "I haven't got anything." What I meant was that I did not have lice. When she saw that my hair was, indeed, clean, she breathed in relief, as though a weight had been lifted from her. Katrina washed my hair in the tub water as I sat there. She then rinsed it with clean water, to which she had added a little paraffin, told me to stand up, and wrapped a small, rough towel around my head. I sat down in the water again and I said to myself, "Not so bad." When Katrina had picked up my clothes and gone out, I began thinking about Fritzike and Bettike again. I thought of them sitting together on the mattress, talking about Annike, unaware that I was here in this strange house, as if held in pincers, not knowing what I would be doing tomorrow or the next day. Katrina came back to the kitchen with a bundle of other clothes in her hand. When she had given me a big, coarse-woven towel, she laid a floral dress on the arm of the bench. It had long, puffed sleeves, a gathered waist and looked too big for me. On the stool next to me, she placed a pair of cotton panties and a petticote with straps. She stood looking measuringly at me as I dried my body. The panties were also too big, but Katrina came to my aid, pulling

the tape at the waist until they fitted me. The petticote was a little wide and the straps slid off my narrow shoulders. But the dress, to our great surprise, rested on me as though it had been made to measure.

A tear appeared at the corner of Katrina's eye. I understood that this had been her daughter Neora's dress. She smoothed the material with her fingers. At that moment, Andre came into the kitchen. He looked at me in astonishement; however, unlike Katrina, a broad smile came to his face: "Neoritchka! What do you say, Katrina? Shall we call her Neoritchka?" And to me, "Do you agree, Annike?" If only the ground would open and swallow me, I thought, but I nodded in agreement.

That night, after a day of perplexity and soul-searching and a sense of oppression, I lay down to sleep on a sheepskin on the big chest in the kitchen. Katrina brought me a pillow in a clean white pillowslip and covered me with a light woollen blanket. She stood the lamp on the table, Andre turned down the flame, and they left the room. I lay awake for a long time after that, musing about the long, troubled day. I looked down at the floor to see how high I was lying and for a moment I thought of getting down to lie on the floor, to which I had grown accustomed. But I felt my eyelids closing, and I fell asleep.

I dreamed I was lying on a steep mountain above an abyss and I was afraid, in my sleep, to turn over on my side. When I opened my eyes in the morning, I was still under the influence of the dream. I looked at the floor and smiled to myself: the distance to the floor was much less than it had seemed the night before. I saw Katrina fussing at the stove and I remembered I was in some house or other, and the embarrassment I had felt the previous night was still with me. When Katrina turned to face me I said in an

embarrassed voice: "Good morning," and immediately flung off the blanket in order to get up. But Katrina indicated that I should stay where I was. Her face, which had been moved, even upset, the day before looked serene this morning and there was even a little smile on her lips.

She leaned over me and smoothed the blanket: "How did you sleep Anna?" I quickly answered, in Russian: "Good, very good." She smiled again, and in sign language told me that I should help myself to food from the pot. She then pointed to the white enamel basin on the stool, and the mug hanging above it, showing me by gestures that I was to wash my hands and face. "Andre has already gone out, and I'm waiting for the wagon to Bershat.

I knew she had to go to work at the school. She was wearing the white blouse and the long gathered skirt, and she had her boots on. Her brown leather case, which she had prepared the night before, was on the chair. I heard a woman calling her name: "In a moment," said Katrina, going out and returning with a pair of black, lace-up shoes with a pair of white stockings in them. She held them up to me and then put them on the floor beside me. "For you, Anna. See you this afternoon." When the wagon drove away I got down from the chest, put on the dress and went outside in my bare feet. I was greeted by the fresh, pure air of May. Standing at the top of the stairs in front of the house, I looked around to see the house and the village by the light of day.

The sun was shining in all its glory amidst white clouds that were scattered across the blue sky. I breathed deeply, taking pleasure in its beauty. The house was at the edge of the village, and overlooked the meadow where several cows were already out to graze. There were some tall trees on one side, among which narrow winding paths led to a few houses standing in yards enclosed by

low wooden fences.

I went into the yard. There was one big nut tree in bloom next to the shed. The ground was warm and I walked up to the fence behind the shed, where a little gate stood open. There, behind the house, I saw an extensive orchard of fruit trees. I hesitated about going in. I was afraid it might not belong to the house. My feet sank into the tall, green grass, which was still damp; beads of dew glistened on the leaves of the trees. The orchard contained mainly cherry trees in full bloom, and their fragrance was intoxicating.

Bemused, enchanted, I stood silently listening to the chirping of some birds flitting among the branches. Memories of my childhood came to mind. The garden in which we used to play and from which we could watch the red fire-engines. Other memories arose, the town hall in Suceava, and the stables of death. And the Bershat ghetto where Fritzike, Bettike and Aunt Rachel remained, and Fania, and all the starving children roving the streets. Uncle Moshe's words echoed in my ears: "Better loneliness in the lap of nature than the company of sinful people shouting and screeching."

I went back to the house, where I saw Neora's shoes in the kitchen. Neora, whose home this really was, whom I had never known. The shoes stood beckoning to me. I had a sneaking fear that the parents would not be able to bear the sorrow of seeing me take Neora's place, that they would not have the strength to accept me and keep me in their house as a substitute for their real daughter.

Only when Katrina returned early in the afternoon did my fears abate a little. I was encouraged when she said in a bossy, motherly tone of voice: "Well, you've had enough rest, child". When she saw the dishes from the night before, now washed, and the

clean floor and the tidied table, she smiled at me, pleased: "Good girl, good girl." She put her arm around my waist and I smiled at her.

There were many more days of painful loneliness after that. My longing for Fritzike mounted when, twenty days after I had come to them, they set out for church one Sunday, taking provisions for Fritzike, Bettike and Aunt Rachel and asked me to stay home and not leave the house. I walked around lonely until afternoon, waiting for their return. When they came, they brought me a note from Fritzike: "We're getting along alright, it was good to hear from you. Your loving and very longing sister." Fritzike had always excelled at writing compositions -- yet she had written only two brief sentences? I could not contain myself, and burst into tears. Katrina put her arm about my shoulders, drawing me into their room. There she seated me on the edge of their big, wide bed. I had changed its sheets that same morning, covering it with the rug. Katrina sat next to me and said: "Cry, cry." And she put her face into her hands and began to cry, too. I wept out my longing, and I knew that Katrina's tears were for her daughter.

Katrina began to devote her spare time to me every day, teaching me to read and write Russian. She was amazed at my progress, my swift understanding, as she said, and in a short time I was able to put aside my own language and our communication became direct. I still had not left the house, and my whole world was concentrated in the house and garden, to which I went every morning to hear the joyful singing of the ever-increasing number of birds.

Katrina gave me more of Neora's clothes, which I stored in a wooden chest Andre had given me and placed next to the chest on which I slept. I also remained indoors on the evenings when the

members of the kolkhoz would gather in Andre's yard. I could hear their voices, their loud laughter and the mighty singing that concluded the meeting in the late hours. Katrina worked hard, coming in and out with her hands full of plates loaded with 'piroushki' stuffed with potato and sweet pumpkin which I helped her to prepare. I also came to know a contrary side to Andre.

Every day on coming home, Andre would stop in the yard to lead his horse to the shed, talking tenderly and affectionately to it. And while still on the stairs, he would call out to us in his deep voice: "So? What's new at home, women?" And to me: "Well, child, can my wife teach Russian?" And when Katrina would sing my praises, he would say good-naturedly: "Let the girl speak, woman!" After I had answered all his questions, he would say, to appease Katrina: "Well, good, very good. After all, my lass comes from Moscow!"

Andre took pride in her being from Moscow. Katrina herself used to tell me a lot about Moscow the Capital, and during the time I was with them she told me about her childhood, growing up and studies in Moscow. She had also met Andre, "her Mouzik" in Moscow. "He's a good man, my Andre." Andre always called her by pet-names, such as: "My Katichka", "My sun", and he would sometimes hug her from behind, lifting her and playing the fool with her. Once, when she was reading to me from a chapter in Gorky's "The Mother", she had said in a sorrowful voice: "He tries to distract me," and she did not elaborate. When she said, "He also loved her dearly," I knew she meant their daughter Neora. "He tries to cover up and hide his pain", she sighed. When he came home, his mood was detectable in his voice. Thus, in a merry voice, he told her once that he and the villagers (he was their leader) had managed to get rid of the Roumanian officer in charge

of the village, because this officer "endangered the lives of the entire village". The officer claimed that he knew the identity of the executed girl, and of the two boys who had been executed with her. Therefore, the villagers had made an effort to get rid of him -- and they had succeeded. "A replacement is being sent this week. This time it'll be one of ours," and he turned to me, his voice ringing, "and you, my girl, will be free to fly around the village as much as you like, freely, and next Sunday we'll take you to Bershat with us."

That was one side of Andre.But on the nights of the meetings, when he and his comrades would drink quantities of vodka, his mood would be wild, and he would be foul-mouthed as he stumbled up the stairs. On these occasions Katrina would stay with me in the kitchen and she would unroll her mattress on the bench. By the next day Andre would remember nothing at all of the night before and would come into the kitchen, asking wonderingly: "What are you doing here, woman, did you spend the night here?"

On Saturday morning, the day before I was to go to Bershat, I went as usual into the garden, where most of the fruit trees were leafing, with some fruit already ripened. I filled a basin with bunches of juicy garden blueberries which grew on the bushes along the fence. I turned towards the house with my full basin.

In the yard, I met a girl who was about to mount the steps. She came towards me, greeting me warmly. "Are you Anna?" I nodded, and she introduced herself as Lucia. "Katrina asked me to come over and see you. Today is our Sabbath, so I've come to get acquainted."

At first I did not know what she meant when she said "Today is our Sabbath." I had forgotten the Sabbath day since coming to live in the village. But Lucia was sure I had understood her

perfectly, "I heard that you also keep the sabbath." We went indoors and sat on my chest. I offered her some blueberries and sat next to her, happy that I had finally found someone of my own age to talk to. It was the first step out of my loneliness. Till then I had not met any Russian girls my age, whose background was different than mine.

Though Lucia seemed to be about my age she was already twenty, four years older than me, according to what she told me. She was short and stocky. Her complexion was dark and her hair was smooth and black and plaited into two braids, which she wound about her head, as Katrina had taught me to do, too.

A lively conversation developed between us, "Very good, very good, you speak Russian very well". She told me she had known about me from the day I came, but Katrina had told her I was not a Russian speaker, to her amazement. Lucia stayed with me till katrina returned from school. She told me a lot about Neora and about Katrina and Andre's two sons, whom I knew from the photographs on the dresser in Katrina and Andre's room; Coustia -- the eldest, then about twenty-five, and Ivan -- the younger, twenty-three. For about three years now, they had been somewhere at the front with the Red Army. Katrina had told me little about them. All I knew was that Coustia was 22 when he had been mobilised, and Ivan 20. In the photographs they both looked very handsome, fair like Andre, with quiffs above their foreheads. They were both in open-necked Russian shirts, wide-trousers and boots.

Lucia told me she and Coustia were going together and that he had promised to marry her when he returned from the war. "And even though we're a Sobotnik family, Katrina and Andre are very friendly with us."

When Katrina came home and found Lucia there, she asked in

surprise; "What have you done to Anna to make her face shine like that?" That day I felt I belonged to the house, for the first time, thanks to Lucia's visit. In time, she was to become my closest friend.

I was also very encouraged by my visit to Fritzike when I found everyone in relatively good spirits, and she told me that she and Aunt Rachel were able to provide a little food for themselves for mine, which was plentiful and good, and for the meagre nourishment of the orphans who continued to beg from door to door in the ghetto. Katrina and Andre had brought me in the early morning, and had carried on to church. I remained with my sister and Bettike and my aunt until the afternoon. I was sorry not to have found Fania as well, but Fritzike told me she had left very early for the village and would not return until the evening.

Since the officer at the local Military Administration had been changed, I was free to go out to my heart's content, as Andre had promised. Fantonel, the new officer, was on close terms with Andre and even visited the house now and then. At these times, I would be in Andre and Katrina's room, or at Lucia's house. Fantonel spoke to Andre and his comrades in Russian, and they behaved like friends in every respect.

I began to go to Bershad every week, and Katrina once asked me to accompany them to church. Seeing me hesitate, she said: "Please, Anna, one can't live like grass in a field; a person needs somewhere to pray to God," and she added, "If you don't go to your synagogue, you can at least find God in our church." Her words weren't very convincing. However, I joined them and began going to church. Later, I was not sure whether it was Katrina or the church that influenced me, but after a few visits I began to be interested. I found the priest's sermons in beautiful, soft

Russian interesting, and I swallowed every word hungrily. He spoke a lot about the relationship between man and man, often quoting from the bible. He repeatedly referred to "Love thy neighbour as thyself". The God of my grandfather, of my parents, my own God, was his God, too. As time passed I began to compare him to the cantor who used to sing at our Temple. I told Lucia that I went to church for Katrina and Andre's sake. Lucia and her friends, whom I met later, went to the little village church, but only rarely. Lucia's opinion of God and the church differed from Katrina's. She claimed that if there was a God, he was everywhere. "Here we are, standing in the yard, and he must be here; God can also be in the stable. I thought she was denying God's existence. Had I told her about the stable of death, for example, could she have claimed that God was there? In my opinion God certainly was not there.

One day in church, a man I had not seen before had approached Andre. Andre had behaved towards him in a different way, rising to greet him: "How are you, Petiy?" Later, he had pointed at me and introduced me as his daughter Neora. As we were leaving, I asked: "Who's that man?" "You've nothing to worry about, Neoritchka, he knows about you and who you are." After a moment: "That man also knew our Neora." Eventually, I met Petiy again, and under different circumstances. He was the commander of a group of partisans, and had been the immediate superior of Neora and her comrades.

On those Sundays I also enjoyed spending an hour and more in Fritzi's company before going with Katrina and Andre to church.

I set out to get acquainted with my surroundings for the first time with Lucia. She led me along the path that wound among the trees which had looked so attractive and picturesque from the top of the steps. The path led to Lucia's house, which I began to

visit. Her elderly parents received me well and showed an interest in my origins and faith, and told me about their own faith. I puzzled them. Once they even asked, "What language did your parents speak at home?" And when I answered, "German", they had looked at me in astonishment, and the father spat a few times on either side of himself. "Don't you know?" Lucia asked and went on to explain her father's behaviour. "The Germans are the lowest nation in the world, worse than pigs". I knew a lot more than Lucia did about the Germans, but I did not respond.

I also ran with Lucia in the meadow, which was close to the house although it had seemed so far in the first few days. Lucia introduced me to most of her friends, who were her age. I strolled about the village with her, and one evening she took me to the outskirts, next to the river, where all the young people would get together on Sundays.

I became acquainted with the joys of the young peoples' life, that evening, and with their happy, tender Russian songs. I also met Vassya, who accompanied the singing on the accordion, and Yuri, who danced the Kazachiok marvellously. Vassya was a Russian boy of eighteen, tall and dynamic, with a golden quiff. He conquered my heart with the wonderful way he played the big accordion on his chest. I met him again one evening when he came with his comrades from the kolkhoz to a 'Vecerinca'party in Andre's yard. All the kolkhoz members were there with their wives to have some fun celebrating the watermelon harvest. Lucia and I helped Katrina serve the many dishes, some of which had been brought by the village women. The Kazachiok was danced, to Vassya's rythm, by older men who were as light-footed as though dancing on air, just like young Yuri, the marvelous dancer.

I came across Vassya several times after that evening while

running with Lucia in the meadow. He was there tending the villagers' cows. His family also belonged to the Sobotnik community. I somehow found a common language with Vassya, and we would often go out to the meadow with Lucia, who tended her family's three cows. Vassya and Lucia taught me the Russian songs I loved. Lucia had a clear, high soprano which could soar amazingly above Vassya's and my voice together.

Later, I also met Vassya's parents, who told me, to my great surprise, that a member of their family had gone to Palestine, where he had established a family and changed his name to Avner. They had exchanged letters with him till the war broke out.

I participated with Lucia and Vassya in many more evenings of entertainment arranged by the village youngsters, usually in the yards of the young people, who took turns as hosts. With Andre and Katrina's encouragement, I also had one such evening in the yard, and the two of them joined in the fun. It was the first time I had ever seen Andre take an accordion and play it. His playing was terrific and the applause was quick in coming. I found out that evening that there was an accordion in the house, but that Andre had not touched it since the tragedy. Vassya began calling on us and tried to teach me to play the accordion, but Andre took it from him and started to teach me there and then; a short time afterwards, when I was able to play on my own, everybody said it was because of him, and only Katrina praised my quickness, though I owed much to those piano lessons I had received from Aunt Eva as a child.

Lucia and Vassya differed in their outlook and aspirations, and I differed from both of them. Vassya dreamed of joining the Red Army to fight the German enemy or, at least, to join the partisans and he used to say: "I'll straighten out the world!"

Neither of them had the faintest idea about the Jewish People and their suffering. Their hearts' desire was to defeat "the German pig" in the war. Nevertheless, I found more understanding in Vassya during the conversations we had under the nut tree in the yard. He was interested in where I came from and how I had come to them. His great interest and curiosity encouraged me to tell him about the periods before and after the deportation. Vassya reacted in disbelief when I told him how we had been expelled. Once, in the meadow, when we were walking behind the cows he suddenly stopped, and asked in amazement: "Tell me, Neora," and he pointed at the cows with feeling, "was that how they moved you around?" I felt a momentary embarrassment, and blushed. When I recovered, I answered him with a forced smile: "No, Vassya, we didn't walk like that." But he did not let up, and then I said: "You're leading them to feed in the meadow," and when I saw he did not know what I meant, I added: "They were leading us to the slaughter," and I smiled to hide my embarrassment.

It then penetrated my mind why I had not told Lucia, or even Katrina, the details of the deportation, leaving them only with the faint impression they had of the Bershat ghetto. Vassya noticed my embarrassment, and to put me at ease, asked: "Are all your girls as pretty as you?" He grinned at me, and I did not want to go on and tell him how I had looked in the stables and about the long, twisted road I had travelled until my own likeness returned to me. We spoke much more about the nature of the war, and he always had the last word. I liked Vassya and during the four months that we exchanged confidences, I regarded him as part of a pleasant period in my life.

I also liked Katrina very much, and admired her eruditon and her noble nature; she sometimes reminded me very much of Mother,

even though I never tried to compare them, because I reserved the most sacred place of my being for my mother. Katrina also made no comparisons between me and her daughter Neora, and our relationship was one of mutual affection. I also liked Andre, for his simplicity and good-heartedness.

During my last visit to my sister, she had told me that the people from the Community Centre had come and told them that they were soon going to move all the orphans from Transnestria to Bucharest, and from there to Palestine. I was excited to hear this, but after brief consideration, I said to her: "It can't be, the war's still in full force." But Fritzi insisted, and revealed that she had put her name down as well as mine.

I did not believe this rumour, and I told Katrina and Andre nothing at all. I tried to raise the subject only a few days later, when we were discussing the war. But they did not take the hint and their sole hope was that the war would end and that peace would return to their country. They did not sense how remote I was from that war of theirs, and that peace. For me, neither war nor peace existed. For me, only those who had sent us to the stable of death existed, and they had to get us out of there. Would that ever happen? And if so, would the wheel not continue to rotate and in another generation, or less, would they not find reason again to march us into the arms of death? A week later, it was the end of November, we were on our way to church and I stopped off to see my sister, as usual. I found her and Bettike crying because I had come late. "We're going to Roumania and the wagons are ready to leave." They had been waiting for me! Aunt Rachel was also upset: "If you want to join them, you have to hurry so as not to be late!"

I struggled in despair with my conscience, with myself. But

when my sister and Bettike again pleaded with me, I hastily took off the coat, hat and boots I was wearing and made a bundle of them, managing, too, to write a parting letter to Andre and Katrina. I thanked them for all they had done for me and for being like loving parents to me in every way. I apologised for leaving them in such haste. Then I joined my sister and Bettike, and my Aunt Rachel and Fania accompanied us to the Community centre.

* * *

CHAPTER NO 14

WE LEAVE FOR BALTA

On our way to the Centre we met other children headed in the same direction. There was a different atmosphere in the Ghetto today. Everyone was hoping that the departure of the orphans meant that they would soon be going home, even though nobody knew who or what had brought about the change, or why, but it was a fact that a change had occurred and everyone was excited. A great crowd of grown-ups had gathered in the square in front of the Centre, both to see the orphans on their way and out of curiosity. There were babies among the children, brought by their mothers who had decided to send them away in the hope that they would be saved. They had listed them as being orphaned of both parents, because 'by law' only such children were eligible to leave. Someone called through a tin loudspeaker for everyone to clear the square and leave room for the orphans to assemble around the wagons. We parted from Aunt Rachel and Fania before they left the square. We promised to keep in touch with them and Aunt Rachel asked us to give her love to Father and Sammy. I felt as if I was in a dream. We promised to do as she asked, but I had the feeling that I was deceiving her, since it could not be, it simply could not be true that we would get out of here at all. Father, Sammy, Bucharest were all on another, inaccessible planet, as far as I was concerned. A man with a list in his hand climbed onto one of the wagons and, through the same loudspeaker, read out the names of the children on his list. When he called my name -- Annie Faust -- I was momentarily confused and did not answer. Fritzi quickly answered for me: "Here." And when the man called her name, she

nudged me to answer, and I shouted: "Here, here!" He called Bettike's name and when he had read the whole long list of children's names he made a short speech: "I am very happy that you will soon have a new home, children". A murmur ran through the children: "What new home? We haven't any home at all." But he continued, "A new home to live in, with the aid of the Rumanian authorities a new orphanage has been established for you to stay in until you go back to Rumania. Representatives of the Jewish Community are waiting for you in Bucharest, and they will look after you." He went on to praise the Rumanian government for their concern about us. I thought to myself: The same government that was so concerned to help the Germans drive us out of our homes, to murder our loved ones, to make orphans of us, leaving us homeless and without minimal means of existence. A girl who looked about my age seemed to guess my thoughts, and she said to a lad standing next to her: "First they took care to turn us into orphans..."

The 'Speaker' then directed us into the Centre: "Go in, you'll get a hot meal before you leave and some food for the first day of the journey, and you'll be given more food on the way." The children began to scuffle and quarrel at the entrance to the hall. We managed to get inside, too. About fifty or sixty children pushed over to a big table standing against the wall, where two women stood holding big ladles. Each child received a mug of corn porridge from a giagantic urn on the table, as well as two slices of bread wrapped in newspaper: "The bread's meant for the journey, children!" Some twenty children dressed in rags, barefoot, or with their swollen feet wrapped in rags, waited with us next to the wagon that was to take us to the orphanage at Balta in the O district. We were told that the journey would

take three days. It was hard to tell how old these children were. They had the faces of old people, and the tiny bodies of 9-10 year olds, but according to the man with the list, this was the older children's wagon. The first wagon was completely full and he called to his companion to get us into ours. The man began putting us in, one by one: "Move up, children, move up, there has to be room for everyone!" Fritizi, Bettike and I were among the last to get in. There was no room stand and we sank onto the pile of children jammed in to the last inch. Once again, we folded our legs beneath us; my body sank down. Bettike found a place by me, half sitting on my knees. Fritzi was on one side of me, her body wrapped around mine, while on the other side a girl sat with her back to me, her legs under her and her big, torn shoes digging into my ribs. Her cropped black hair was full of live lice and clusters of nits.

The little children were now being loaded onto the third wagon. Some were wrapped in blankets, and their mothers clasped them to their hearts, before placing them in the wagon. As each child was lifted to the wagon, the mother was left with her empty arms stretched out as though she was extending her protection until the very last moment of separation. One mother forcibly seated her little child, who sobbed and cried out: "Mamma, Mamma," reaching out to her with both his little arms. She freed herself from him and whispered: "Be saved, child, be saved!" and she ran away with her face in her hands. One of the people from the Centre gave the signal that the wagons were ready to leave. Suddenly, a man came running and shouting: "Wait, wait a minute!" His voice was alarmed, he ran to the first wagon and shouted loudly: "Is there anyone here by the name of Neora or Anna Faust?" At first I did not register my name, only when he repeated it several times

did I stand up and shout: "Yes, yes, here I am!" The man came over to me: "Get down quickly, someone's come to say goodbye to you! Don't worry, the wagon will wait." I knew at once that this was Katrina or Andre. And when I saw the two of them standing some distance from the wagon, in the crowd of grown-ups, talking to the man with the list, my heart began to pound and I ran to them. They had also seen me and, breaking away from the man they were talking to, they came towards me. Katrina took me in her arms and I pressed against her, we stood embracing for a moment, not speaking. But Andre said: "Its alright, Neora, its alright. We knew that you would leave us one day." Katrina then let me go: "Neoritchka, we spoke to the man in charge, he told us that you're going to Balta and they don't know yet when you'll be able to go to Bucharest." I knew they meant that I should stay behind, and I did not know how to tell them that I did not want to miss this chance, but I kept quiet. Then Andre said: "Neoritchka, stay with us, we'll keep in touch with the man in charge." And Katrina added that the Manager had told her that the date of departure for Bucharest was unknown. Andre was again trying to explain that the journey to Roumania could be delayed for a year or even longer, when the man from the Centre interrupted us, telling me to hurry up because the wagon was being delayed because of me. Katrina pleadingly tugged at his arm: "Won't you be able to tell us a day or two before the train leaves Balta for Roumania?" "Neoritchka, stay with us," she pleaded. "We'll bring her to the train ourselves," she said to the man. Her pleading voice touched me to the core and made my parting from them even more difficult. The man from the Centre was also upset: "I'm very sorry, but the train from Balta to Bucharest could leave in a week, or a month or two, we have no way of knowing in advance. They'll notify us or the

children an hour or two before they leave." Despairingly, Katrina took the bundle Andre was holding and said: "Get dressed." She took out the boots: "Take off your shoes," and they hurriedly helped me to put on the boots and the padded jacket. "I'll pass on the shoes to Aunt Rachel," said Katrina and Andre took two ten rouble notes from his pocket and pushed them into my hand: "This is all I have on me, maybe it'll be of some use to you." I parted from them quickly. But they followed me to the wagon, and at the very last moment Katrina asked the man from the Centre for a slip of paper and his pencil, and she wrote a few words and the address of a family friend who lived in Balta, as she said, and then she folded the paper and pushed it into the pocket of my jacket. "He's a good friend of ours and if you need help, turn to him." I kissed Katrina and Andre again and got into the wagon. When it moved off, Katrina took the white scarf from her head and threw it to me, crying in Russian: "Be well, Neoritchka!"

On a wintry day of grey skies in the month of November, 1942, exactly one year after we had been expelled from our houses, we left the Bershat ghetto. We passed the church, at the other end of the ghetto, from which the last of the Sunday worshippers were just emerging. Most of the women had wrapped their heads in big woollen scarves and wore coats or padded jackets. The men also wore padded jackets, boots, and caps with ear flaps. When they saw the wagons passing by, they craned their necks inquisitively. They halted and looked at us. I cast a last look at the church, with mixed feelings. The slow-moving wagons had left the town and were on the uneven, muddy highway. The wheels sprayed the thick mud in all directions.

Although there was frost in the air of that morning in early winter, we were not aware of it owing to the crowded conditions in

the wagon. But when the wind began blowing more strongly, I took the blanket folded under me and spread it over us. The girl with the cropped head pushed herself under our blanket, and so did a boy sitting behind me. Afterwards, other blankets were unfolded and they covered most of the children.

Under the blanket, I became acquainted with a girl who said she had turned 17 in May, although I had been certain, because of her tiny body, that she was no more than 10, or 12 at most. Her name was Freda, and she told me during the journey that they had been expelled from Czernowitz, and that her father, her sister, who was three years older than she, and her little brother, who was two years younger than she, had all died on the way and she and her mother had arrived at the stable in A ,
where her mother had died. "And I was left alone..." The boy, Abrasha, like Freda, looked 12 years old at most. He was a native of Raebnitza, in Bessarabia. He had had four older sisters, all of whom, together with their mother, had fallen by the way. Only he and his father had reached the stable in the village of Dobina, where his father had died.

The wagons halted and one of the men accompanying us passed among them: "Whoever needs to do his business, can get out!" Children left the wagons and went towards the field near the road, as the man had directed them. Fritzi, Bettike and I alighted together, taking the blanket with us as a screen. I stood holding the blanket to conceal Fritzi and Betty. I looked around me at a scene I have never forgotten: the children were dotted about on the open field, their bottoms exposed to the biting wind. The little ones in the last wagon also climbed down and did their business next to the wagon, on the road.

The girl who had stood next to me and reacted to the

speaker's words about the "enlightened Roumanian government" now also pushed in under our blanket, as did the boy she had addressed then. She seemed about the same age as me. ""Sixteen," she whispered confidentially, and then mockingly: "They told me I was 13 at the centre." And I sensed her mocking smile under the blanket. "My brother," said she, hugging the boy beside her, "is 14, of course, according to the wishes of Their Excellencies the Roumanian rulers, who decided that only 14 year-old orphans are entitled to a home. However, he's 18 already." And I also became acquainted with Tania Shermat and her brother Willy, who were natives of Kishinow in Bessarabia.

In the morning, for the first time, they dished out cold slices of mammaliga, and as we ate it, I said to Fritzi: "That girl looks our age." "She also looks like an intelligent girl who has not lost her biting sense of humour," Fritzi answered. And she was right. I liked Tania and Willy and we had a common language from the first moment.

Just before dark, the wagons stopped again and we again did our business. The field filled once more with bare bottoms and then, as if from a giant tap, the rain came down worse than any downpour I had seen in all my hardships. As we were running desperately back to the wagons our feet sank into mud and water that almost flowed into my boots. Drenched to the bone, we climbed back into the wagons. My cottonwool-padded jacket had absorbed a tremendous amount of water. We were frightened and bewildered, and pulled the blanket over ourselves as a last refuge. The wagon driver cursed loudly as he vainly tried to light the lantern. "Supper", that is, a piece of cold mammeliga, was not served that evening. When the wagon began to move we burrowed beneath the blanket, which was also sopping wet by now and sagged damply and

heavily on top of us. Water above and water below, while the rain continued to rain down on us. We could actually "touch" the darkness under the blanket. Only the swaying of the wagon let us know that we were still on the move. We subsided in the water at the bottom of the wagon and froze.

The rain began to let up only on the third day of the journey and in one of the dry spells, the wagons once more came to a halt. Nobody had the desire to get down, but the driver and the man from the Centre explained that the water had to be drained from the wagons. We alighted with difficulty. Fritzi, Tania and I tried to wring the rainwater from the blanket, then we hung it on the side of the wagon while the driver removed the straw from the bottom and began to mop up the water with a big rag. I took off my padded jacket and attempted, in vain, to wring it dry while I shivered with cold. Back in the wagon, I could feel the chill shaking my whole body, and when they brought the mammeliga I did not have the strength to stretch out my hand and take it. The water had penetrated the third wagon, too, despite the canvas roof they had put over it. The sky began to clear around noon, and a pale sun emerged from the clouds. My teeth continued to chatter, and however much we huddled together, the chill increased. We had stopped talking, and the road to Balta stretched endlessly on. The wagons stopped at noon and our driver got down and began running around the wagon, cursing and grumbling all the while. When we had returned to our places in the wagon in order to be on our way and reach Balta by evening, the skies became grey and as if at the wave of a magic wand the first flakes of snow began to fall on us, ever thicker and faster.

* * *

CHAPTER NO 15

THE ORPHANAGE

It was already dark by the time the wagons entered Balta and faint lights were to be seen in many of the houses. We drove past them till we reached a narrow bridge that led to the ghetto. Only then did our driver remember God, urging on his horses: "Praise the Lord, horses, praise the Lord, we're almost there!" There were many more wagons full of children in front of the local Centre; they had arrived a few minutes before us. Within a short time a great crowd of children had amassed in front of the Centre. A man standing at the entrance of the building was letting the children in, group by group. We stood outside for ages under the covering of snow which had fallen uninterrupted since the afternoon. The children who had gone in ahead of us re-emerged and, accompanied by adults, went away. We were among the last to go inside, into a big hall where we were received by two men and several women. Only one of them spoke Yiddish, which was the language of most of the children. He pointed to a table where two women stood with ladles, dishing out mugs of corn porridge from the massive urn on the table. Afterwards they directed us to the other side of the hall, where we each received a big jute sack. We were told that this was to replace the wet clothes we were wearing. Some of the children took off their clothes at once and wrapped themselves in the sack.

Tania and Willy, Abrasha and Freda, and Fritzi, Bettike and I had already crystallized into a group. We withdrew to a corner in order to hold up the wet blanket to screen one another while we changed into the sack. Just then, we were called to join a woman who introduced herself in Russian as Dora Abramovna, apologising

for not being able to speak Yiddish.

Not far from the Centre was a big, high-windowed house that looked like a school from the outside. Dora Abramovna led us inside. We climbed a few steps and entered a long corridor that led to a big hall. Most of the children who had gone before us were crowded there. They were sitting on the wooden floor, against the walls and under the high, uncovered windows. Some illumination came from two lamps standing in the middle of the floor. When we came inside, they indicated that we, too, should sit on the floor. The grown-ups accompanying us seemed distraught. Dora Abramovna introduced the women standing next to her, naming each in turn: Ida Abramovna, Dora Libovna, and Sofia Umovna. And the two men: Dr. Hochman and Mr. Rubinstein. Dora Abromovna was the spokeswoman: "We'll be your counsellors." Her words were brief and to the point. She pointed to a small room: "You can change your clothes in there. Tonight you'll sleep on the floor, and during the week they'll put bunks in for you."

The children at once began to crowd around the door of the little room. We went into a corner and Abrasha and Willy held the blanket, behind which the five girls concealed themselves. We took off the clothes that were sticking to our skins, and wrapped ourselves in the sacks. Then the boys undressed and put on the sacks.

Dora Abramovna showed us another room, where we could spread out our clothes to dry on the floor. When I was spreading out the padded jacket I remembered with a start the letter and money I had received from Katrina and Andre, and quickly took them out of the pocket. All that was left of the letter, which had been written in pencil on a scrap of paper, were a few damp crumbs and only the money was intact; I hoped I would be able to dry the notes and use

them. When we all looked as if we were in sack uniforms, we found sleeping places on the bare floor. We lay close together, preparing for our first night of sleep with a "roof over our heads". The lamps were left burning in the middle of the floor and Dora Abramovna informed us that she and Ida Abramovna would stay the night with us. "And if anyone needs to do his business, there are some buckets standing there in the corridor, for the purpose." We were more than 100 children, including many little ones, even babies. They lay quietly among us, wrapped in their sacks over their clothes. Slowly, the children began whispering among themselves and in the big hall the whispers sounded like a chorus of ducklings in a meadow.

Deep in the night, after we had finally fallen asleep, there came the sound of powerful kicks against the front door, as well as the screeching of Germans commanding us to open up. Most of the children woke up alarmed. Dora Abramovna and Ida Abramovna also came out of their cubicle in a state of alarm. They stood for a moment helplessly, and when the noise increased, Dora signed to Ida to open the door, ordering us to lie down quietly. At that moment two soldiers of the SS burst in shouting: "Outside! Outside!" Dora Abramovna tried desperately to stand in their way but the one soldier shoved her so hard that she almost fell. The other kept one hand on his revolver in its holster, while he brandished a club in the other. The shouts became more threatening and the children started to flee towards the door, pushing out in a panic. Dora Abramovna stood next to the door shouting in a frightened voice: "Disperse! Disperse!" It was still dark outside and only the white snow, which had been falling since the day before, lightened the gloom a little. We spent the rest of the night in one of the yards where we had found shelter. When it

began to get light and we went into the street, we met a lot of children on their way to the Centre and they told us they had found the bodies of two children. There were many children clustered around the entrance to the Centre, where Dr. Hochman was standing. I was standing and looking around me, when my eyes were drawn to a shrivelled, shaven little girl. She was standing not far from us, clutching a small bundle. Her face was turned to us. Her big blue eyes immediately reminded me of Sima Kupershmidt, my good childhood friend and classmate who had left Radautz in the days of the Russian conquest. I called her name hesitantly. She answered my call with a smile in her surprised eyes. We ran and fell into each other's arms and both of us burst into tears. Then I looked closely at her. She bore scant resemblance to the beautiful little Sima with the blonde hair and the ever-smiling blue eyes.

After the excitement of our meeting -- in such miserable circumstances -- Sima joined our group and stood tensely waiting with us to hear what Dr. Hochman was saying. He told us that the Germans objected to the opening of the Home and negotiations between them and the Roumanians were in progress, without any conclusion as yet. "Whoever among you has somewhere to go, please go, and those who have nowhere to go, stay in the ghetto and you can come to the Centre to sleep." The news stunned all the children and not one of them asked anything or complained. The expression of despair on a child's face is not the same as that on the face of an adult. A voiceless shout of protest makes their blood boil, but fear, which can be seen in their eyes, seems to freeze it. My oft-destroyed world was destroyed once and for all, this time. The loss of Katrina's letter to that saviour , which I so needed at this moment, had turned into a real disaster. There

were no further announcements and we dispersed in silence. Only the smaller children were allowed into the Centre. Scores of children spread out among the houses, trying to find a scrap of bread, but they were turned away empty-handed and, like me, looked for shelter from the fierce cold. I tried to buy something at the ghetto market, with the roubles I had, but I was told "only German marks are OK," and the roubles could be used for another purpose... We were also warned not to go far off, since Gestapo HQ was in one of the nearby streets. So we wandered back and forth along the street until the afternoon. When we grew tired we looked for and found a hiding place in one of the yards and we huddled behind the fence, waiting for evening.

In the evening, we returned to the Centre where we found Dora Abramovna and Dr. Hochman, who let us in. We received a mug of corn porridge and settled down on the floor to sleep. Before she left, Dora Abramovna told us that she had found temporary lodgings for the little ones, with local residents, and that the discussion between the Germans and the Roumanians was still going on and she hoped it would end in our favour, and that the Home would be allowed to exist. "Till then, children, you'll be able to come here only to sleep at night." The lamp went out and we were left in the dark. They both left and locked the door from the outside. Sima lay beside me and told me about the death of her parents, her big brother, and her sisters Rivka and Vicki, all of whom had died somewhere of cold and hunger. But we also talked about those days when we had visited their open house, and the laughter, mischief and happiness of her sisters and brother that had filled it.

The next day I noticed that some of the children we had met the day before had not appeared in the streets. In the evening, when we again gathered for our night's sleep we learned that many

of the children had started back to where they had come from, on foot. In the following days, more children who had left a parent behind, began to go back. On the fourth or fifth night, Dora Abramovna informed us hesitantly that it was possible we would be allowed back in the Home in a few days' time. "Just hold on, children! They're already putting in bunks and we've also got other equipment."

The eighth night in Balta was the same as all the others. Nothing had changed. The door was again locked from the outside. The toilet buckets near the door stood empty. They stood there every night and when the children made their way to them in the dark, and could not find them, they did their business next to them. And it must be said for the staff at the Centre that they cleaned it up in the morning without comment. That night too, a child stumbled over a bucket and the noise shocked us awake. The child who had made the noise began to shout in a scared voice: "Its nothing, its nothing! I only tripped over the bucket." The whispering that then started made it hard to fall asleep, and it went on like that until very late. Most of the children fell asleep again. So did Fritzi, Betty and Sima. I continued to whisper with Tania, until she suddnly sat up. "What's the matter, Tania?" I was startled. "Listen, Annike," she touched me, "I can hear something at the door." I listened and also clearly heard the key being turned in the lock and before I could wake Fritzi lying next to me, I heard the door opening. Bettike began to shout in her sleep "Pappa, Pappa!" I just managed to bend over Fritzi and put my hand over Bettike's mouth when I heard Dora Abramovna's voice whispering to the man standing next to her, "They're asleep already, we'll have to wake them." "They're coming to chase us out again!" It was as if something was torn from my heart. But

Dora Abramovna struck a match and lit the candle held by Mr. Rubinstein from the Centre, and their calm faces were illuminated in the candlelight. She then lit the lamp and the two of them began to move among the children, quietly waking them. "Children," Mr. Rubinstein said when the children were all awake, "The Home is all ready for you and we're not in any danger anymore. Get up quietly and form a line, and follow us. "Despite the emotion in his voice, his words were clear and quiet. The children rose quietly and stood hand in hand. A long chain of children. Dora Abramovna held the first child's hand and everyone followed her out, while Mr. Rubinstein brought up the rear.

There was something different about the building we had been chased from a week earlier. The corridor was illuminated by some lamps hung on the walls. On the left side of the door were two empty brown enamel buckets, and near the wall that faced the door to the big hall there were two more buckets on à stool; these were blue enamel and were full of water. Two big tin mugs hung on the wall above them. The hall was also illuminated by lamps placed on a long table with wooden benches next to it. Bunks covered in thin woolen rugs ran the length of the walls. We were received by Ida Abramovna and Sofia Umovna, and when we had seated ourselves on the floor, out of habit, next to the bunks Ida Abramovna and Sofia Umovna said a few words of greeting and Mr. Rubinstein began to read names from the list in his hand. "If there are any children who want to bunk together, raise your hands." Many of the children raised their hands. My friends and I also asked to be together and we climbed onto the bunk under the window. There were two girls there already. Mr. Rubinstein made no mention of our departure for Roumania, which was, after all, why we had come here. Fritzi and I had also stopped thinking about the remainder of our journey.

because during the time we had wandered around the ghetto, hunger and weariness had displaced thoughts of anything else. With the two girls who had reached the bunk before us, and four others who joined us later, we were twelve altogether. We crowded close until there was no space at all to move in. All the other banks were just as crowded. The boys had been put in another room and some visiting children lay on the floor.

Dora Abramovna, wearily told her colleagues, "We've completed our mission for tonight. And children, like all of us, you have had a hard day. It will soon be dawn so you'd better go to sleep." She put out two of the lamps and turned the third one low. "Good night, see you tomorrow," she said.

Even though the night was almost over and most of the children fell asleep as soon as the women had left, I lay sleepless and full of waking nightmares, which had begun to trouble me. My imagination was polaying tricks. I heard the footsteps of Germans on the staircase, and their savage shouts. And however I tried to ignore my thoughts, they came back to torment me until I finally managed to fall asleep, clamped and trapped between my new friends.

It was full morning by the time I woke up. When Dora Abramovna and Sofia Umovna returned they found us lying as they had left us. Even though it was almost noon already, they wished us good morning and informed us that in a short while we would have breakfast. I made the acquaintance of the two girls lying beside me: Emma Wolowsky, my age, of Soroka in Bessarabia, whose parents had moved to Bucharest when she was a baby. There her brother Abrasha, three years her junior, was born; and Vera Gorewitz, also my age, born in the city of Rabnitza in Bessarabia.

Sofia Umovna asked us to get up, and pointed to the small

room: "You'll find the clothes you put out to dry, in there." There were already many children pecking around the pile of "clothes". I managed to push my way in among them and immediately identified my padded jacket, which had been flung aside. I also found the brown flannel skirt and the green flannel blouse.
I did not find the white woollen scarf Katrina had given me when we parted. Nor the blanket. Fritzi was also disappointed not to find the coat we had bought in Bershad. We found only Bettike's coat.

We returned to sit on our bunks. Two women came in carrying big trays. The smell of mammeliga rose from the trays. The first to go to the table for a small square of mammeliga were the visiting children. Then we got down from our bunks one by one to receive our portion of mammeliga which, although it was already cold, everyone swallowed on the spot. The visitors left during the next two days and the little ones who had arrived with us were given for "adoption" to the older girls.

Having grown accustomed to sleep spoon-fashion, we also learned to sense when the end girl wanted to turn over, and the whole group would have no choice but to turn on the other side at the same time. The girls sleeping at either end of the bunk were deprived of their full share of the rug, which was enough to cover only half their bodies. During the day we sat on the bare boards and wrapped ourselves in the night's bedding. Despite the intense cold in the big, unheated house, Fritzi and I were careful not to fold our legs under ourselves, and so were the rest of our group, whom we had warned against doing so. The boys also sat all day long until quarrels began to break out. These quarrels began during the cold nights, when each of them tried to pull the blanket over himself. When these quarrels increased, Ida Abramovna

was delegated to keep order, and she appointed Samuel Gold deputy. In one of the more serious fights, someone broke two of Max Kurtz' teeth. Little quarrels also broke out among the girls, specially when the two cooks -- fat, smiling Rosa and tall, thin Aliza, who had a high-pitched, shrill voice -- dished out a few extra pieces of mammeliga. Most of the quarrels, which were only verbal, were about the extra pieces of mammeliga. Two sisters in the adjoining bunk always broke into juicy Yiddish curses, which some of us found amusing. In such cases, the counsellors intervened with great patience.

Dora Abramovna and Sofia Umovna worked hard until they finally managed to establish a clinic in the little room. They whitewashed its walls themselves and acquired a bed, a table and two chairs, which they painted white. Some of the boys helped them bring a cupboard and paint that, too. In the weeks that followed we got to know the most of the other girls and also the boys, who began to leave their room and mingle with us. A roster system was introduced for certain chores. Two would take turns to remove the buckets that had filled up during the night. During the day we did our business outdoors, behind the house, in a pit fenced off with some planks. We called this a "field latrine."

Another two helped Rosa and Aliza to bring the mammeliga from the kitchen at the other end of the grounds. And some others helped them clean the kitchen. Samuel had a flair for organisation and, with David Switzernik, he organised the roster. Samuel was 19 already. He was tall, compared to the other boys, and had blond hair and compelling blue eyes. David was sallow-skinned and stocky. He had black hair and eyes and his hot temper earned him the nickname "Gruzini" -- the Georgian. Tania's brother, Willy, also took an active part in what went on in the house, and his

main strength was as peacemaker among the boys; his nickname was "Papa Willy". I admired him for this quality. Although he was thin, his movements were ponderous, but most of the girls liked him no less than they liked Samuel.

Nicknames were becoming commonplace. Abrasha, "our" brother, was physically the weakest of the boys, and timid. One night, we were again visited by two soldiers, Russian-speaking Roumanians, who burst in drunkenly in the middle of the night in search of women. They found Abrasha asleep among the boys, with a cloth around his head, and one of them happily called out: "Here's a girlie!" The soldiers did not manage to harm anyone, however, because Samuel and David threatened to call their officer. The drunk soldiers left at once, but the nickname "Girlie" stuck to Abrasha. Lonya Lederman, fourteen, was tall for his age and had curly blond hair and smiling, intelligent blue eyes. He said that at night he would dream that he was being chased and would escape in a horse-drawn cart. Once, he shouted in his sleep: "Giddyap! Giddyap!" and ever since was called the "Wagon-driver". Max Shpetzirer, also about fourteen, was tall and thin, with a greenish skin, which caused him to become known as "Green Frog". Shaya, fourteen, was plump and had a round, girlish face. His father was a barber, and so he became the children's barber in the Home. He had a high opinion of himself, and flatly refused to take his turn at emptying the night-buckets, therefore he was called "The Prince". Boria Katz, a ginger, freckled seventeen-year-old who walked on his toes, had a sweet tenor and often sang Russian songs which everyone enjoyed, and was thus known as "The Singer."

The counsellors were joined by Fira Yakovna, who was about thirty-five, a native of the city of Belz in Bessarabia and fluent in German and Roumanian. She was the only one of the

counsellors who understood Roumanian, the only language spoken by Menasse, who

was born in Bucharest and spoke only Roumanian. He was seventeen, dark-complexioned and had big, black eyes. He was by nature irritable, suspicious and on guard against being tricked. When he shouted he was like a roaring lion, therefore, he was nicknamed "The Lion". Max Kurtz, fourteen, was pale and thin, a quiet, contained boy who liked to think. He was nicknamed "Broken Teeth". Sofia Umovna, who always found time to sit with us and exchange opinions, became the most liked of the counsellors after Dora Abramovna, whom we loved for her direct involvement in our day to day life, which was very monotonous in the beginning.

Owing to the intense cold brought upon us by the hard winter, which was now at its height, and because of the lack of hygienic conditions, we were again beset by lice, which occupied most of our daylight hours. Although the clinic had begun to function under Dr. Lyuba, who came to us twice a week, the doctor had no means at her disposal to save us from the lice. The room became an isolation ward when illnesses began to appear. Rochele was the first to fall sick -- with a disease they did not know. Seventeen year-old Rochele had come from Bershad with us, together with her five year-old brother, Yossele. Until she fell ill, her nickname was "The Poetess". She often wrote poems in Yiddish and set them to music as she sat on the bunk picking lice from Yossele's head. She would spontaneously begin to compose rhyming lines, and after reciting them to us a few times, she would begin to set them to music with the same spontenaiety, while we repeated them after her. One of her songs became a kind of prayer for us, after a time, which we sang in yearning for our mothers:

I climbed a little hill, nearby,
the day my mother died...
I miss you so, oh Mother of mine!
Oh, Mother, return to your child!
Come to me, but not just for a while,
And if you can't, then hear my cry,
Take me, take me, to your side...

We never saw Rochele again, after they took her to the isolation room. After a few days, when the counsellors began whispering among themselves, the door to the room was opened and we could not see Rochele, and we knew... They had taken her body away during the night. Jennie Stock, Rochele's closest friend, adopted little Yossele.

Good-natured, long-legged Jenny Stock would jump with ease from one bunk to another, making little Yossele laugh. She thus earned the nickname "Gazelle". And someone even composed a song about her long legs. Other girls, emulating Jenny, began adopting small children. I adopted Jenitchke Lintzkaya, aged three, who had a shaven head and a tiny body, and sad, green eyes that did not at all suit her age. I discovered her personal history from a note I found in a dirty bag tied around her tender neck. Her mother had written in a delicate handwriting, before she died: Jenitchke Lintzkaya, born in 1939 in Rabnitza. Mother's name, Tania, aged 25." We assumed that this was her age when she died. The father's name was also recorded: "Grisha, aged 27, who is at the front with the Red Army." There were no details of any other family members. I asked Dora Abramovna how the children had reached us, and she shrugged her shoulders: "That's one of the miracles that happened." Fritzi adopted Kurty, and he also had a bag around his

neck containing his personal details: "Kurty, born 1938, of Czernowitz, his mother's name: Clara, and his father's name: Yaacov. Father's occupation: Banker in Czernowitz." Little Hayuta was adopted by my friend Eva. Hayuta had no bag around her neck. She had been crawling on all fours and was not able to talk when she arrived at the orphanage. Dora Abramovna claimed that the child was in shock, and it was impossible to get a sound from her. She had named her, symbolically, Haya -- 'Alive'. And when she started to walk and say a few isolated words, we gave her the pet name: Hayuta. Tania adopted a boy whose age was estimated at about 5. He also had no bag around his neck. But he spoke fluent Russian and answered to the name Grisha. Although he could not tell us where he came from, we were sure he was born in Bessarabia, where many spoke Russian.

After some two and a half months we went through the most difficult period at the orphanage, one which banished all ambition and hope. During this period we began to fall sick and because of the crowding on the bunks, it was impossible to prevent infection. First to come down with hepatitis was Jenny Stock. She did not get up that morning, and asked her brother Itzhak to take Yossele from her. She also complained of strong stomach pains. That day, Dr. Lyuba paid a visit (we had recently found out that she was an opera singer, and that her doctor husband was at the front, hence her role as our doctor) and moved her to the isolation room. The next day, when Lyuba did not turn up, Jenny came out to get her portion of mammeliga, shocking all of us. The skin on her face and hands was a frightening yellow, and even the pupils of her eyes were that same yellow. Dora Abramovna hastily returned her to the room. That same evening, some of the girls complained of pains in the stomach. Fritzi and I also felt pain in

the upper region of our stomachs. When we woke up the next day, Fritzi got in before me with the cry: "Annike, you're terribly yellow!" I was stunned to hear this and answered: "Fritzike, you're terribly yellow!" Fritzi began to rub her face in panic, trying to feel the colour of her skin, but her hands were also yellow. That week everyone was sick and we all suffered from that awful disease for a fortnight. Apart from Dora Abramovna and Sofia Umovna, who emptied the buckets and washed the floors in the passage in the mornings, the counsellors did not appear during that fortnight, and the two women also brought the mammeliga to the bunks. We received a teaspoon of honey once a week. They were mainly busy with the helpless little ones who never ceased crying. Lyuba did not appear at all for the first week, and when she came for one day during the second week, she gave us a half a tablet, whose function was not clear to us, but which caused us "general" vomiting. David recovered first, and the morning he left the boys' room he said, in his halting Yiddish: "It was nothing, nothing." His dark complexion had returned. More and more children gradually recovered, until all were well. But the colour yellow had become a symbol of torture for us. Only a short while later, yet another colour was to become a symbol of torture for us: the colour red. Tania was first to complain: "My bottom is terribly itchy." Tania was scratching her buttocks all day and complaining. During the night I, too, began to itch in the same sensitive place. Within a few days the itch had spread to become an indescribable nightmare. The pussy sores which appeared intensified the itch maddeningly. We stood on the floor scratching with jute sacks until we drew blood. When we tried to lie down, the cloth stuck to our puss-and-blood-smeared bottoms. Lyuba tried to help us, bringing a yellow ointment and giving each of us a dab of it on the fingertip, with

instructions to rub it on the sores. But it did not help and was not enough to cover the whole area. A few days later, Lyuba brought a deep, red-enamelled tub which she filled with lukewarm water from the kitchen. She sprinkled a few grains of alkali into the water, which changed its colour. We formed a line. I stood behind Vera Gorevitz, quickening the tempo of my scratching to match hers. Suddenly I saw drops of her blood and pus falling to the floor. I called out to her in alarm: "Vera, stop it!" She managed to turn her head to me and then fell down in a faint. I do not know from where Dora Abramovna drew so much strength, nor do I know when she managed to rest, if at all, since she had virtually never left the orphanage during the past few weeks. She laboured constantly, even though she had no means at all. She lifted Vera, turning her head to me and saying in her calm voice: "You go in, Annie," before she carried Vera away. There were a few girls ahead of me, and when I went in Lyuba showed me how to sit in the tub. The touch of the water, cold by now, was soothing and I breathed in relief for a moment. But Lyuba's look reminded me that I had to get up: the line ... After some days of communal dipping in the red water and application of a red ointment which Dora Abramovna brought for us in reasonable quantities, the sores gradually began to disappear.

Nor were we spared an attack of itching between the fingers. This time we soaked our hands in the red water in the red tub, and rubbed in the red ointment, and that is how the colour red became "the colour of redemption" for us. A symbol.

Dora Abramovna informed us that we were soon to have a visit from some women of the Balta Jewish community. It was supposed to be a surprise for us. Because not a soul had visited us until now. Even Dr. Hochman and Mr. Rubinstein had not visited us since our

arrival. But the children were indifferent. The sicknesses and inadequate nutrition had doubtlessly drained their strength and dulled their interest in things that seemed somehow irrelevant to them.

We were served our mammeliga early on the evening of the visit and we all went back to sit on our bunks, as usual. The boys also went quietly to their room. Only Menashe shouted in Roumanian: "What's going on, what's going on? Who's coming to visit us?" Max Kurtz advised him to wait patiently. The difference between Menashe's mighty voice and Max's moderate tone was like the difference between a lion's roar and the bleat of a sheep. They were the only two to mention the visit. The little children were sitting with us and, as usual, they busied themselves picking each others'lice. Jenitchke sat with her head in my lap. When she fell asleep I moved her to the opposite bunk, where the little ones slept. Tania, Fritzi and I covered our legs with my padded jacket. We heard Lyuba's voice calling to the counsellors, who had already gathered in the room: "They've arrived!" But when they came in, Sima whispered, "What? Only two?" But those two visitors looked as if they came from another world. The older woman, tall, portly, was wearing a black suit with a pale blue silk blouse and a gold pin in the shape of a flower in her lapel. She wore a fur hat, a muff and black boots. The younger woman was wearing a grey woollen coat that reached below her knees. Her head was wrapped in a big white woollen scarf which was also wound about her throat, and she wore white woollen gloves and also had black boots. Her cheeks were flushed with the cold. She removed her gloves and blew into her hands. A hush descended on the room and all eyes followed them. They passed down the middle of the room, with the counsellors, saying nothing. Dora Abramovna was the one who smiled

at us. Then they went and sat on the bench. Ida Abramovna called the boys into our room. In no time, tumult reigned. They shoved one another in order to get closer to the visitors. "What do they want?" came Menashe's roar. The older woman addressed us first, speaking Russian, before continuing in Yiddish. She introduced herself as Mrs. Yampoulsky and told us that she had lived in Balta for many years. She introduced the younger woman as her daughter, and Mr. Rubinstein's wife. "Mr. Rubinstein is himself a refugee from Kishinov." "What's she saying, what's she saying?" yelled Menashe in Roumanian. "Quiet," Max calmed him, "she hasn't said a thing yet." Some of the children burst out laughing, which angered Menashe wildly, so that he began cursing in Roumanian. The visitors fell silent and the tumult spread when Samuel tried to remove Menashe from the room. Mrs. Yampoulsky spoke to Menashe in Yiddish, apologising for not being able to speak Roumanian. Samuel translated her words and he calmed down. Mrs. Yampoulska expressed the hope that the end of the war was drawing near and that each one of us would find our way in life. She also promised that she and the women of the community would do whatever they could for us, and that they would soon "send you a heating stove. But, to my regret, you'll only be able to light it in the evenings, because we have a serious wood shortage in the ghetto, too." Little Kurt suddenly burst into tears: "I made pee-pee, I made pee-pee and I'm hungry!" Wetting himself and the pangs of hunger were always associated in his mind. Mrs. Yampoulsky went over to him, keeping a little distance: " What's your name, child?" "Don't you know, I'm Kurt." "Don't cry Kurty. Tomorrow I'll send you another pair of trousers. And you'll try not to make pee-pee in them, won't you?" Kurt stopped crying, and from the other end of the bunk, came Sima's voice: "Lady, lady, Kurt isn't the only one

who needs trousers. Grisha, Lyowa and Jenitchke also need them, all our little ones wet themselves, and their pants never manage to get properly dry on them!" Sima, known for her shyness, was surprised at her own outburst, and immediately fell silent. But she caused an uproar among the children: "We want food!" "We want clothes!" "The lice are eating us up!" Mrs. Yampoulsky was looking for somewhere to sit. The children continued to shout and Dora Abramovna remained silent. Finally, when Mrs. Yampoulsky and her daughter rose to leave, Dora Abramovna made herself heard and all the children immediately fell silent. "Now we'll say goodbye nicely to our guests," she said. The two women exploited the moment of silence: "Dear children, be in good health," Mrs. Yampoulsky said in Yiddish, taking out a handkerchief and dabbing at her eyes. She took her daughter's hand, "Enough, Mummy, let's go already!" said the daughter, and they went. "Its a pity we behaved like that, what will they think of us?" I said to Tania. But Tania mimicked Mrs. Yampoulsky's voice: "Dear Anntchike!" said she in Russian. But then she grew serious: "Annie, I'm not laughing, I'm crying!! Don't you remember that not long ago we also had a mother and father to care for us? We weren't here, then! We were at our school desk, with fat sandwiches in our schoolbags. But then we didn't give a thought to the sandwiches in the schoolbag, only the books, and now, when both of us can think only of the sandwiches, you must agree that not only our thoughts have changed, but so has our behaviour, our whole way of life has changed. So don't blame the children. The background is what creates the thought, Annike." I hugged her, "Tania, you'll end up a philosopher, yet, if we only live so long..."

* * *

CHAPTER NO 16

AFTER THE VISIT

It was my turn to work in the kitchen, with Carolina Fund. We arranged that I would wake her in the morning. I almost did not sleep a wink all night for fear of oversleeping. I was awake before first light, but did not dare move in case I would disturb my friends. I peeped over at the bunk facing mine, and discerning a movement under the rug covering Carolina, I slid to the floor just as Carolina was sliding from under the rug.

We silently left the room. We heard Abrasha calling: "Shaya, be careful to do it into the bucket." I smiled at Carolina: "We weren't mistaken, Shaya always does his business at the same hour every morning". And Carolina cautioned me: "Watch out that we don't drown in the corridor!"

She was right, the brown buckets were full to the top, with puddles around them; we reached our coats on their hooks with some difficulty. The big shoes standing near the door were also flooded and Carolina had trouble putting them on.

It was dark outside. The snow that had piled up during the night was deep and it covered the path to the kitchen. It almost reached our knees. The kitchen was a few metres away, but we were almost frozen when we reached it. The smiling cooks greeted us and helped us remove our shoes. Aliza wiped our feet and rubbed them in her apron until sensation returned to them. They also put my boots and the shoes Carolina had worn next to the stove to dry, and wrapped our feet in dry rags. When we had warmed up a little, and recovered from the night and our walk in the cold, we looked around. The two urns for cooking the mammeliga were already on the stove. The kitchen was relatively clean. "Well, do you think I don't know what you want?" Rosa said to us. "We've left some

mammeliga on the table for you. Eat it warm before you start."

When the water began to boil, the two cooks approached the stove with sticks in their hands. They poured cornmeal into the water, from a little pail, after which they used the sticks to stir it in the big urns. Aliza stirred so fast that it seemed as if she was about to fall into the urn. She had no such fear, however, and sang as she stirred:

"My Motherland is very wide..."

"Quiet, Aliza, the Germans will hear you," Rosa scolded. "Let them hear and burst, the murderers." And to Caroline and me: "You hear, girls, listen to the song, because we're going to make it heard from here to Moscow."

"My Motherland is very wide..."

Carolina and I took four big trays from under the table and lined them up on top of it. The mammeliga was ready and I helped Rosa, while Carolina helped Aliza, to take the urns from the stove and pour the mammeliga into the trays, the steamy warmth and fragrance enveloped us like wine. Rosa gave me a big wooden spoon and told me to smooth the top of the mammeliga. I felt the warmth of the spoon with each motion.The heat also melted the ice at the windowpanes and I could see that it was light outside. I also saw the two bucket-monitors emptying the buckets and pitied them.

When the mammeliga had cooled a little, the cooks stacked the trays and carried them to the house for breakfast. Carolina and I remained alone in the kitchen. Before washinge the urns, we scraped the remaining mammeliga from their sides and ate it. "Delicious," said Carolina. By the time the cooks returned with the empty trays the kitchen was clean.

I heard them coming, cursing the White German, meaning "General Winter". We also cleaned the empty trays they had

brought. We knew this was all the work until preparation of the mammeliga for the evening meal. It was still warm in the kitchen and we did not want to leave. But when we finally started to go, Aliza said, "Wait, maidelach, I've got something else for you. You worked very nicely and you deserve it." She took four boiled potatoes and two slices of bread from a drawer, and ceremoniously offered them to us. Before wrapping them in the piece of newspaper Aliza gave me, I took a healthy bite of the bread.

It was still snowing outside, but the path to the house and to the latrine had been cleared a little by the monitors. When we came to the steps Fritzi, Betty and Sima were waiting for us, as I had waited for them when they were on kitchen duty. We shared the potatoes, and divided the slices of bread between Jennitchke and Kurty.

When we returned to the kitchen in the afternoon, the fire was lit and the urns were on the stove: "What should we do now?" I asked Carolina, and to make myself useful I put two logs on the fire; Rosa jumped up as though bitten by a snake: "What have you done?" She swiftly opened the stove and took out the two logs, extinguishing them in a basin of water. "Look, the stove's full of wood!" Then she immediately tried to console me, "Go maidele, go to Aliza and learn 'My homeland is wide...'"

We went back to the orphanage feeling that the cooks were pleased with us, and also feeling well-fed. I told Fritzi about the day's events, in the evening. "It was very easy." And Fritzi asked; "Its awfully nice there, in the kitchen, isn't it? Its also pleasant to work when its warm." I thought about her words, and found that she was right. "You know, " I said to her, "happy is the person who works in warmth and with a full stomach. In a small

corner of my heart, I try to create the hope that things will really be like that, one day."

During the morning, when the mammeliga was being dished out, two stout men arrived with a heating stove. They stood it in the middle of the girls' room: a high, round, cast-iron stove which they immediately began to install with the assistance of some of the boys. The chisselled away at the wall in order to get the chimney out, then they plastered around it, adjusted it this way and that, and by the time the evening mammeliga was being served, the stove was ready to be lit. Beside it was a big pile of firewood, which the men had brought with the stove. They looked at the children expectantly, and when no reaction came, the one with the smiling, round face tried to stir us up; "Well, children, sing something!" Disappointed when there was still no reaction, he turned to his mate, who had put some twigs into the stove to start a fire: "Borya, light it quickly, maybe the fire will sing us a song!" Boria stood up and said loudly, for us to hear: "Give us a song, Grishka, and I'll hammer out a dance for them." Grishka immediately began singing in a deep tenor, while Borya danced a kezatzka around the stove; with both hands on his hips, he lightly kicked one leg after the other in the air, went down on his knees, and stuck both legs out in front of him. The children, spurred on by the counsellors, began to clap their hands in time to the rythm of the dance. Borya and Grishka remained with us that evening, entertaining us with Russian songs. The children, along with the counsellors, were now carried away by the stirring singing of the two men. After more and more pieces of firewood had been added to the stove, and the warmth spread in the room, I felt my movements becoming freer, and I unfolded my legs, which had been under me all the time. So did all the others on the bunks. The singing went

from strength to strength; it was the first time the sound of Russian songs had been heard in our orphanage, seeping deep into our slumbering souls. Fritzi sat beside me, whispering: "See? I told you. Warmth can do wonders."

The clothes for the little ones also arrived, the next day, as Mrs. Yampoulsky had promised. Dora Abramovna invited several of the girls into the isolation room, and gave each of them a little bundle with the child's name on it. The girls eagerly opened the bundles. In the one marked with Jennitchke's name were flannel pyjamas, a pair of little woollen panties and a pair of shoes, as well as two small squares of chocolate. Fritzi, for Kurty, received a pair of long pants, a short woollen tunic, a pair of underpants and a pair of socks. He, too, had two squares of chocolate. There were similar things in the other bundles. Dora Abramovna then collected everything and put it into the cupboard. "At last, this closet's found a use!" Then, with enjoyment: "Tonight, we'll wash the little ones and dress them in their new clothes." (Which were second-hand).

That very evening, we placed the red tub in front of the flaming stove, and when the boys arrived with the urns full of warm water, we filled the tub. The parcels had also contained a piece of soap redolent of disinfectant.

Kurty was first in the bath-line. We sat with the children in our arms, waiting our turn. Fritzi took Kurty to the tub. When she began to undress him, he wrapped his little arms around himself and shouted: "Nein, nein!" continuing to protect his clothes, which were sticking to him. Fritzi used all sorts of tricks to pursuade him and get him to remove his hands from his clothes. She held up the new pair of trousers, waved them in front of his scared face and said in a calm, pursuasive voice: "Look, Kurty,

these are the new trousers that the Auntie sent you." Kurty immediately let go of himself and stretched his hands towards the trousers Fritzi was holding. When she gave them to him, the little one let Fritzi undress him, while he felt them with his fingers.

The moment he came into contact with the water, the infant again began to shudder and shout: "Nein, nein!" crying as if in danger of drowning, pleading to be saved. Indeed, when had he last been washed by anyone?

Next in line was Grisha. Then Jennitchke. She was in my arms, anxiously keeping an eye on what was going on in the tub. When Fritzi had dressed Kurty and there he was, looking as if he came from another world, I whispered into Jennitchke's ear: "See how beautiful Kurty is?" But she made no response and continued to watch Grisha, who was screaming in the water.

I remembered the chocolate, and changed my method: "Jennitchke, you'll get a piece of chocolate after I take you out of the water." But just then, they took Grisha out of the water, and Jennitchke started crying, till I added warm water from the pot we had put on the stove: "Jennitchke, let me take your clothes off and wash you, and I'll give you a piece of sweet mammeliga." It worked. Jennitchke sat in the tub. She started crying again when I touched her skin with the soap. I remembered that the soap had been unpleasant for me, too, when I first used it, at Aunt Rachel's, and I knew how Jennitchke was feeling. I soaped my hands and carefully smoothed suds on her body. My hands moved over every bone protruding under the taut, thin skin, and I sadly looked at her swollen belly and skinny legs.

After I had taken her from the water and dried her in the same little towel the others had used, I put on her pyjamas. She looked so tired, almost asleep in my arms, when I carried her to

her bunk. I looked at her sleepy face, and wished upon myself to see that little face laughing, or at least smiling. When I put the piece of chocolate into her mouth, she wrinkled her little nose and her eyes gazed in surprise, as if asking: "What's this?" Then she fell asleep.

Something had begun to change since the visit of the women. Dora Abramovna and Sofia Umovna came every day, but the other counsellors used to come only for a few hours. Now, however, they started coming more often and staying later, usually until the fire in the stove went out. One stayed on for night-duty. The children also did not get onto their bunks straight after having their mammeliga, particularly when Sofia Umanova and Fera Yacovna were on duty; we would sit with them on the benches, close to the stove, and the spontaneous singing would go on till late at night. All those songs we had sung before the war, and which had vanished from our memories, now came back to our lips. Borya Katz lifted his voice in Russian songs. "When you sing 'My Volga', I feel as if I'm sailing on its waves," Sofia Umovna once told him.

Ida Abramovna also joined our fun evenings, and we heard stories about 'Mother Russia' from her. She spoke about Russia's poets and writers, speaking with special enthusiasm about Maxim Gorky, emphasising his difficult childhood, despite which he had read a great deal. Ida Abramovna also brought us books which she put on the cupboard. These included Gorky's trilogy. Fritzi once asked her if she compared Gorky's condition as a child to ours.

One evening Ida Abramovna surprised us by telling us that she and her husband had been to Palestine. She spoke of this with longing, too. "It was many, many years ago. We were still young, then. It was in 1926."

I listened open-mouthed, taking the opportunity to ask

questions, which she answered. She told us about Tel Aviv, describing it as "a sandy city, with camels walking around in it." I also asked her about the kibbutz. I used the Hebrew word, 'kibbutz'. The children turned their heads in my direction, and Ida Abramovna asked in surprise: "And where did you get that from, Anna?" I told her I had joined the Hashomer Hatzair youth movement and had heard stories about Palestine and the kibbutzim from my group leader, at which she began to spill everything: stories, names of kibbutzim she now recalled, and, like my teacher Mrs. Torutz, she said: "Palestine is the Jews' country, it's a sun-drenched land, with a blue sea and beaches of hot, yellow sand." She also told us about Jaffa Port, about the Arab inhabitants, "But the houses are built by Jewish builders, and the land is worked by Jewish hands." She told us that she herself had worked as a road-maker, while her husband had worked in the orchards.

After this, we also heard about Palestine from Sofia Umanovna, who told us that when she had been very young, before the war, she had belonged to the underground Zionist movement in her native Odessa. She taught us a Yiddish song:

Come on children, let's go for a hike
We'll make a chain hand-in-hand.
Let's wave the flag of blue and white
In our golden sunny land.
We'll build and we'll plant,
And dance the 'hora' among the flowers
Where all the trees and plants are ours.

The counselling staff was joined by a man who contributed much spiritual enrichment; his name was Dr. Eckhaus. In Czernowitz, where he was born, he had been a university lecturer in astronomy and philosophy. At first, we found him strange

because he used to walk with a stoop and dressed sloppily. His buttonless jacket was permanently open and his wide trousers were held up by a rope. Our attention was mainly drawn to his bald head and his black briefcase, which he was never without, clutching it to his chest with both hands. He began to be strict about our behaviour, and particularly objected to the boys' going out to the ghetto. They resented him for this. Dora Abramovna also knew about their ghetto excursions, but had always turned a blind eye, and never stopped them.

In the beginning, the boys had drifted around the ghetto, then they began to find work in the Roumanian and, mainly, the Italian army bases. Lonya Lederman was the first to disclose where he worked, telling us that Dr. Hochman himself had directed him to the work in the bases. One way or another, many other boys began to join him. They worked as cleaners, in the kitchens, in the yards, and even polished the soldiers' boots -- all for leftovers. Samuel Gold, the oldest, a dental technician by profession, found work with a local dentist, together with his brother Poldi, who was a year older than him and lived in the ghetto. Two of the girls also found work knitting sweaters, and they would sit on their bunks all day, knitting. Yasha Weissman, known as the "Trader" since our first days at the orphanage, was first to establish trade relations with the soldiers. He received articles of clothing and shoes and sold them to the inhabitants of the ghetto. He drew many of the boys into this trade, and they earned a good living. Max Shpetzirer, the 'Green Frog', even managed to bring a tarpaulin from a military truck. He and his friends sat in the area behind the house, cutting the giant tarpaulin into pieces for sale.

Dr. Eckhaus caught them red-handed. He came in with his slow

walk and directly addressed Dora Abramovna. We heard him say to her: "Dora Abramovna, they're doing it again!" "But Dora Abramovna! I have just seen the boys at work!" He repeated, when she did not answer. And then she said, as though whispering a secret: "But they're hungry!"

A few of the girls also went out of the orphanage; girls who were not given anything by any of the boys. Many of the girls had close relatives among the boys. Some, like Eva, Tania and Caroline Fund, had real brothers. We had Abrasha -- our adopted brother. Later David became my adopted brother, too, and he took care of us, bringing whatever he could.

As time passed, there were also loving couples. There were boys who tried to go steady with Fritzi and me, and when we rejected them we were stuck with a nickname: "The Nuns". Even when Fritzi got to know Maniu, who became her steady boyfriend, she was still known as the "Nun". Dr. Eckhaus was aware of this situation as well, and he would invite the girls for a chat with him and Dora Abramovna, in the isolation room.

I was asked in to see Dr. Eckhaus and Dora Abramovna when I returned from the city with one of the girls. She had invited me to come with her to visit her sister, who lived in the ghetto. "My sister will give us some roast meat and potatoes," she had promised. She was one of the three relatively well-dressed girls. I never asked where she got the clothes from. She was also fat, which was something rare in the orphanage.

Only when we reached the ghetto did she let me know that her sister lived outside the ghetto. "What does she do there?" I asked. "She lives there!" she answered simply. I went with her into the city. I finally understood the situation only after our arrival at her sister's well-kept, fine house, when I saw an

officer's uniform on a hanger in the hallway and listened to the exchange between the sisters -- "When will Vassily be back?" "You don't have to worry, he's gone for a week."

The sister received us well, and she even let me have a bath with her sister in a wooden tub. She also gave me a gift of a pair of panties and an old, woollen dress in good condition. The hot meal of roast pork, potatoes and bean soup was very palatable. By the time we got back to the orphanage it was evening, and the mammeliga was being given out. As I entered, I saw Dr. Eckhaus and tried to avoid him, but Fritzi ran towards me holding two portions of mammeliga, calling out in amazement: "Where'd you get that lovely dress?" I motioned her to keep quiet, but Dr. Eckhaus had noticed us. He also gave me a surprised look. Then he said: "Go with your sister and finish eating, then come to the isolation room."

I felt my cheeks flame and the heat spread to my ears. I said to Fritzike, "You eat my mammeliga." She was bewildered, and only consented to eat my portion after I had told where I had been and what I had done: "You must be full." When she had finished eating she asked with a smile: "Would you like me to tell you what speech awaits you in the isolation room?"

Before I went in, I prepared a counter-speech. Dora Abramovna welcomed me kindly and, in a motherly voice, began: "You look so nice in that dress..."

Dr. Eckhaus looked rather put out by Dora Abramovna's presence, and was in no hurry to begin his talk with me. He only motioned me to sit when Dora Abramovna asked me where I had been. There were not enough chairs, and he remained standing, clutching his black briefcase.

When I told them where I had been, Dr. Eckhaus said: "In

future, ask one of the counsellors for permission to go out!" I did not want to look at Dora Abramovna's face, so as not to embarrass her. Dr. Eckhaus added a short speech about girls who try to ease their distress and are drawn to the "shiny buttons". He had more to say, but I answered him: "Dr. Eckhaus, I think I understand your meaning, and there's no need to go on." I also assured them I'd know how to take care of myself. For the first time, I saw him smile in satisfaction, and he looked me in the eye, saying: "Thank you, Annike, I'm happy that you're such a clever girl." Dora Abramovna rose, and gestured that I should follow her out. When we were outside, she merely pinched my cheek and went about her business.

Some children even dared to go beyond the ghetto and beg at Ukrainian doors. Sonia was one of them. When she returned one day, with a sack full of cooked potatoes, she told us that one of the peasant women had asked her if she could knit. She fell silent. "And what did you answer?" She held out her hands, "Look, of course I can't, if I could..." Sonia did not believe that her two crippled hands could carry out any work, certainly not knitting. When she was in the stable in Pichiora , her fingers and toes had frozen and later they had sloughed off. Sonia had come to us without fingers, apart from her two thumbs. As a Bessarabian child, she was fluent in Russian, which is why she had dared go to the village. "Are you prepared to go out with me tomorrow and get some knitting work from that Ukranian woman you spoke to today?" Sonia agreed at once.

We held a meeting of all the girls that night and told them about our discovery. It was obvious that all of them could knit, apart from Sima. Freda sat looking at the two sisters who had their backs to us, knitting. Catching my eye, she said: "Now we

can find out where they get their work from." I thought a lot that night about how to get out and organise things, and what the outcome would be. The following day, straight after the mammeliga, I left with Sonia. The early March weather was still wintery, and I was wearing only a skirt and blouse, with rags bound around my feet. "Is it far?" I asked Sonia from time to time, and she would stop and say, "If you don't want to go on, let's go back." "I'm terribly cold," I apologized. We carried on until we saw the first houses of the village, but then Sonia realized that she did not know which of the houses was the one she had been in the day before. After we had considered what to do, I suggested: "Let's go into the first house we come to." Sonia, who had a good character, agreed. So we went into the house next to which we were standing. When the woman of the house opened the door we asked her if she needed someone to knit for her.

By the way she received us I realized we had come to the right place, for she invited us to come in. She then pointed to a bench and told us to sit down. She asked if we knew how to knit socks; "Yes," I replied. "And where are you from, girls?" We told her that we were from the ghetto orphanage. "Yes, now I know. There are some other girls from there who come to the village for work. Can you also knit sweaters?" she asked. I answered enthusiastically that I could knit both sweaters and socks. And indeed, we had learned knitting in our handcrafts class in elementary school. The woman gave us some pumpkin pie and two full bowls of potato soup, then she brought two balls of thick, coarse white wool and asked us to knit her a pair of socks. I took the wool, and before going out, promised to bring her the socks as soon as I had finished knitting them, not committing myself to a time. When we were beyond the gate, Sonia asked: "Where will you

find knitting needles?" Suddenly the dream seemed to melt away, "I honestly don't know," I said. "Are you prepared to go back and ask if she has any?" Sonia went in and emerged empty-handed. I was disappointed, then suddenly an idea flashed in my mind and I said consolingly to Sonia: "Don't worry, if the two sisters found needles, so will we." We went to a few more houses, and our luck held -- we received wool for two sweaters. It was the same kind of wool: coarse and thick. "And where am I going to get needles from, really?" The problem occupied me the whole way back.

On our return, Fritzi and the rest of the girls pounced on us and began asking: "What must we knit?" and "How much must we knit?" and "How much will we get?" and "Is it worth it?" We sat on the bunk examining the wool. I told them we had nothing with which to knit. For a moment their faces were downcast, and then we began to rack our brains about finding needles. We almost gave up. I decided to go over to the two girls who were sitting with their backs to us and ask them, but Fritzi stopped me. "You'll see, we'll find a way in the end."

When David and Willy returned from the base, we told them about our problem. "Its no problem at all," said David. "Come on, Willy, let's go get them some needles." And they went and dismantled a fence not far from the orphanage. That night, using stones, they cut lengths of metal to the measurements I gave them, using the same stone to sharpen the ends. The very next day we began the job of knitting, which lasted until summer came. Except for a few who preferred to be independent, most of the girls participated. I revealed the source to them and they went out themselves to fetch the wool.

Even Sonia worked at the knitting jobs I brought in; she helped collect the wool and wind it into balls. Sima, who did not

know how to knit, seriously began to learn, and in a few days knew how to cast on and was soon in demand as a fast, excellent knitter

We returned the completed sweaters to the peasant women and received boiled potatoes, bread, and sometimes pies. But the spun wool soon ran out and one of them asked me if we knew how to sew. I said to Tania: "Don't give up! Maybe this time chance or luck will send us someone who knows how to sew." But when we got back and began asking the girls, not one of them knew how to sew. Therefore, we decided to get the raw wool and attempt to spin it between our fingers. At first, we produced a thick, short thread. We pulled it a little more, rolled it between our fingers until it became thin, and then held it tight so that it would not snap; the girls kept discovering new methods for making a long, thin thread. After two days of concentrated work and tireless persistence, we managed to produce enough wool for a small ball. In time, we became adept at spinning and when we brought the finished sweater to the woman, she could not believe her eyes.

We kept on with our spinning and knitting and obtained some coloured wool as well. In addition, we found that we could knit socks for ourselves out of the remnants. The knitting needle industry also flourished. Many of the boys became involved in it until there was nothing left of the fence David and Willy had discovered. Some of the boys learned to knit and joined us, the most talented being Shaya, the "Prince". He managed to knit himself a most colourful pullover from remnants no more than 10 cm long, which he painstakingly collected, knotted together and then knitted into the pullover, which suited him marvelously.

The socks everyone knitted for themselves were of some help against the intense cold during the day. We knitted two pairs of slippers for outdoor wear, to be worn over the socks, in turn, by anyone with business to conduct outside.

The boys, who started out teasing Shaya about his knitting because they regarded this as exclusively female work, even changing his nickname from "Prince" to "Princess", also began to do business with us. In exchange for food they brought us from the military bases, we taught them how to knit and supplied them with wool for socks. We collected all the scraps of wool we could find, in the hope that we would one day have enough to knit sweaters for ourselves, too. It was an exhausting, difficult task. Fritzi tried to pursuade me to exchange the wool for food, but I did not agree. For the first time, an argument developed between us that almost ended in hard feelings. That evening, we stood apart from each other in the line for the slice of mammeliga. "What's happened to you, twins?" asked Sofia Umovna, half-jokingly, "Are you also quarreling now?" "You almost guessed,"said Fritzi, squinting at me in the hope of making up. Suddenly I heard her telling Sofia Umovna about our argument. Sofia smiled at us and whispered secretly: "Don't be such a worrier, Annichke, they're soon going to distribute clothes."

Bruria Haberman, a girl who had been sickly since the days in the stable, where her parents had died, and who occasionally burst into tears and often wrote on scraps of newspaper, was standing behind me and she also heard Sofia Umovna's news. For the first time, she responded aloud: "At long last they've discovered us!" When we returned to our bunk with the mammeliga, Fritzi started talking to me as though nothing had happened between us: "Something tells me that Father and Sammy are still alive." Hope had begun to beat in us again: "If a parcel of clothing has in fact come from Bucharest, it means that the Bucharest Jews have established contact with those who remained in Transnistria.

They really have discovered us at last, and

therefore there's hope that Father and Sammy will discover us, too." "If they're still alive, from what I know of them they aren't sitting around, and they'll find us soon!" That night, Fritzi and I again spoke for hours about Father and about Sammy, reviving the memories, sad thoughts, and longings for good tidings that we had suppressed in fear of the reality. I decided to go to the Centre and remind Dr. Hochman that Fritzi and I had a father and brother and that, as far as we knew, they were in Bucharest, and that we requested him to do something about finding them and notifying them of our existence in the Balta orphanage. In my innocence, I hoped Dr. Hochman would respond to my request.

However, I was again left with nothing. Dr. Hochman asserted that he could not help in any way, since he did not have direct contact with the Bucharest Jewish community. I did not understand then that anything could be impossible and I accused him, unjustly, of lack of interest. "I just want you to know, I"ll never appeal to you again," I said, turning to go.

He called me back, and warned me in an emphatic voice not to appeal to anyone else. "Remember, child, you're in the orphanage as a double orphan, if the authorities get to know of your father's existence, you and your sister are likely to find yourselves on the outside of the orphanage."

His words shocked me so much that I answered on the spot, without much thought: "I don't want to be in the orphanage, and I don't want to be imprisoned in the ghetto; why do we always have to play the game according to the conditions of our enemies?" I remembered Tania's saying: "Take care not to be dependant on your co-religionists either..." Dr. Hochman, a lawyer by profession, smiled: "What conditions are you talking about?" And he tried to show me how naive I was.

"After all, everyone knows, and so do they, that not all the children are thirteen, and if anyone has a mother or father who has lost the right to look after their children, why also deny the existence of that mother or father?"

"As long as we're in their country, their motherland, they can do as they please with us," he answered me flatly. I went back to the orphanage in a dejected mood. Fritzi tried to comfort me: "If Father's still alive, he'll find us."

Without saying why, Dora Abramovna requested that we all remain in the orphanage on the following day. She particularly requested this of the boys. Dora Abramovna only told us later, in the evening, that we were due to be visited by some people from Roumania, "Delegates of the Jewish community over there."

"This time I'll be able to express my distress to them," I thought, "I'll ask them to trace our Father, whatever happens!" The next day, after we had been given our breakfast mammeliga, we all went to sit on our bunks, as always. Sima and Fritzi were energetically knitting the sleeves of a sweater we had promised to finish that day. Moussia Skainsky and I were busy on the fronts of the same sweater and Tania and Carolina were starting a new sweater. Eva was also sitting on our bunk, delousing the rug. She was the only one among us who did not do any work, because of her short-sightedness. She sat bent over the rug, finding the lice in the wool of the rug with difficulty. The three Ackerman sisters, also short-sighted, sat doing nothing. Next to Eva sat the twins, Pnina and Esther , who were four years younger than she, and the two Haberman sisters, Bruria the eldest and Hadassah, aged thirteen. The latter was nicknamed the "Mongolian", because of her large, slanted eyes. Hadassah was the more mischievous and lively of the two sisters and her clowning raised a laugh in the

evenings, around the stove. Dora Abramovna announced that the expected parcel had arrived and that the ladies -- Yampoulsky and Rubinstein -- would come in the evening to help the counsellors distribute the clothing.

The boys did not leave the house that day, for fear of losing their share of the clothing. Their anticipation became the main topic of conversation, and those who had a pair of trousers worthy of hanging on the lower half of their bodies tried to hide them. The only ones who were not excited were Samuel and David, who had an income and obtained their own, minimal clothing. David had become a bit of an enigma to me recently, and I was unable to discover where the clothes came from. Even though we were close, and he called me "sister", I had not succeeded in extracting from him the source of his income.

We received uncommon items of food from David, such as pieces of chocolate, or a slice of yeast cake, "from the Italian soldiers." Jennitchke was his darling and she loved him as much as she loved me. She generally fell asleep in his arms, while he was feeding her with cake or chocolate. The day the clothes were distributed, David was absent. In the afternoon, two men arrived with a big cardboard box. Mrs. Yampoulsky and her daughter, Mrs. Rubinstein, arrived right after them. They went into the isolation room. Dora Abramovna and Ida Abramovna went in with them. Sofia Umanovna stayed in our room."I assume," said Sofia Umanovna, "that they're trying to sort the clothes into boys' and girls' items, and there are most likely some that are only for the little ones." I asked whether there were enough clothes for all the children, and she replied that everyone would get something. Freda gave a sigh of disappointment: "I knew we wouldn't get anything!" "You always see the black side of things," Fritzi said. "If we get

something or not, it won't do much to change our situation!" They began an argument. I tried to soothe them: "It'll save us the worry about what to do with the rags we have."

I was immediately sorry about the irony of my tone. "In any case," I told myself, "my mockery is directed at the lot of us. We're all waiting behind the door to get a pair of underpants and the likes, they have become of great importance in our lives, and the reality they've fobbed onto us against our will has been accepted by us as the norm. And what does our conversation revolve around all the time, if not the damned lice that suck our blood, the mammeliga we eat which is maybe sufficient for a bird. The more daring among us even dream of bread and bean soup!"

Sofia Umanovna cut my thoughts short when she suddenly said in an excited voice: "There, they've finished!" Dora Abramovna was standing in the doorway asking the boys, in her quiet voice, to stand in line in front of the door. "Girls -- later," she said. The only ones who were unexcited were the little ones. Only Kurty ran to the boys to join in, without knowing what was being given. The boys dashed all together to the door, beginning to push one another. Fritzi managed to get hold of Kurty: "Its not mammeliga, Kurty."

Dora Abramovna began calling names from the list in her hand and the boys went in group by group, coming out wildly waving the items they had received. Shaya waved a sweater, his cheeks flushed with excitement and Nathan also came out with a sweater. Abrasha had a shirt and a pair of socks, and Max Kurtz had received a little overcoat. Abraham Wollowsky, last out, held a pair of trousers in his hand.

When the girls' turn came, I was among the first. Fritzi, Tania, Freda, Eva, Rivka, Moussia and Betty were with me. The

clothes were spread on the table, ready for distribution, and the two women -- Yampoulsky and Rubinstein -- were standing at the table. My eye followed a beautiful yellow woollen top, which Rivka received from Mrs. Rubnstein. I received a brown coat. Moussia received a dress, Tania and Eva received a skirt each. Bettike, who was last, received a big pair of half-boots and a pair of woollen socks. Sima and Sonia were among the happy ones to receive underwear. "We're the only ones to come out with valuable possessions!" I seemed to be able to read their thoughts. The clothes distribution ended close to the mammeliga distribution. The women came out together with the last girls. When we lined up for our mammeliga, they stood at the head of the line and wished us to "wear the clothes in good health."

Each of the little ones had received a track-suit or pyjamas, socks and a sweater, which Dora Abramovna put away in the cupboard in the isolation room. When we had received the mammeliga and the two ladies had left with Dora, there was an uproar in the boys' room. Sofia Umanovna and Ida Abramovna, who had stayed with us, went to cope with the noise and yelling coming from the boys. Menashe's voice over-rode everyone's, as he tried to pull on his new trousers, which were several sizes too small. He turned yelling to Cogan to change trousers with him. Cogan was much smaller than Menashe, and he had received a pair that were twice as big as he needed. Shaya's thin voice was heard trying to convince Abrasha to exchange his shirt and socks for the sweater he had received. The verbal confrontation became a fist-fight and Ida Abramovna's voice could be heard over all their voices, when she hurried to their room, until finally, with the help of Samuel and David, who had turned up meanwhile, order was restored.

In our room, too, the girls had begun displaying the clothes they

had received. Just as with the boys, offers of exchange were being made. These "deals" went on for several days. Then it was time for borrowing and lending. Girls going to the ghetto completed their outfits by borrowing items from a few other girls.

Naturally, the clothing problem was not solved. The hygienic conditions worsened and lice continued to plague us. The food problem became pressing now that the knitting work had come to a halt. March brought no benefits. Although the snow had begun to melt, the cold did not slacken during the day, nor did the frost and chill at night. The shortage of wood left us without heating and all that warmed us in this period was the dancing in the evenings: we danced the hora, and in pairs and threesomes, accompanied by our singing, and this constituted the evening activity. I became an expert whistler and accompanied the soloists, of whom the most popular was Borya Katz. Of the girls with good voices, Coca Guttman, Moussia Skainskaya, my sister Fritzi and Sonia Trachtenberg were the best.

Other talents emerged during those evenings, adding to the warm atmosphere. Sonia was the most prominent of these; despite her crippled feet, she amazed us with her ballet dancing, which I accompanied with whistled renditions of the Blue Danube and the Merry Widow. She danced with astonishingly light movements to their rythm. Bettike revealed a great flair for mimickry, mainly portraying the figures who were part our daily life: Dora Abramovna's characteristic Russian 'Good-morning', and if you closed your eyes you would be certain it was Dora herself speaking; the girls picking and squashing lice; the emphatic voice of Ida Abramovna; also in her repertoire were Liza and Rosa, the cooks; me; our principal, Dr. Eckhaus, whom she mimicked expertly. She also gave us Eva and Fira, who were both short-sighted,

delousing the rug.

Hadassa was an excellent joke teller. She made up most of the jokes herself and they suited our reality. These jokes caused loud laughter among the children. It did the heart good to hear and see them laughing like that. The Yampoulsky and Rubinstein ladies came to our evenings, though not very often, and we attempted to display all these talents for them. With their encouragement, we began preparing to put on a show for the ladies of the community, whom we had yet to meet.

The show was ready just before Pesach, which we had not remembered for the past two years, since being driven from our homes. Dr. Eckhaus took upon himself to stage the exodus from Egypt as the central theme. To this end, he invited some of the boys and girls to the isolation room, to test them and prepare them for the 'main roles'.

Among the girls were Tania, Moussia, Fritzi and myself. Tania mocked any attempt to shake us out of our emotional distress and raise our moral, however slightly. She dubbed our benefactors "Philanthropists in Trouble": "Take a good look around you, Annike, take a look at yourself, at me. Do we look like actors who can please an audience, those ladies, to rouse their pity?"

The next morning, after mammeliga, which had become a measure of time for us, Dr. Eckhaus, clasping his black briefcase, approached me and mentioned that I was expected in the isolation room. I followed him almost immediately. I will never regret that meeting, which led to others from which I drew the encouragement I needed so much. From him I also learned and heard things I had not managed to learn from Professor Stein, my religion teacher at secondary school. That man, whom I, like everyone else, had regarded as unstable and eccentric, became someone close to me, a

friend.

When I went in, he greeted me with "Good day," as if this was the first time he had seen me; I was surprised to find him seated behind the little table with the mysterious briefcase in front of him. He pointed to the chair facing him, "Sit, Annike." His voice and look were differnt from what I knew, which embarrassed me a little. "Tell me, Annike, was Izziu Faust of Radautz a relative of yours?" he surprised me again, by asking.

I froze in my seat. "Yes, Dr. Eckhaus," I replied "he was my father's younger brother." "And who was your father? Moshe or Max?" And when I answered, uncertainly, that my father was still alive and that his name was Moshe, I heard myself telling him about Father and Sammy, Uncle Izziu and his family, about Grandfather Efraim, and the tears which choked and halted me every so often, appeared in the corners of his eyes, too. But he listened to me, never removing his gaze.

I went on talking without any embarrassment. Only when I had finished, did he hand me a big, white handkerchief: "If you want to cry, don't stop your tears." And in a fatherly voice: "If you can still cry -- its good and its a sign that your sensitivity is still there." (That is, I am still a human being, haven't become brutalised yet... I explained to myself).

Then he told me that he had known Uncle Izziu in Secondary School and had heard about my mother and father, who got married at that time. "You and your sister Fritzi hadn't come into the world yet," he said with a smile. Then he told me about himself. He was from Czernowitz where he had been a lecturer in philosophy and astronomy at the local university. His wife and two children had perished on the way to Transnistria. He also told me that he had belonged to a Zionist movement. "I believe absolutely that

Palestine is the only place for the whole Jewish People." And in a disappointed tone: "I was also in the communist party, but it was a passing episode."

He put his hand out to the mysterious briefcase, slowly untied the cord around it, pressed the catch, opened the case and withdrew a bundle wrapped in a white handkerchief and secured with a lace. With the same slow movements he undid the lace and unfolded the handkerchief to reveal a bundle of photographs. He took out one photograph after another and after looking at each one himself, handed it to me; one photograph was of a handsome, elegantly-dressed young couple walking arm-in-arm on a sidewalk in one of Czernowitz' main streets.

"Do you recognise me?" he asked bitterly.

"To tell the truth," I answered, "there's only a faint resemblance between you and the young man in the photograph." He smiled in understanding and continued to hand me one photograph after another. Himself, his beautiful wife, their two children of five and seven; he then took out another folder, containing all his personal documents.

"How did you manage to keep that whole file?"

"I really don't know, I myself can't believe I managed to do so." In the end, he took out a book with gilt Hebrew lettering on its black cover, "This is all I have left," said he.

I understood that the mysterious briefcase was his entire world. He replaced the bundle of photographs and the folder of documents and certificates in the black briefcase, locked it, tied it with the cord and, after knotting it securely, opened the book: "And now we'll get to the point of this interview." But before he began to read to me from the Bible, he pointed to the Hebrew columns, "Do you know these letters?" I answered in the negative.

He began reading to me.

"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth, and chaos reigned on the earth." He translated the verse into German. He handed me the book and told me to read. On the righthand side was the Hebrew text, with the German translation on the left, I read the verse in German. Then he began to explain it. "The Bible tells us about the whole of Creation; about the creation of the world, about our forefathers, about the kings and prophets of Israel." When he saw that his words interested me, he added: "If you wish to carry on reading it, you may come at any time." I replied that I did not think I could understand it by myself. He smiled and suggested we should read it together. He paged further, to Exodus, Chapter 3, and read:

"I have surely beheld the affliction of my People in Egypt and I have heard their cry..."

He raised his eyes from the book, looked at me with curiosity and asked: "Do you understand?" I answered in the affirmative and he said in an optimistic tone: "It may be that in these times, too, God can hear our cry." He continued to read and explain to me. He paged on until he came to Chapter 7:

"And the Lord said unto Moses, 'See I have set thee in God's stead to Pharaoh;
And Aaron thy brother shall be thy prophet;
Thou shalt speak all that I command thee;
And Aaron thy brother shall speak unto Pharaoh that he let the People of Israel go out of his land..."

He was expressing his faith in God, that He would lead us out of Transnistria, and that our German and Roumanian oppressors would be punished by Him.

I envied his faith and belief in God, and his knowledge of

the Bible. I was unable to free myself of the bitterness that had mounted in me in the face of the great wrongs against us. I could not be swept along by his enthusiasm and faith in God. "Let's now see how Moses led the People of Israel out of the Land of Egypt," said he, with obvious satisfaction. He paged further, to Chapter 15: "I have dramatised this chapter and I want you to play the part of Miriam, Moses' sister." And he began to read me the Song of the Sea. He looked so enthusiastic, that I dared not tell him that I had no intention of participating in the play and nodded as if in agreement. He read the Song of the Sea with special emphasis, trying to elucidate the meaning of the lines for me, but all I could see before me was the Dniester River, which we had crossed under the threatening, strict supervision of the Roumanian soldiers.

As though hypnotised, I promised him I would play the role of Miriam. I was pleased when he said: "Annike, I expect you to turn to me if you have any question or problem, and convey that to your sister Fritzi, too." Tania was waiting for me on the bunk, very curious about my "interview" with Dr. Eckhaus. "Tania you don't have any idea about that man we thought was so eccentric," I told her. I sat next to her and Fritzi and gave them a detailed account of my talk with Dr. Eckhaus. Fritzi was excited when she heard that he had known Uncle Izziu, and listened to me with her mouth open. But Tania, in her mocking tone, said: "I'm pleased you had a spiritual experience," and went on to argue about the existence of God: "Supposing that God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, is also our God, does He also sit and think how to save us? And after some thought: "After all, we're his children, no? Well?..." Fritzi interrupted her: "Tania, don't be so cynical!" But Tania paid no attention to her and continued: "Anyone who believes that God is

all-powerful, must also believe that God has inflicted us with this suffering called Hitler, whose name was Pharoah in those days, just to condemn us to this holocaust. Because what is the logic our God employs? First he punishes his children, then he looks for some new Moses to lead us out of Transnistria. He could simply not send us all those hardships, and then he wouldn't have to extricate us from them."

Willy came into the room, and by the smile on his face and the heavy pot he was carrying, we knew he had earned the whole pot from the Italians he served. "Look, God has remembered us and sent us some hot soup," I ended the discussion of "divinity" with Tania.

At first, Pesach was set as the date for the show, and the theme was determined accordingly. However, changes were made during rehearsals and sections that were even slightly reminiscent of the Passover holiday were dropped. Dr. Eckhaus obtained a Haggadah, and enthusiastically taught us some of the contents: "Slaves We Were", "When Israel Left the Land of Egypt" and "One, Who knows One?" which formed part of this traditional Passover Tale.

A show was indeed presented during the month of April, and I assume it was around the time of Passover, but it was a party without a theme and most of the turns were spontaneous. Our guests were a few of the ghetto ladies, Mrs. Yampoulsky and her daughter, Mrs. Rubinstein, and the orphanage staff, including the two cooks, Rosa and Lisa. The little children appeared in the first part, performing a dance which I had adapted to the song "Rejoice, Maccabee Heroes". They danced walking in a circle to left and right; moving to the centre of the circle and out again, according to their ability. The second dance was in pairs, to a song Sofi-

Umanovna had taught us. The clapping that accompanied the children encouraged them, and signs of happiness came to their little faces. Jenny Todros, a girl from Czernowitz, played all the Hassidic tunes that used to be played at Jewish weddings. At the sound of her violin, spontaneous groups formed and Abrasha pretended he was a bride, and Cogan volunteered to be the groom, while Borya Katz was dragged in to be the rabbi, reciting the blessing over bride and groom to cheers from the audience. Jenny also played Mendelsohn's Wedding March. It was the first "wedding" in the orpahange. For the "Troika", most of the boys and girls spontaneously leapt into the dance while Jenny played. The violin had been brought by Mrs. Yampoulsky. There was also communal singing, in which all the visitors participated, with Lisa the cook's soprano dominating. Bettika did her mimickry. Moussia, Fritzi, Coca Guttman and Sonia Trachtenberg appeared individually, as soloists. But Borya Katz again got the stormiest applause for his Russian songs, particularly when he sang "I know the Sun will Shine Again", and "Volga, Volga", which was his encore. Sonia performed a ballet dance while I whistled the tune.

The party, which had begun in the afternoon, continued well into the evening and when it was at its peak, with the children almost in a frenzy, loud knocks were heard at the door. Kolya, the Ukrainian bully, rushed in savagely with some of his men, waving a club and screaming like a lunatic. All the participants, including the guests, withdrew to the bunks and the boys' room in panic. The uproar cut short the spontaneous joy and returned us to the reality of fear and anxiety.

Kolya, or "Ivan the Terrible" as he was nicknamed, was in charge of the ghetto. He was known for his cruelty and hard-heartedness. I could not understand how Dr. Hochman succeeded in calming him and getting him to leave without harming any of us, but he left us trembling in terror. The little ones, who had risen to a few moments of happiness, again cowered under their rug. The visitors also vanished as if they had never been, and we were given the repfreshments they had brought only after everything had calmed down again, much later.

* * *

CHAPTER NO 17

GHETTO POLICEMAN: A NOTE RAISES HOPES

We were forbidden to go to the ghetto or anywhere else, and most of the boys stayed at home, apart from Samuel and David who continued to go out every day. David even stayed out for a few nights. We heard about what was happening in the ghetto from the counsellors, about the German gestapo soldiers, who had begun to make their presence felt in the yard. Many of the men who set out from their homes, sent from the Centre to forced labour with Kolya in charge of them, disappeared and never returned home. There was an increase in the number of rapes and the fear did not abate even within the walls of the orphanage, which were supposed to offer protection.

One morning, I went into the passage with Tania and we met Samuel. He seemed distraught and in a hurry to get outside. We both thought we were imagining things when we saw a big revolver sticking out of his pocket. Tania's eyes were wide: "Did you see what I saw, or am I dreaming?" I nodded. We returned to our bunk, imposing absolute silence on ourselves. That day, Samuel also did not come back to the orphanage. Tania and I kept the secret, discussing various possibilites only in a whisper. We awaited his return curious, worried and afraid although we knew that Samuel was a clever and courageous boy. Tania also pointed out that Samuel had not even tried to conceal the revolver from us. "I think Samuel will succeed in destroying the whole German army ... he's gone to pay them back for what happened yesterday." She did not know how right she was.

The day before, German soldiers had raped a Jewish girl from the ghetto. We knew the girl. Her screams had reached us and most

of the children had run to the windows to see what was taking place outside. The deed had been perpetrated in full view of passersby, who ran away. The girl had lain naked on the pavement outside the orphanage, while a soldier viciously copulated with her as his companions stood around kicking her. The counsellors hastily chased us away from the windows. The girls screams and the sight we had seen shocked us. The children huddled under their rugs for a long time after, refusing to emerge. Jenny Stock became hysterical and jumped at the slightest sound.

Samuel, from our orphanage, and Asher and Lyova from the other one, had been taking part in actions of the partisans based in the Balta forest, and that day they went out to avenge the rape. I learned this only months later, when I myself met the region's partisan group. During our stay in Balta, we became familiar with the criminal character of the gestapo, which acted in the ghetto according to their mood, as influenced by events at the front. Their response to victory was identical to their response to defeat. They ran amok among the ghetto's inhabitants with the same cruelty. Kolya was their tool, and he exploited every opportunity to satisfy his bestial instincts working in partnership with the gestapo soldiers. He began to demand that the Centre supply him with more and more people for forced labour. When there was a shortage of men, they filled their quota from among us -- the children.

Our turn came to do this work. We went: Tania, Moussia, Vera, Eva and Abrasha, Lonya Cagan and Yaacov. We left early in the morning, before mammeliga. We were promised a portion of mammeliga at the place of work and when we came back in the afternoon, they promised, we would have a double portion. Some way from the Centre, we could already hear Kolya's furious voice shouting

frenziedly: "To work! To work!," he was mounted on his horse and the club, which was always in his hand, a part of him, waved energetically in the air. The Centre official who received us gave each of us a twig broom and a pail, and as a parting blessing, whispered: "Take care not to anger the bastard, he knows he's not allowed to harm you, but when he loses control he's more dangerous than an animal." We understood that we had to follow him, and we set out with our brooms and buckets, trailing behind him as he rode ahead. He stopped the horse in the city centre, and told us, over his shoulder, to clean the road. He then spurred his horse and left. We began to sweep the stones, which were wet from the previous night's rain; the mud stuck to the brooms, which grew heavier. Kolya returned every so often to check up on us. The more we swept, the more we smeared the mud on the stones, and when Kolya came again, he screeched that we were making fun of him with that kind of work, and warned that we would be punished, announcing that we would only get the mammeliga in the afternoon. He returned at midday, but there was no sign on the horizon of our getting any food, nor of being allowed to stop working. Evening was drawing near, and still it seemed that he had no intention of letting us go. He stationed himself near us on his horse, which was beginning to paw the ground nervously. His presence added to the feeling that time had stood still. Eva decided to get close enough to Kolya to see what the time was on the big watch he wore on his right hand. Not having her glasses with her, Eva screwed up her eyes to see. Kolya interpreted this as pulling faces at him and before she could see what the time was, he suddenly and savagely brought his club down on her. He then went wild raining blows on everyone in reach from where he sat on his horse, yelling: "You're pulling faces at me?" The only one to stand up to

him was Lonya Lederman, who shouted at him: "Stop going wild! Stop going wild! Lunatic!" Fortunately for Lonya, his words did not reach Kolya's blocked ears and only when he became tired, did he shout: "Go home! Damn you, home!" He kicked his horse and vanished from sight. We were stunned, those who had "caught" the club nursed their wounds. I was hurt on my back and could barely straighten up. When we had revived, we gathered our implements and turned back towards the orphanage, hungry, tired and beaten. Luckily, as we passed the oil factory we found sweet, oily lumps of sunflower-seed husks in the barrels outside, and this eased our hunger somewhat by the time we reached the Centre to return our brooms and buckets.

As the wave of terror in the ghetto abated, there was a lull and people began to be seen in the environs. Our boys went back to work in the military bases and the sun of May 1943, which we saw through the orphanage windows, contributed to a re-awakening. I could sense nature's bounty in my imagination and the cry for freedom rose in me. As a substitute for freedom, when the moon and stars outside, meant for the young, were forbidden to us, we returned to our evenings of singing and dancing in the confines of the house. The boys' revived courting contributed to the atmosphere of youthfullness. Samuel's brother was among the newcomers and he was a permanent visitor to our bunk, with Dora Abramovna's encouragement. He was courting Eva, who was only three months older than us, but who had come of age, in Dora Abramovna's opinion. Bettike, noticing that Eva was not taking part in the dancing stood on the bunk and publicly invited them to come out and dance a solo, by which she announced their engagement. Abrasha, whom I regarded as a little boy, my adopted brother, began to court me overtly. When he acquired two German marks from

the sale of Italian soldiers' clothing, a considerable sum, he invited me to a restaurant in the ghetto. And I invited Bettike... The restaurant was in a small, dim kitchen in a broken-down house. In the corner of the "restaurant" there was a big bed on which lay a little child, huddling under rags, who cried the whole time. The "proprietress", its mother, would go over to it every so often. She served us at the only table, which stood in another corner, bringing bean soup in a tin plate and a tiny potato pudding. She was paid one German mark for this. Bettike and I shared one portion, and Abrasha had a portion to himself. I jokingly promised Abrasha that I would invite him to a restaurant in Bucharest. On our return to the orphanage we told Tania and Fritzi about our gastronomic experience and they -- jealously -- made fun of me.

I felt differently about David than I did about Abrasha. Even though the spark of first love remained for Vassya from Berlivka, in my memory. Manyo, Fritzi's boyfriend, who was regarded as a serious, nice fellow by all, was intelligent and older than everyone else. I, however, did not take to him, and Fritzi avoided speaking of him when I was there. I also did not share my intimate thoughts, as a rule, and confided only in David, who listened attentively to "the little doubts" which then seemed important to me. In the evenings, sitting alone with him on the steps behind the house, I told him about Katrina and Andre, about Lucia and Vassya, and all my other experiences in Berlivka.

The beginning of summer made itself felt inside the orphanage, too. I sat with Sima on the bunk, soaking up the rays of sun coming through the windowpane above us. That day, like all the others, was characterless inside and outside of the house. I was sunk in sad reflections about the past and present, about

those figures who had once been so dear to me, and whom I would never see again. Was this only a nightmare? Would my terror come to an end?

Suddenly, Sima touched me: "Look, Annie!" She was pointing at the door. I turned my head and saw the visitors who had just entered. The other girls had also turned to look at the door, where Mr. Rubinstein was standing with two tall, elegantly dressed men in dark suits, pale shits and ties. Mr. Rubinstein said something to Rosa Libovna, who had gone over to greet them, while the two men inspected the room with curiosity. They walked among the bunks, looking to left and right. Most of the girls were occupied at the time, picking lice from each others' heads. The little ones were among them, except for Kurty who lay asleep, huddled under the rug. He had complained of stomach ache in the morning, right after his mammeliga, and he had vomited. Fritzi had put him to sleep under the rug. The visitors went into the almost empty boys' room, emerging soon after and going into the isolation room. Dr. Eckhaus opened the door to them and it closed behind them immediately. We were all surprised at this irregular and unexpected visit, and when we asked Rosa Libovna who the men were, she shrugged and said; "I don't know." Jenny Stock said: "Those are the Roumanian delagates." Someone immediately contradicted her, saying she had heard them speaking French. It occurred to me that they were from the Red Cross, who worked for human rights, despite race or creed. This assumption was also negated, because one girl said she had not seen the Red Cross badge on their sleeves. After a long time, they emerged from the isolation room accompanied by Dr. Eckhaus and Mr. Rubinstein, who asked Rosa Libovna where Kurty was. She went over to the bunk with them, and pointed. After a pause, Mr. Rubinstein drew aside the blanket and

I clearly heard one of them say in French: "But he's just a baby," and the other said: "Poor thing." Kurty continued to sleep. One of them went closer and covered him again, and then they left.

We heard about the visit from the counsellors, in the evening, when they were discussing it and preparing Kurty for what was to come. Kurty himself was indifferent, and did not understand what all the fuss was about. Towards evening on the following day, when the Rubinstein couple came to take him, he went along without any reaction. The story was that his late father, a Czernowitz banker, as I have mentioned, had left a lot of money in Swiss banks and had left a Will according to which Kurty was the sole surving heir after the death of himself and his wife. The two men were the executors and had come to take him to Switzerland.

The next morning Mrs. Rubinstein brought Kurty, dressed in his best clothes, washed and combed; for the first time we saw how small he was. His sad, old eyes were shining. When he came in he ran straight into Fritzi's arms: "I ate bread and meatballs! I ate bread and meatballs!" When Fritzi put him down, all the girls surrounded him and he, the infant, realised that he had to be true to his new image. Like the little prince in the story, he began to march to and fro and whirl around. Mrs. Rubinstein said that when she had put him to bed in her house, in a real bed, and covered him with a blanket, Kurty had protested and stayed awake all night asking to go back to his bunk. They had therefore decided not to cut him off from his "natural" surroundings until he left in two days time, she said. They remained until noon and when she again wanted to take him with her, he objected with all his might and only agreed to go with her when she mentioned meatballs. She brought him back in the evening. His face was pale and his eyes had lost their shine. He looked ill, and all he wanted was to

sleep. Mrs. Rubinstein explained it thus: "The child has not slept since yesterday." She quickly laid him down to sleep, after dressing him in the new pyjamas. He lay down on the bunk and curled up under the rug. After Mrs. Rubinstein had left, Kurty began to writhe under the rug, he tried to stand up and managed to get to the edge of the bunk, where he collapsed and began to vomit. When he recovered a little he began to walk around in his nice new pyjamas. One of the older boys composed an impromptu song in his honour, which he sang as we clapped hands:

Kurty is the lucky one,
Kurty is a banker's son,
Kurty jumps and stamps his feet,
Kurty's going to eat and eat.

He didn't understand the song, but he rsponded with a smile on hearing his name. But he again began to throw up quantities of food and to writhe in convulsions. The Rubinstein couple arrived in alarm, accompanied by one of the Swiss men, who was apparently a doctor and began to attend to him immediately. He looked dejected. When Kurty continued to writhe, they wrapped him in a woollen blanket and took him to the local hospital. That was the last time we ever saw him. It was some time later that we heard that clever, wise little Kurty had died of over-eating after being hungry the whole of his short life.

June was already behind us, but the edge of light that my mother, bless her memory, always spoke of with such faith, was remoter than ever and there was no hope of grasping it. The prison Dr. Hochman had spoken of last time I saw him was closing in, and we continued to live out our youth inside its walls.

Poldi's courtship of Eva bore fruit and at the beginning of July they announced that they were getting married. The event

became the main topic and reached its peak on the 11th of July, 1943, when Poldi took Eva as his wife. The marriage ceremony in the ghetto, conducted by a rabbi from Bessarabia who was a refugee like us, was very modest. The Rubinsteins and the Yampoulskis acted as surrogate families. The young couple went to live an a little room in the ghetto as soon as the wedding was over. Poldi had rented it, furnishing it with a narrow iron bed, two chairs and a small table. They placed a few utensils on a little shelf. A week after the wedding, Poldi came and invited Vera and me to have supper with them. I wore my blouse, Tania's skirt and Bettike's shoes in honour of the occasion and Vera and I went home with Poldi. Eva's welcome was very moving. Although only a week had passed since she parted from us, she fell on our necks weeping as though she had not seen us for ages. She was wearing the silk striped dress Poldi had bought her and which she had worn at her wedding. She was also wearing the woollen slippers we had given her as a wedding present, and her face beamed as she pointed to the table she had set in honour of our visit. Poldi was also happy to have us, and he praised Eva's cooking skills. He gave us the two chairs and he and Eva sat on the edge of the bed. Poldi was right. The bean soup Eva served in tin plates tasted wonderful despite the fact that there were only a few beans and cubes of potatoes in it. In the same plates, she served us a delicious pudding made out of cornflour mixed with potato puree. We stayed late at the "party" and even did without our mammeliga at the orphanage. Eva asked us to come again. "I'll always make you something to eat," she smiled. Poldi walked us back to the orphanage. We went there often and their room became a pleasant place for us to visit. Sometimes Samuel and David came with us to Eva and Poldi, although David began to be away more and more often

at night. His sudden appearances and disappearances puzzled me.

One day in mid-July, it was again my turn to go out on forced labour under Kolya's supervision. Dora Abramovna supplied everyone in the work squad with a portion of mammeliga and then, to my surprise, called me aside: "You aren't going with them. Today you'll be working in the kitchen at the German gestapo." I almost fainted when I heard this: "Why?" And before I could absorb the harshness of this decision, she continued: "You have nothing to fear, you won't come to any harm, there's someone who'll look after you there!" I was gripped by foreboding: why, they were sending me into the lion's jaws! But I understood that there was no point in resisting, and I went. I went alone the the gestapo building, a few streets away from us, opposite the other orphanage, which we had never visited for fear of encountering the gestapo. On the way, I tried to imagine what awaited me there, but I also felt a certain curiosity to see the building from the inside, imagining it to be swarming with terrifying soldiers. I also convinced myself that Dora Abramovna was too responsible to send me into danger. When I reached the iron gates and the two soldiers on guard intercepted me, I did not lose my head and asked, in German, to be allowed in as a worker. But I received the surprise of my life when one of the soldiers said something to a soldier on the other side of the gate, through the hatch, and the gate was opened to reveal David standing before me. I felt my tongue stick to the roof of my mouth, and as I stood gaping wide-eyed at him, he addressed me in fluent German, telling me to follow him as if he had never laid eyes on me before, and without batting an eyelid, he led me into the building. Some soldiers were walking about, ogling me. I dragged after him, my legs almost giving way, into a spacious kitchen. We were not alone there,

either, and a SS officer working at the big stove turned his head and welcomed me with a warm smile. I managed to catch a meaningful wink from the officer to David. I was further surprised when David turned smilingly to the officer and said, in Russian, as he went out: "Now she's your responsibility." I was standing in the middle of the kitchen looking around, when two gestapo soldiers came in and saluted the officer, who continued to smile warmly at them, too. Before leaving, he ordered one of the soldiers to give me something to eat before I started to work. In a half joking, half serious tone, one foot on the threshold, he said: "Don't you bother the girl!" And to me, in the same tone : "They're good boys, and if they should try to play around with you, you can shout!" One of them immediately served me a bountiful breakfast: pork cutlets, eggs, white bread and a big cup of fragrant tea. I had sat down to eat, when David suddenly reappeared, with a girl from the other orphanage. She was short and doll-faced, with curly brown hair that fell to her shoulders. Her well-developed breasts were her special feature, revealed by her thin blouse, and the two soldiers cast meaningful glances in her direction as they politely asked her to join us at the table. I was a somewhat reassured at the sight of her, "I have nothing to fear", flashed through my mind. I looked like a child beside her. She was very developed and if they had sent her, too, there really must be someone looking after us. When she came to the table she asked me in a whisper: "Are you also from the orphanage?" and we immediately had something in common. She was also from Bukovina, a German-speaker like me, and her name was Esther. When we had finished eating, the same smiling officer came in and, after taking something from a wall-cupboard, again warned the two soldiers not to fool around, and then went out. During the day he returned every so often on

one pretext or another and Esther and I understood that he was the one watching over us. We began washing dishes in a gigantic sink, while Esther tried constantly to hide her breasts because of the soldiers' crude jokes. But when we got to know them better, by noon, they seemed more human and the tension passed. When they sat down to eat with us, Hans, who seemed the more intelligent, told us that he was a native of Frankfurt and had been sent to the front at the age of eighteen. He had been wounded and was sent to work in the kitchen. "Three years have gone by since then!" he sighed. Before Hitler had come to power, he said, most of his friends were Jews, whom he had liked very much. I remembered that I had once liked my German friends, too.

David came into the kitchen and sat down in a corner to clean weapons, without paying any attention to us. I could not stomach this, nor the way he addressed the two cooks as "Sir", which angered me. My anger prevented me from thinking clearly.

It was already three-thirty by the time Esther and I finished scrubbing the big pots and pans, and the porcelain plates. The smiling officer came back and ordered the two cooks to let us go and to give us some leftovers. Before he went out he said: "If there are any "kuchen" left, let them have some, too." All would have ended well had Ernst, the second soldier, not asked Esther to climb up on a stool and put some plates back in the wall cupboard. Esther looked at me, as if asking me to take her place, but he insisted and ordered her to get up on the stool. As she was standing on the stool with her arms raised, Ernst came up to her and put his hand under her blouse. Esther fell off the stool, dropped the plate in her hand and landed full length on the floor. I stood frozen with fear when I saw him bend over her, his expression becoming bestial. Without thinking, I said: "If you

touch her, I'll shout!" Hans then intervened and pulled him aside. I helped the stunned Esther to get up and the two of us dashed out, panting. We found David behind the door, busy at something, but it was obvious that he was waiting for us. When he saw us running in panic, he stopped us and asked quietly, in German: "What happened?" I looked angrily at him and did not answer. Esther, who did not know him from before, told him about the incident. He did not even try to calm us and said in the same quiet voice: "I'll go and fetch the food you left behind." We waited until he came out with two big white paperbags, which he held out to us: "Go to the orphanage!" he said commandingly. Frightened, the two of us left the gestapo yard. Luckily, I met Dora Abramovna, who was on her way to the kitchen. She smiled at my frightened face and asked me casually whether I had seen David. "Yes," I said. "Well, then you know," she said, "don't say a word about David, he's a good boy. The day will come when you'll understand," and she turned to go. I also turned and went to the orphanage. I did not tell anyone that day, but I remained angry with him for a long time after. Only Jennitchke who, like my friends, knew nothing about what had happened between David and myself that day, continued to wait eagerly for him.

In October the skies became grey and early autumn winds began to blow, reminding us that winter was coming. If rescue did not come soon, we would again be forced to huddle under the rug day and night. One dark day, Fritzi and Moussia went to the ghetto to do housework for the local families; Rosh Hashannah was approaching. But they returned immediately. Fritzi explained, ironically: "The woman I was supposed to work for caught a fright from the weather and decided to put off her cleaning till a pleasanter day." She took out a slice of bread she had been given

as an "advance", broke it into two equal shares for herself and me. Moussia also took out her slice. "In that woman's yard," Fritzi said, "there are a number of fruit trees!" They were fascinated by the discovery, because the look of the ghetto was very grey. We spoke about autumn and nature's compensations, trees shedding their leaves in fall, to form a carpet on the sidewalks, and gardens where ripe fruit dropped, the flight of many birds passing, flock by flock, to the warm countries. "All that has remained on the other side, where we came from," Moussia said sadly.

That evening, Dr. Eckhaus came into the room and walked directly over to me, gesturing for me to follow him. He looked a little distraught. When we were in his room, he shut the door quickly behind him. "Annike," he said, while we were still standing, "maybe the time has come for us to send a note to your father." Without letting me answer, he took a piece of paper from his pocket and instructed me to sit down and write a few words. "Do it quickly," he said, "Dr. Hochman's coming for a visit soon, with one of the Roumanian officers who acts as a sort of unoffical liason between the Bucharest Jews and the local Centre." "Dear Father and Sammy," I hastily wrote, "Fritzi and I are in the orphanage at Balta. Love, Annie." Dr. Eckhaus folded the note and with a satisfied smile, said: "Now hurry back to your Fritzi, and may God help you." I knew he was encouraging me in this against Dr. Hochman's instructions. I answered the girls inquisitive questions: "He arranged to give me a Bible lesson tomorrow." Dr. Hochmann arrived a little later with the officer, and when they entered the room, the officer stopped at the door and greeted us in Roumanian: "Good day, children." None of the girls answered his greeting, and only Dora Abramovna returned it, in Russian. Dr.

Hochman paced close beside him, to and fro, and the Roumanian officer stopped at the girls' bunks every so often, asking this or that girl where she was from. I was sure he would stop by us, too, and I did not dare move from the edge of the bunk, where I had placed myself in order to be closer to where he would pass. He did, indeed, stop at our bunk as I had hoped, but to my great disappointment, Dr. Hochmann stood with his back to me, hiding me. I understood from the officer's words that the visit had come to an end when he said, honestly sharing our pain: "It is a sad and depressing sight." His face was grave. "I'm travelling the day after tomorrow, and I'll try to report the situation as soon as I arrive." He did not say where he was going, but it was obvious to me that he meant Bucharest. "If only I could shrink and hide in his pocket and go with him!" I thought. "I'll be at the Centre tomorrow at five, to coordinate the report with you," he said to Dr. Hochman, and his words galvinized me into action. I was outside the Centre at exactly four o'clock, lying in ambush in the hope that I could talk to him before he went in with Dr. Hochman. I had decided not to miss my opportunity this time. I approached him and addressed him directly, not looking in Dr. Hochman's direction. He looked at me with curiosity and understanding, and asked Dr. Hochman to go into the Centre so that he could hear what I had to say. With relief, I followed them and Dr. Hochman even politely invited me to be seated. The officer sat facing me and listened with great interest as I told my story. When I finished, he said: "I'll do my best." He also told me that Cuizitul De Argint Street, which I had given as a possible address, was miles long and that unless I had the number of the house it would be almost impossible to find my family. "In my excitement I forgot to mention that it isn't the address of a house," I said, "but of my

uncle's factory, 'Vitro Metan', and its number 12." He breathed a sigh of relief, "That's different, my girl." He took a notebook from his pocket, pointed to a blank page
and told me to write a few words in my own handwriting. I sat at my ease, and not hurrying, wrote:

"My dear Father and Sammy, on the 1st of February 1942, Mother died, as had all the others. Fritzi and I are in the orphanage in the city of Balta. We hope that God has protected you and that we will meet soon. Yours with love and longing, Annie and Fritzi."

The officer praised me for having managed to word the letter like a telegram, and after noting the address on another page, he extended his hand and parted from me with the promise to make every effort to help me. "I hope to be able to give them the news that you are alive." It was late by the time I got to the orphanage and Fritzi, knowing nothing about my mission, had been worried. When I told her she was overwhelmed by emotion and much more optimistic than I was.

Since I had sent the note, I had become extremely sensitive to every hint or sign that came my way and whenever I saw Dr. Hochman my heart stopped, in case he had some news. But I always received the same response: The officer has not returned yet. Dr. Eckhaus also tried to suppress any excessive hope in me, and warned me that there could be "bad tidings," as he put it. He hinted that many of the inhabitants of Bukovina who had been in Bucharest had been sent accross the Bug river, to forced labour. He succeeded in returning me to reality, to a certain extent. Nevertheless, a secret voice in me said: "Father and Sammy are alive, be patient." Great hope engulfed me.

CHAPTER NO 18

MEETING WITH VASSYA AND NATALYA

White snow was piling up in the narrow ghetto street. Another cruel winter was descending on us. Moussia fell ill and lay with a high fever in the totally unheated isolation room. Tania was in low spirits: her brother Willy had left the house with a few other boys the day before, and had not yet returned. Ever since we had seen the revolver on Samuel we knew that the boys were involved in underground activity. We had heard a little about a group of partisans who operated in the Balta forests. We had formed an imaginary scenario, but we were worried. Dora Abramovna's soothing whisper on seeing Tania's troubled look -- "Don't worry, they'll be back" --increased our suspicion that, with all her composure and gentility, she knew a lot more than we thought. Only when evening fell did they return, to Tania's relief.

Moussia's condition had improved when, at noon, Willy and his friends came out of their room and asked me casually about Berlivka village, about Andre and Katrina and about my relationship with Vassya. I enjoyed the conversation, because I liked talking about them, particularly since it was so long since I had heard from them. "Its possible that things have changed for them, too; after all, they have two sons at the front and there's no immunity against tragedy."

We were sitting at Moussia's bedside in the evening. Her fever had dropped and she was recovering. The door opened and David appeared, dressed in a Russian padded jacket, shiny black boots, and a Russian 'kobenka' at a rakish angle on his head. After greetings and some small talk, he turned to me: "Annie, come with me." I said goodbye to Moussia and followed him out. "What's

happened?" I asked. "A visitor's waiting for you in the kitchen." My heart filled with hope and wonder: "For me? Who is it? My father? My brother?" "Neither," he replied, gently pulling me towards the kitchen. Light taps at the door, and Dora Abramovna slowly opened it. In the faint light of the candle on the floor, I saw Vassya standing there, as tall as ever. He took me in his arms: "Is it you, Neora?" Someone put out the candle and the darkness made it easier for me to begin asking all the questions I had accumulated over the year.

On that cold, dark night we sat on the floor while Vassya told me what had happened in Berlivka since I had left. I was shocked by the news that Kostya had fallen at the front. "Katrina," he continued, "went completely to pieces." I saw before me that strong, long-suffering woman and when he told me that she had been hospitalized many times, I burst into tears. "Andre joined a partisan group after their lovely, well-tended home went up in flames." And he told me about Lucia, who, after hearing of Kostya's death, had also left the village and joined the partisans. They had been together for a time until he and a few others from the village, under the supervision of Neora's commander, Petya, had been transferred to the Balta area. Things slowly became clear to me and I began to understand what David and the other fellows from the orphanage had been doing. He confirmed my assumption: "Sure, that's how I got to know David. He's been active with another group in the area for close to a year." I couldn't see David's face in the darkness, but I could feel his reproachful look. I learned that David's group had been transferred to the Odessa region. I was gripped by a powerful shudder and felt the blood rush to my head. I blessed the darkness for not giving me away. I reached my hand out to David and

tenderly stroked his arm in apology. He responded by carressing my palm: "I know, Neora, that you can be trusted," Vassya concluded, "anything you say could endanger all of us." I did not answer him, but I knew very well that I would keep my mouth shut. I suddenly had a strong sense of responsibility on discovering that all my discussions and guessing with Tania had been verified, and from today on I would no longer be free to sink into pleasant illusions. Then David said: "You know, don't you, that Willy, Lonnie and others from the Home also belong to those groups?" "I know nothing," I replied. "You didn't guess?" And then I deliberately lied: "I never guessed, never suspected, and its all new and surprising to me."

The basket was full of potatoes, but still heavier than it should have been. I walked behind Natalya with faltering steps. While we were walking, she explained what my mission would be. She pointed north, to the iron tracks some 200-300 metres away, which were manned for the whole length by German soldiers. Seeming to ignore them, Natalya said: "We have to cross the railway tracks and if we're asked where we're headed for, you should know that our destination is Katousk, if we cross safely." She pushed me forward: "Its nothing, it'll pass." And in order to calm my fears, she began to chatter gaily. When we were close to the tracks, she pulled me after her, and we crossed. On the other side of the tracks two soldiers stood talking to each other. I tried walking faster, but Natalya gripped my arm forcefully to compel me to slow down. She also burst into unnatural, loud laughter which I was sure would give us away. But amazingly enough, one of the soldiers turned his head in our direction and then back to his comrade, without relating to us. We continued along a path piled high on

both sides with snow; I was tense and felt that we would never reach Katousk, which I had never heard of before. I also wondered why we were going there, why the basket was so heavy, and how far we had yet to go. But Natalya's chatter prevented me from asking and I realized it was just a cover-up. After we had walked for about half an hour over fields, when we were out of sight of the soldiers, Natalya stopped and took a deep breath: "We aren't going to Katousk, we're only going to the crossroads." I wanted to take advantage of the short rest to put down the basket, but Natalya stopped me in alarm: "Rest for a bit, but don't ever let the basket out of your hands! And now let's hurry!" "And from there?" the question slipped out. "Home," Natalya answered simply. I had guessed what was hiding under the potatoes, but to open the conversation, I asked her why she had laughed so loudly in front of the soldiers, "You could have drawn attention to us!" "They're lucky they didn't bother us!" she said. "Had they tried to search our baskets, there would have been only one possibility -- to blow them up!" She said this without a trace of fear. At that moment I forgot my hatred for the Germans who had murdered my mother, my grandfather, my uncle and my aunt and their baby, and the thought of murdering human beings horrified me. Natalya broke into my thoughts: "Vassya sends his regards and will visit you in a few days' time." We walked on in silence. When we came to the crossroads, we saw a deserted stretch covered in snow with not a living soul in sight. Above, in the grey sky, a pale sun could be seen, indicating that it was afternoon, and Natalya's wristwatch showed three o'clock. We waited, baskets in hand, for about half an hour, until we saw a cart in the distance, slowly coming towards us. "Come this way," said Natalya. Without asking where to, I dragged along behind her until the cart overtook us. The

driver stopped beside us: "Where to, girls?" Natalya looked at him, not answering. Then she asked, "Where are you headed, Uncle?" He chuckled and replied:" I'm going to Katousk." Natalya took the heavy basket from my hands, and gave both baskets to the driver. He moved his horse quickly forward and Natalya called after him: "Take care and good luck!" He returned the greeting before drawing away into the distance. She suddenly hugged me in her strong arms and whispered with satisfaction: "This time we did well!" It also seemed to me at that moment that the whole mission had been easier than I had imagined, and I freed myself from her embrace with a sense of relief. We made our way back almost at a run, this time cutting diagonally across the field to reach the other side of the tracks. As far as my friends knew, I was with David at Eva and Poldi, and so they did not disturb me. Luckily, I arrived in time for the mammeliga, and this saved my empty stomach. As to the way I was dressed, I told them I had received the clothes from David.

That night I was tortured by thoughts about the two German soldiers. Had they bothered us, would Natalya have thrown the grenades she had in her pockets? It would have been a rare opportunity for revenge for what they had done to our loved ones -- but I was torturing myself only about the thought, after all, I had not caused their death. When I thought of standing face to face with them, their uniforms fell away and I saw them as human beings. Grandfather Efraim's image was also before me. He had also worn an Austrian uniform in his youth. When it was the turn of his eldest son, my father, to enlist he, too, had donned the uniform. Perhaps my warm, good grandfather, as well as Father, had not known what they were fighting for. Perhaps the father of the soldier who had shot Grandfather had been his comrade-in-arms,

fighting shoulder to shoulder with him. I reflected on the insane world and the guilt of people -- I was pleased when morning came. The girls woke up, telling each other their dreams.

Some delegates visited us, and there was a rumour that we were soon to get some clothes. What's more: It was possible that the first group would be leaving for Roumania and from there to Palestine. This was not specifically stated. The rumour was neither confirmed nor denied. A great hope was ignited and everyone was gripped by excitement.

One day David came and took me to visit a friend who lived in the ghetto in his mother's flat. We waited a long time for him and his mother made us tea. He, Borya, finally arrived. The opposite of his fragile mother, he let fly with a series of succulent curses on the heads of the Nazis. I was drawn into the free talk, and discovered my human weakness; all the compassionate Jewish traits, to which I had always had a negative approach, were my lot and deeply imprinted on me. David laughed, but Borya took it seriously, asking: "And the verse -- Kill or be killed -- means nothing to you?" I kept quiet, because I had no answer.

Borya told us that "Ours" were very close. Reliable information had reached Petya and him. "If so," I asked, "why should we go on endangering ourselves?" Both of them gave me reproving looks and began to lecture me on philosophical concepts of life. The monster Hitler's gigantic death machine was composed of millions of screws scattered worldwide. In order to halt its insane action, it had to be dismantled screw by screw, leaving not one in place. My claims that these screws were also human beings who might not be aware of the machine's function, were of no avail. "Only the creator of the machine should be destroyed, and I'm prepared to do so with my own hands without a single pang of

conscience." They smiled at me tolerantly and this only increased my confusion.

David accompanied me to the orphanage after we left, and then went on to Natalya's house.

On the 10th of January, 1944, I met Vassya again. This meeting was also in the orphanage kitchen. I went out on tiptoe, wearing my patched padded jacket, with a scarf around me and my shoes in my hand. I put them on outside. I had changed since I last saw him. To a certain extent, I regarded myself as belonging to the group of wonderful people that Vassya was part of, although I had not met these people face to face and their names were never mentioned to me, apart from that of the commander, Petya, whose orders came to me through David and Borya.

Since meeting Natalya I had passed on baskets of "food" which I received from the smiling German officer I had met at the gestapo. The missions I was given seemed very easy, but David assured me that they were important. In the gestapo kitchen, where I continued to work as a dishwasher, the two cooks had nicknamed me the "Little Gypsy" and treated me like a helpless little girl. I tried to reinforce this impression. After work, the smiling officer, the partisan, would give me a bonus: a basket of potatoes and two loaves of bread.

With the heavy basket in my hand I would walk for about half an hour to the tracks. The first day on my own, when I was on my way to my first mission, I found an original way to avoid encounters with the soldiers guarding the tracks. Before arriving at the tracks, I found a canal with a view of what was happening in the area and there I hid and lay in wait for the guards. When they had passed beside the tracks and moved away, I crossed over without drawing their attention. It looked so easy and simple.

When I expressed my surprise to David about Natalya's having taken me by such an open route, he answered that the danger lay in getting the basket out of the gestapo and the rest of the way wasn't so important. But Maroussia, with whom I had once happened to cross the tracks, said that the open route was less dangerous. Nevertheless, I also preferred my own way because of the grenades I would have to throw if I was caught. The path through the fields was also pretty clear for me. In half an hour, with no difficulty, I would reach the crossroads where the farmer in his cart would overtake me. "Where to, girl?" "And you, Uncle, where are you headed?" "I'm going to Katousk. " I would give him the basket and so on from day to day, with everything going smoothly.

In those days, I tried to avoid the man I so respected and admired, Dr. Eckhaus. He more than once tried to meet with me, to reprove me for serving the Germans, as he said, and he also warned me not to ruin myself with David, the 'apostate' as he called him. "I don't know what the fellow gets up to," he said. I dropped my eyes, so as not to encounter his reproving gaze, although this hurt me. On the other hand, Willy, Lonnie and Yaacov were nice to me and even encouraged me in a roundabout way. They did not speak to me openly. I knew nothing about their activities and I was sure they knew nothing of mine.

During this time I also thought less about Father and Sammy, and when Fritzi told me excitedly that she had been at the centre and managed to get Dr. Hochman to express some optimism regarding the Roumanian officer's mission, my response was restrained. "What's happened to you, Annie? Why do you sound so pessimistic?" There was disappointment in her voice, "You, of all people?" I was confused and could not tell her that according to rumour the Russian front was fast approaching and that I did not think that

the Roumanian officer would have any thoughts to spare for us. So I smiled and said, "Time will tell."

On my way to meet Vassya I thought about my place in that other world into which I had been projected.In the few minutes that stood between me and the kitchen, my senses became blurred and confused and my feelings were like a volcano blocked by an invisible valve. The kitchen was in complete darkness when I gave three sharp raps, and when the door opened I felt Vassya's strong arms around my body as he kicked the door shut behind me. His hot lips sealed my mouth and everything I had wanted to say vanished and drowned in my first kiss, which made my head spin and a sweetness blended with calm and relaxation enfolded me. The arrival of Dora Abramovna, who had followed me, cut short this moment of sensual sweetness.

We sat on the floor, my hand in his, and Dora Abramovna sat on a stool. At first all was still, like the silence after a storm and I was afraid Dora Abramovna would hear my heart thudding. "What's new, my boy?" Dora asked.I slowly calmed down. In his deep, musical voice, Vassya told about his meeting with one of the boys she knew well, because she was very eager to know how he was. To me he said: "I have some news for you from Bershad and Berlivka. Your Aunt Rachel sends her love and I told her everything I know about you. She's fine," said Vassya "and she manages fairly well although she's had no news from your Uncle Moshe." "I also hope to see him again," I said with a deep sigh that burst from me. I had waited tensely to hear news of Berlivka, and it was good to hear that Katrina had regained her strength and was coping as before. "Her sole hope," said Vassya, "is that her youngest son Vanitchke will return from the front." He said that Andre was busy in the village most of the time and it was possible

that he would come and visit me one day. "How I would love to see them!" I said. My hand trembled lightly in his and I felt the firm grip of his hand,

in sympathy with my feelings. He also brought me regards from Lucia. Lucia was continuing her activities in the ranks of the partisans and sometimes came to the village to be with her parents and, most of all, with Katrina. "My mother also sends you her warm regards." And as he whispered in my ear, "My mother says that you should learn to cook Russian borscht," I mused about the remnants of a world that had sunk until it was one big borscht. Guessing my thoughts, Dora Abramovna said: "You're still young, Annitchke, this damned war will come to an end. You'll be a wife and mother, yet." Her smile was palpable in the darkness as she said: "And a good housewife, too." We spoke of this and that and it was clear that Dora Abramovna had no intention of leaving us on our own. We spoke about life in the ghetto and of our hopes for after the war and the indications of what peace would bring to each of us. Vassya never mentioned his own deeds, not by a single word, nor did he enquire about mine. Finally, Dora Abramovna decided it was time I went back to the orphanage, "The cooks will soon arrive." When we parted at the orphanage door, I never imagined that this was the last time I would see Vassya alive.

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CHAPTER NO 19

TWO LETTERS FROM FATHER AND SAMMY

Sima came into the room, her face flushed, and pulled out a bundle that was tucked into her belt: "This is for you." She bent over me to see how I was impressed by the scraps of paper. I rewarded her with a smile of thanks: "Where did you get them?" Sima explained that she had acquired them from Antonio, the Italian soldier, and that they were only the white margins of many newspapers. I could again write to my heart's content.

David and Borya told us they would be away for a few days. After mammeliga, Ida Abramovna said that she had some news, which she would tell us after the little ones were asleep. It was late by the time we sat listening to her telling us that the front was coming closer. She went on to warn us of the danger that the German soldiers would turn on us when they retreated, "as they've done elsewhere". While we were listening, there was a knock at the door: Dora Abramovna had come back, which was unusual, and wanted Fritzi and I to go with her. It was dark and we were unable to see her face, but we knew something important had happened by her excited voice. She clasped both of us: "Girls, two letters have come for you!" "From Father? From Sammy?" Fritzi cried in excitement. "The letters are at my house." I heard these words in a daze.

Dr. Eckhaus and Dr. Hochman were waiting at her house. The Roumanian officer had brought the letters -- but we would have to burn them after reading them, to protect both him and ourselves. I immediately recognised Father's handwriting, close and tall, in German. He had written four pages describing his heartbreak and his search for us, exploiting every possible contact. After months

of effort, he had been notified that his wife and two daughters, family name Fauster, had died in the Abadovka camp. He had hoped that the additional -er was not an error and that the notice did not refer to us, and had continued his search. He had almost set out for Transnistria. The little note I had managed to get to him via the Roumanian officer had changed his whole life. He would now work at getting us to Roumania. We also learned about Sammy's life in Bucharest, and that Uncle Samuel had gone to Switzerland. We read the two letters over and over again. We had to write our answers at once. But first we were given a box that Father had sent with the officer. It contained a treasure of clothes and foodstuff. Everything thoughtfully packed down to the last detail. We spent hours unpacking it with great excitement, with the help of Dora Abramovna, who was as enthusiastic as us. The night had gone by and after washing and changing into our new clothes, we sat down and ate with the others until sleep overtook us.

The next day we found, tucked into gloves, hidden letters, money and instructions on how to answer them so that they would know everything had reached us. I wrote my reply, beginning with the words, "Dear Father! Dear Sammy! Today we ate nuts!" which was the agreed sign that we had opened the box and reached the bottom of it. I then described in detail the deaths of Grandfather Efraim, Uncle Izziu, Aunt Rosa and little Mozziu, nor did I conceal the fact that we had not given them a Jewish burial, but had left them somewhere in the swampy mud in the Ukrainian wastes. I left no doubts or illusions and I indicated that I felt they would want the seven days of mourning, the 'shiva', to be observed for them. I also recounted my meeting with Aunt Rachel and Uncle Moshe, and their great help. I did not conceal the disappearance of Uncle Moshe. I described my stay in Berlivka village, with

Katrina and Andre, and I told them that Sima and Bettike were with us. I skipped many details on the assumption that they would not be understood. I had heard that Uncle Max had also died, but I was not sure, therefore I only mentioned the fact that he and his family were in one of the camps in Transnistria. I had written about two pages when I sensed Fritzi standing behind me, reading over my shoulder. She had managed to write half a page, with difficulty, which she swiftly tore into pieces: "I think I only wrote what you're writing," and she asked if she could add a few words to my letter. Somewhat too briskly, she threw the scraps of her letter into the stove.

She read my letter intently and then added in the space I had left: "My dearest Father and Sammy, since Annie has already written everything, I send you many, many blessings and kisses in the hope that I'll be seeing you soon. Your very, very loving and longing Fritzi.

We folded the letter, put it into an envelope and placed it on the table, hoping our messenger would come for it.

Dr. Eckhaus and Dr. Hochman were talking to each other, and Dora Abramovna told us: "You're lucky girls! You've remained together and now you have news from your father and brother." "The great suffering, and the fear and anxiety that we've been through in the last two and a half years can't be erased by anyone. But in comparison to the other children, yes, it can be said that we're lucky girls," I said. "There's reasonable hope that the rest of the children will also find security," Dr. Hochman remarked and Dr. Eckhaus nodded in agreement: "It seems that the Roumanian government is seriously considering complying with the insistent requests of the leaders of the Bucharest Jewish community for the return of the orphans to Roumania," he said. I

was angered by the pacifying note in relation to the government that had alienated itself from the fate of the Jews in its country. This time, Dr. Hochman corrected him: "Please, my friend, don't delude yourself into thinking that those devils are capable of thinking seriously. They lived and still live in blind hatred of the Jews, and nothing has changed with them. The Russians are close to victory and that's why their guts are shaking and they're changing their spots."

As I listened to the two men, Dora Abramovna and Fritzi were having a lively conversation about our continued stay at the orphanage. "I'm sure we'll hold on," I heard Fritzi say, "until that great day when we'll be able to say goodbye." Her face was happy and gay. "Right," said Dora Abramovna in Russian, adding "You just have to be brave and not look back." But I wondered: could we really put behind us all those experiences we had lived through over here? And those dear people we would never come across again?

Dora Abramovna tried her utmost to fulfil the role of the soothing mother. But could it be done?

Dr. Eckhaus' voice came to me from the other side of the table, again pushing me to think about the future. " I hope," he said, lowering his voice, "that the road from Roumania to Palestine will be short," reminding me of my aspirations to go to the Holy Land. "There," he said with a smile, "Jewish boys are waiting for you." His face shone with renewed hope, but Dr. Hochman interrupted him: "You're going too far with your prophesying, my friend." His voice was fatherly as he added: "They're still young and they have to make up for everything they have lost over the last two and a half years." As though waking to reality, Fritzi remarked: "We'll be eighteen next month."

"Really?" Dora Abramovna exclaimed, and her understanding smile appeared. "Looks like we should celebrate such an event. But don't forget that all the children in the orphanage were born on one day or another, and maybe the time has come to consider reminding them of it?" The two men looked at her in surprise, as though Dora Abramovna was trying to remedy the whole world by her words and deeds.

My friends knew the secret of the note I had sent to Father and they were, therefore, not surprised when I told them about the letter and parcel I had received from Father. In the evening, Willy, Abrasha and the rest of the boys returned from work and their reaction added to my excitement, which had not subsided yet. The following day, we invited our friends to the "restaurant' in the ghetto. Abrasha was with us, and when we were served the bean soup with the potato pudding, he joked: "If you get to Bucharest first, don't forget to look for a fancy restaurant." "I'll keep my promise, on my word of honour," I announced.

When the emotion had died down, life returned to its dismal grey, while the wait for the special permit strained our nerves. Despite the warm clothes and 'plentiful' food, we were endlessly tomented by insecurity. For some reason, anxiety about Father and Sammy's existence, although already proven, began to gnaw at us.

The date of our birthday arrived: 2.2.1944. My sister Fritzi and I were in our eighteenth winter, the last two of which had been the worst and cruellest imaginable. Nevertheless, that evening we celebrated our coming of age. Our friends sang childhood birthday songs for us, around the stove they had lit in honour of the occasion. Dora Abramovna gave everyone the sweets we had received from Father. She showered us with heartfelt blessings and gave us what she called a modest gift, a little book of

Pushkin's poems in a yellowed binding. The counsellors gave us a joint present, a little excercise book in which they had written memories of the orphanage since the first day. Dr. Eckhaus, who was present at the 'party', presented us with a poem he had written in our honour:

> Annie and Fritzi, two lovely girls
> With blue eyes and black curls,
> We celebrate your eighteenth winter today.
> From now on: only peace and spring, I pray.
> Walk proudly toward the future, never to part
> From your devoted father and loving brother.
> May the years of exile be erased from your hearts.

When Dr. Eckhaus had read the poem aloud with great feeling, he handed me the page, which I held to my heart. Trembling all over, I thanked him and all the counsellors for remembering our birthday, "But most of all," I said, "I thank all of you for what you gave us during the difficult, grey days when death hovered at the door. And I thank you, and not only for myself, for the hope you implanted in us." The day after that outstanding evening, my good spirits returned and the great hope once again beat within me, as I wrote in my diary.

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CHAPTER NO 20

POGROMS BEFORE LIBERATION

Maroussia was the only one who still kept in touch with me, turning up now and then to visit me at the orphanage without giving any reason for the visits, which I did not always enjoy, a feeling I suspected was mutual. Ever since she had once let slip some unsympathetic remarks about Jews I had been ill at ease with her, maybe even hostile. But she was the only one who still gave me a little information about what was happening with Vassya, David and Borya. I received her coolly on her few visits, but I did not reveal my feelings and did not discuss her views. Mostly, I listened to the news she brought, learning that the boys and Natalya were in the Odessa district and all was well with them.

No matter how I tried to pump Dora Abramovna, whom Fritzi and I would visit on Fridays to bathe and change our clothes, she would give me no information about them. Why does she wrap herself in silence, I wondered more than once. It was she, after all, who had first sent me to work in the gestapo kitchen and she who had, without explanation, put an end to it. This was after I told her that I had met Ivan the Terrible (Kolya) having his teeth fixed at Poldi's. She also asked me to limit my visits to Eva and Poldi. Yet one morning, when she arrived a little late, I sensed that she wanted to talk to me. She had approached me a few times, but had changed her mind at the last minute and slipped away without saying anything. Tania, who was sitting next to me at the time, noticed Dora Abramovna's strange behaviour and remarked: ""What's the matter with her?" adding, with relief: "Had Willy been away, I'd have been afraid of bad news." Tania's words rang in my ears

like an ill omen; perhaps Dora Abramovna had heard some bad news about Father or Sammy and was trying to tell me -- and recoiling. Still wondering, I rose and hurried over to her. I felt my knees sag as I asked her in alarm: "Has something happened to my father or brother?" She gave me a surprised look: "No, no, nothing's happened to them...we haven't had any messages from Bucharest..." And only after she had thought for a moment: "But..." and without saying more, she went into the boys' room, leaving me open-mouthed. The "But..." troubled me, boring into my head all day. Willy and Lonnie also looked upset the whole day, I noticed. Every time the front door opened, they hurried to their room as though under orders, and vanished for a while.

After the mammeliga that evening, Willy came to me and asked me rather hesitantly to come out with him "for a little walk". "A walk? What for?" Willy ignored my ill-mannered remark and pleaded: "Come on, Annie, let's get some air." On cold winter evenings I preferred the stifling air that protected me against the clear and hostile air, in which all I felt was the piercing, stinging cold that hurt me to the bone. I refused and he turned his back on me. I jumped from the bunk and stopped him from going. "Wait for me," I called after him. He turned to face me again, mollified: "Dress warmly because its very cold outside." Under my bunk, at the ready for any of my friends who wanted to use them, stood my rubber galoshes, and I pulled them on. I took my coat and woollen scarf from the isolation room and wrapped myself in them.

When we were standing outside, Willy put his arm about my shoulders. His voice was tender and warm: "Look," and he paused for a bit. "Look at this beautiful night." My eyes roved across the clear sky of inky blue strewn with a multitude of glittering stars. "Willy," I said, "you haven't invited me for a walk in

order to show me the stars." Actually, I was captivated by the shining stars and the glory of the sky and the clear, dry air, which I breathed in deeply. Willy did not hurry to answer. We walked on the white snow that crunched under our feet. The silence in which Willy had wrapped himself wonderfully suited the beautiful mid-February night. I stole a glance at him and his material, physical presence vanished, so that I sensed his warm, inner humanity. "Which girl will win his love?" I mused. Willy who loved everyone and who was loved by everyone, walked silently beside me, his big shoes sinking into the soft snow. His head was bent forward, as if he was looking for his footprints. I broke the silence: "Where do you plan to go?" He shook his head as if remembering my existence, and halted. He said "Um..." to recall his usual opening phrase, which was "No, its nothing, nothing..." and then he would begin to talk, his words sounding as if they had been placed in their proper frame, without which they might lose their significance. "Willy, are you in love?" I immediately regretted my foolish question. Willy was not at all surprised: "Has Tania told you?" "No, she hasn't told me a thing." He chuck led, put his arm around my shoulders again, and after a few steps began to speak in a rush about a girl named Haya, who had been in his class at school, whom he loved, and who loved... "But all that was before the expulsion," he said. "Its been a year since then, and I didn't know what had happened to her, until now: I hear that she's in Bershad and that she'll be coming here to us soon. We're going to get married!" We went as far as the second orphanage. "Its a pity its dark here already," said Willy, "we could have gone in for a short visit." I was also sorry, but the house was in complete darkness and we retraced our steps. On the way, he pointed to Dora Abramovna's house, where a faint light was coming

from one of the windows. "It seems a bit late for a visit," he hesitated a moment before deciding to move on, and then, as if to himself, he said through clenched teeth: "Another dear comrade had gone from us." Surprised at this sudden turn in the conversation, and without suspecting his meaning, I asked him impatiently: "Who's gone from you?" He did not immediately answer. I looked around, in the light of the millions of stars glinting on the white snow, there was nobody to be seen. The houses of the ghetto looked abandoned and the only sign of life was the faint light in Dora Abramovna's window. "He was killed yesterday, by the damned Germans," he said with the sort of calm that comes before the storm. "That fellow from Berlivka, Vassya. He was shot by the Germans yesterday." I felt I was suffocating. His words, which seemed to come from a distance, echoed and echoed in my ears: "Vassya's been shot and killed.....Vassya's been shot and killed." Vassya who had dreamed of building a new world where none would kill or be killed. Willy gripped my arm with one hand and stroked my cheek with the palm of the other to wipe away a non-existent tear; "I know...I know..." I do not know what he meant when he said he knew. My senses were hazy, my heart emptied of all feeling, but my power of speech returned, and I whispered: "Let's go back." I wanted only to be under the rug again, to think in peace about what had been and what no longer was.

Before going in, sitting on the steps outside the house, I heard Willy repeating the tragic sequence of events in which three of the boys, including Vassya, had been killed. "They arrived safely at the railway tracks," Willy said. "The ones I often crossed?" I asked in dread. "No," Willy answered, "they were working on the tracks to Odessa. They managed to lay a big load of dynamite and detonate it in time; a scheduled trainload of goods

and passengers -- German soldiers and ammunition -- was blown sky-high." And after a short pause: "Vassya and his comrades were caught later. Then they were shot." He wanted to go on and bring me up to date on the whole affair, but I stopped him. "Enough, Willy, that's enough." I felt a flood of hot salty tears. Willy stood up, helping me to my feet. "Was the dynamite in those baskets I took over?" Willy knocked at the door and we waited for Ida Abramovna to open it. "No, no, Annie," Willy said,"the only thing in your baskets was potatoes." "If so, why was my mission so important and mysterious?" Ida Abramovna's sleepy voice came from inside: "Who's there? Who's there?" "Its me, its me," Willy answered, and before the door opened he whispered: "Your mission wss to test the guards' alertness."

The death of Vassya and his comrades, whom I did not know, was only the beginning of the bloody reprisals the nazi monster carried out in retreating. They also left no time to think about what had been. They pounced like threatening grey waves, cruelly submerging everything in their path, spreading destruction. The orphanage was the only place they had not yet fallen upon, but the acts of rape, brutality and murder that took place in and around the ghetto had reached our ears. An atmosphere of fear and dread prevailed, growing worse when we learned of the murder of Jennie Stock's brother. He had left the house to look for food, in spite of the strict instructions forbidding us to go out. When he did not come back, Jennie brought his absence to the notice of the counsellors, but she was too late. Ida Abramovna was beside her when she was informed of the tragedy, and when she began screaming, Ida quickly put her hand over the girl's mouth to avoid another kind of outburst; the kind we were hearing from outside.

Poor Jenny! Her beloved brother, her only support, had left

her tearing her hair, beating her head with her fists, to silence her cries, cries of pain we all shared.

The presence of the counsellors, who had not left the house since the pogroms began, was not of much use. They walked around on tiptoe, and the slightest unexpected movement intensified their nervousness, which they passed on to us. "The house is like a small world simmering on a low fire," said Fritzi, "and its inside a world that's gone up entirely in flames." Dr. Eckhaus was also with us and he was perhaps the only one who maintained relative calm. We learned from him that the journey to Roumania was a certainty and, what was more, preparations were being made openly. That week, scores of boys and girls who were candidates for the journey arrived from other ghettoes. They gradually filled the house, which was too small to contain them. They crowded on the floor in the passage, in our room and that of the boys, and even filled the isolation room to capacity. They were nicknamed the "Refugees"; "Eaters of our mammeliga". Our twice-daily portion of mammeliga was cut by half and was now only enough for two bites. Because of the situation outside, the boys were not permitted to go out to work and earn the little food they had received from the Roumanian and Italian soldiers. The hunger grew more serious from day to day. The money I had was also of no use, for the same reason, and we couldn't get to the "restaurant", which was rumoured to have been closed, anyway. The lice, a trouble we had managed to limit, now multiplied with the arrival of the "Refugees".

The only one whose luck improved was Mannyo, Fritzi's boyfriend. Being the oldest and most educated of us he was called to the Centre, where his job was to negotiate with the Authorities. His main function was to make lists of candidates for

the journey. Thus, he spent most of his time at the Centre, where he also ate and slept.

In the midst of this maelstrom, there were also moving reunions among families. We were not excluded from this excitement, when we discovered three cousins on Father's side. Two of them, Ida and Yojiu Faust, were completely unknown to us and we only discovered the family connection after a brief inquiry. Yojiu's father and Ida's mother were brother and sister and they were my father's second cousins. We found, therefore, that they were only third cousins... This fact did not lessen the happiness of the meeting. I considered any survivor of the family to be a sister or brother. Gusti Fessler, the third one, was also a third cousin on my grandmother's side, and the matter was further complicated when we learned for the first time that she was Ida and Yojiu's first cousin, on her mother's side ... But we did not continue to scratch around in the family undergrowth, content just to be together. I knew Gusti from home. We had gone with our grandmother to visit them in the resort town, Solka, where she lived with her parents and big sister, who had perished in one of the stables. Ida and Yojiu were two years older than us, and Gusti was the the youngest and smallest, five years our junior. Her thirteen years were not evident, and she looked like a girl of eight or nine. She clutched at us as if we were her sanctuary. Ida and Yojiu also clung to the hope that in Bucharest, where Ida's brother lived, we would be able to unite the remnants of the family.

Willy was the happiest of men when his girl Haya arrived with one of the groups from Bershad. She was exactly as he had described her. Tall, with smooth black hair and black eyes full of intelligence. The joyful Willy even earned one of Tania's

provocative comments: "He struts around her like a peacock". We squeezed her in with us, as we had already done with Ida and Gusti. The bunk was considered preferable to the floor where most of the "Refugees" sprawled.

Haya was two years older than us; I was fascinated by her personality in the few days that I was in her company and admired the richness of her Russian. She was pleasant to talk to and, in her restrained way, revealed her love for Willy. She spoke with longing about those secondary school days, when they had first met. When the Russians had taken Bessarabia, boys and girls had begun to study together and the bond between them became even closer. "Now we'll never be parted again." Fritzi laughed: "Little children, weaving dreams while God Almighty sits on high and unravels them." She's probably been influenced by the atmosphere in the Home, which was that of a sinking ship on the high seas where survivors sought other survivors in order to rescue them, I thought.

There were other stormy, vociferous meetings between brothers and sisters, cousins, and friends. There was constant turmoil on the bunks and the floor, the whole house was in ferment. In those troubled, muddled days in mid-March, 1944, I did not see much of Willy. He and Lonnie were perhaps the only ones who came and went. In the few hours that Willy was in the Home I gathered from him what was happening outside. He hinted that Asher, Freda Frank's boyfriend, and Yaacov, Hilda Sandlers's boyfriend, were somewhere with Petya, the partisan commander. "I have a feeling," Willy said, "that Kolya the bully is on our tracks. He's trying to exploit every minute that he's still in control," he gritted between his teeth. "How do you know?" I wondered, "where did you have the pleasure of his company?" "He comes fairly often to the

kitchen," Willy said. "Maybe the bastard has scented what goes on in the kitchen after hours." "Perhaps it wasn't by chance that he tried to interrogate me that time at Eva's," I said. "Willy agreed. "Or maybe he's trying to change his ways and lighten the punishment that's waiting for him," I said to Willy, to calm him. Although I knew my words had not convinced him, there was encouragement in the smile he gave me. That night they moved a big group of children to the other orphanage, including Fritzi, Tania, Moussia, Sima and myself. We accepted the transfer as obvious. We were recieved at the orphanage by Freda Frank and Bella Schneider. Two days later we were separated again, and Freda and Bella were transferred; we did not know where. When more children were moved out, and others were moved in, an air of mystery prevailed, but our fears were not yet aroused. Only a week later did we understand that the thing had been done to prevent a display of distress and utter bitterness that we had not been among the first to get out of this purgatory.

When Mannyo finished his job at the Centre and returned to the orphanage, he was stunned to meet us. "You're here?" he cried in disbelief? "What happened to you?" We were alarmed at the tone of his voice. "Where should we be, then?" "God Almighty!" he cried, "Those bastards sold you out, too!" and he jumped with rage. My heart told me something awful had happened. Only when he had recovered somewhat did he take Fritzi in his arms: "Perhaps its better this way," he murmured, "its best we stay together." The night before, the train, loaded with children and young people, had set out from Balta to Roumania. "Now I know why those adults I saw at the Centre were wearing short skirts and pants -- to look younger!" I was beyond despair. "Were Fritzi and I cheated?" He grated his teeth as he told us that the authorization

to have us sent back to Roumania had arrived from Father in the last few days. "I was so happy for you! I gave the document to Dr. Hochman with my own hands." "But how...?" Fritzi asked. "It was given to me by the officer when Dr. Hochman was out, and it was Dr. Hochman who put it in the drawer." "The document has come too late, because the girls are going with the group anyway," he had said. From which Mannyo understood that we had left on that train. "I was sorry I couldn't come to the station to say goodbye." Hope throbbed in me that perhaps there had been a mistake and another train was leaving, on which Dr. Hochman planned to send us. "They won't risk more trains these days," Mannyo said.

"What about Haya?" Willy asked anxiously, "Haya stayed behind in the other Home and I haven't been able to visit her; did she go?" "No, no, she hasn't gone, "Mannyo calmed him. "She opted to stay." Willy breathed in relief. "And who were the girls who got the places meant for us?" Fritzi asked. "Maybe," Manyo said, "you weren't maliciously sold out. When they learned that the permit was on its way here, they used your rights as orphans for others. Maybe they borrowed your names because they thought you'd be leaving with the group anyway." He pleaded the cause of Dr. Hochman and Mr. Rubinstein: "They never assumed things would turn out as they did." "You mean," I said, "our special permit and the orders to evacuate the orphans arrived at one and the same time, and that's why the plan, for two pairs of girls named Anna and Fritzi Faust to leave, failed?" Mannyo shamefacedly admitted I was right. "The Roumanians aren't complete fools, they would have discovered two sets of girls with the same name on one train." "And we've fallen between two trains!" Fritzi said and, for the first time, I heard her rebel and protest in pain against the wrongs done to us, this time, even if in error, by our fellow

Jews.

Tania, Moussia and Sima tried to console us by the fact that they had also been left behind. Sima was the only one left of her family, she had not a soul in the world. Therefore, she was frankly happy to remain with us. Tania did not care where she would be when the liberating Red Army came, and she expressed this by warmly and lovingly embracing her brother Willy, who was her whole world. Willy was also happy that his sister had stayed with him, and with a levity unsuitable to both his character and status, he said: "At least you'll be beside me when I marry Haya." "Are you trying to change the subject?" Moussia complained, "It seems that I've also fallen between two trains." I felt that the accusation in her voice was directed at me, too, when she said: "It seems that they've selected us as a unit." Mannyo told us that Bettike, Yojiu and Ida had gone, too. He gratified Lonya by telling him his sister Carolina had left for freedom with the rest

The fraud robbed me of sleep the whole night. I tried to reconstruct this farcical, incompetent affair that had toyed with our destiny. I recalled the sentence in Father's letter which had awakened our hope: "Children," Father had written, "I hope to get the permit very soon." He had also written: "I'll pay as much as I can to the clerks responsible for carrying out the permit. Each word and its significance echoed in my ears. When I was young and very innocent, I scorned both bribed and bribers, but now that I had grown up and learned something of the way of the world I accepted Father's arangements to obtain our freedom. But this new reality that had slapped me in the face angered me. All kinds of thoughts continued to trouble me and deprive me of rest, and so it went until, suddenly, my thoughts cleared and the inner resolve took shape: "Don't give in!" When it was light, I silently slipped

from the bunk, put on my shoes swiftly and quietly so as not to awaken the other girls, slung my coat over my shoulders and tiptoed to the door.

Fritzi had also been unable to sleep and she had noticed everything I did. When I was at the door she jumped from the bunk and was beside me in a flash. She had also grabbed her shoes and coat: "I'm going with you, Annie!" I wondered if she knew where I was headed. Outside, in the big deserted yard, it was already full light and the fresh air of early April expanded my lungs. "Where are you going?" Fritzi surprisingly asked. But I could tell from her voice that she had guessed correctly. Encouraged by the fresh air I told her the plan I had formed in all innocence, in the last watch of the night. "I'm not sure we'll succeed," she hesitated, "Dr. Hochman could deny it." "He can't deny it. Why, Mannyo can testify that he gave him the permit himself," I answered testily. Fritzi tried to persuade me not to go and when I would not listen to her advice, she tried to give another reason: "Let's assume, Annie, that Dr. Hochman agrees to give us the permit, what will we do with it?" "Its possible we haven't missed the train yet, Fritzi, and if we have the document in our hands, I'm sure we'll find a way to exercise our rights." Encouraged by my words, Fritzi pulled me forward: "Come, let's go quickly, so that we won't be late," and we set out for the Centre together.

The street was as deserted as a cemetry on a winter's day. After a few steps we were passing the gestapo building. We peered at it, wondering where all the soldiers were who usually filled the big yard. "Look," said Fritzi, " the guard isn't at the gate, either." "Maybe the ground has swallowed them," I answered serenely, but an undefinable fear rose in me. "Perhaps they've all been ordered to the front," Fritzi joked, to cheer me up. As we

continued in the deepening silence, Fritzi said again, "Maybe we should give up, after all? Come on, let's go back, Annie, this silence scares me." "Don't panic," I told her, "we're near the Centre already." I said this although I also wanted to turn back, but an invisible hand pushed me on against my will. One more turn and we'll be there, I pursuaded myself. I quickened my steps, pulling Fritzi along with me.

We had come to the main street and were continuing in the direction of the Centre, when my ears suddenly caught the sound of Kolya's voice and a few metres in front of the Centre we saw a crowd of SS soldiers around a truck standing in the middle of the road. I almost froze in my tracks and Fritzi cried in alarm: "Let's get out of here, quick!" We turned. Suddenly we heard Kolya's threatening voice: "Halt! Halt!" We carried on without looking back, but when I heard his horse galloping, I knew we were lost. I had sprung the trap myself!

He overtook us rapidly and I heard him coming, he turned his horse and confronted us. His eyes stared in their sockets. "Ha! You, is it!?" he crowed triumphantly. I saw him blink in disbelief: "There's two of you?" His confusion encouraged me to smile at him, and I replied calmly: "No, this is my sister next to me." He returned an evil smile and like a man in a hurry, said: "Go back and get in the truck, quick!" When we reached the truck I took a look at the SS soldiers who stood there wordlessly, observing perfect silence. They gave the impression that Kolya was their commander, and he alone was running the whole project. But the soldiers' silence was nothing but a trap, in which all those in the truck had been caught. Actually, they had managed to trap us, too. In the truck young men, boys, and some girls were sitting in total silence, nobody opening his or her mouth. Fritzi and I

were the last and we found ourselves at the opening. There was another truck behind us, which the armed soldiers were getting into, and when the last of the soldiers had entered, Kolya gave the sign and our truck moved off.

With the movement of the truck, people also began to stir in agitation and dread at our fate. Someone declared that they planned to murder us, another said: "They won't dare." Among the passengers we identified Bernhard, from our town, and we learned from him that they had caught them while they were in the Centre. He also told us that he and the rest of the boys and girls, whom he did not know, had arrived in Balta only during the last few days to try their luck in joining the train that had left for Bucharest. We also heard from him that Dr. Hochman was nowhere in the Centre, nor was anyone else they could turn to. While the truck made its way at a relatively slow speed, I saw that it was driving towards the railway track. When I drew Fritzi's attention to this, she asked in amazement: "How do you know this is the road to the railway track?" And a spark of hope flashed in her eye. After a short drive -- the railway track appeared in the distance -- deserted. I also identified the hut in front of the tracks, and when the truck screeched to a stop beside it, I was filled with foreboding. The other truck halted behind us, and the soldiers began quickly to alight from it, pulling revolvers from their holsters and aiming them at us as they ordered us off the truck and began hysterically herding us into the hut. Beyond despair, I pulled Fritzi with me towards the hut and we were first inside. All the feverish thoughts I had had before, were now erased. Driven by a mighty urge to live, I pushed Fritzi in the direction of the only window, which faced the door. I do not know how it was, and whether the window opened apparently by itself. I could

see the stream of youngsters pushing inside. I jumped through the window and dragged Fritzi after me, and we rolled into the familiar canal in which I had hidden several times to observe the movements of the guards. When we reached the bottom of the canal a tremendous explosion was heard, and then the flames of a huge fire and cries of terror rose from the hut. I felt around for Fritzi, who had apparently lost consciousness and lay heavy as lead. The acrid smell of smoke began to pervade the canal. I was also near fainting and kept my head clear with difficulty. Suddenly Fritzi sighed: "Annike, are you alive?" I indicated that I was. Under the heavy smoke and flying sparks overhead, deafened by screams of terror, we clasped hands in thanksgiving to God who had decided at the last moment to let us live.

My heart stopped thudding when the cries died away. We remained in the canal under cover of the smoke, straining our ears to catch the sound of the murderers' voices, but we heard only a mixture of shouts in German. Terrified to death, from which we had just miraculously been saved, we remained in the canal until the smoke dispersed and the shielding, saving darkness fell. We began to withdraw along the canal under its cover until we were a reasonable distance away from the tragedy. And again, thanks to the experience I had gained before, I found the way around the danger and back to the orphanage.

The house we had left in the early morning, with the children fast asleep in it, was in total darkness. The frightening silence testified that something had happened here, too. "Is it so late that they're all asleep already?" Fritzi asked in wonder. I had the sneaking fear that they had all been murdered or kidnapped. When we walked around the house, we saw that the kitchen was also in darkness. They usually left the lamp burning low all night. I

went back to the main door and we tried des[perately to waken someone to come to our aid, knocking rythmically, but it was no use. Helpless and desperate, we went to the back of the house again and for lack of any alternative, hid ourselves under the single tree that, for some reason, was left in place, and there we decided to stay and await the future. The night which was like an eternity took us to its bosom as we trembled with cold, fear and a more concrete sense of desolation than ever before.

With morning light, when we were vulnerable harm under the tree, we heard a slight noise coming from the entrance door. I took courage and softly called: "Who's there? Who's there?" Fritzi put her hand out to close my mouth, when I clearly heard Willy's voice, also answering in silence: "Annie, Fritzi, where are you?" We darted towards him like startled cats. As if he had suddenly appeared to rescue me, I fell on his neck as the tears burst from my throat. Fritzi was also speechless, but wise, good Willy did not lose his head for a moment, and with his characteristic calm he drew us in, once inside the seemingly uninhabited house, we were stunned into silence. Willy led us to the isolation room, down a few steps.

When my eyes grew accustomed to the dimness of the room, whose window was blacked out by a dark blanket and whose shutter was bolted, the scene of a refugee camp came back to miserable life in front of my eyes. The scores of children huddled on the floor looked pale and frightened in the faint light. Their consensus of silence hovered like a threat in the air. Suddenly I heard Jennitche's joyful cry, which came from one of the corners, threatening the existence of the last haven. I immediately identified her little body fluttering in the children's hands as they tried to quiet her. I made my way to her through the

reclining children and gathered her in my arms. Haya and Mannyo were also there to welcome us. Mannyo reached out to Fritzi and drew her to him. With Jennitchke in my arms I took refuge next to Tania and Haya. The "Welcome" with which my friends greeted me in that despondent atmosphere, sounded out of place. Moussia and Sima, who were sitting nearby, also greeted us. Willy's serene voice softened the atmosphere somewhat as he bent over me and whispered accusingly: "You've pinched my place, Annie," but he immediately sank down next to us. "How did Jennitchke get here?" I asked in a whisper. They did not answer this, and Willy began to give me the latest news in a whisper. To sweeten it a little, before the blow, he whispered in my ear: "Borya and David arrived yesterday." He took a deep breath: "They're in a safe place, behind the house." "How," I asked, "did you know where we were?" "We guessed," he said, "and we heard about the tragedy next to the railway line..." "So you knew..." I interrupted him. "The rumour spread quickly," he said and gradually told me about the day's happenings, and one after another the blows fell -- the evil news.

"Kolya and his gang of murderers came yesterday morning to the first Home's kitchen and killed Rosa the cook. Lisa wasn't there. At the exact same time, while the pogrom was going on in the ghetto and the kitchen was on fire, we managed to get the children out of that orphanage and bring them here." Willy listed the day's victims, some of them known to us and others not. Together with those in the hut, which I had witnessed, and who numbered about 40, there were some 100 victims that day. I was tired and there was an awful emptiness in my stomach. Although I had not eaten for the whole of the past day, this was not food-hunger. "How long?" I asked Willy. He stroked my head tenderly and whispered, as if to himself: "Until the Red Army liberates us."

Leaning against Willy's shoulder all night, with Jennitchke on my lap, I was unaware when sleep finally overcame me. When I woke up Willy tried to provoke me: "You slept like an angel and shouted like the devil in your sleep." He tried to instill a note of complaint in his voice, as in the old days, but the tension and tiredness on his face and his stubble betrayed him. I also tried my best to take a tone that would hide my inner turmoil. "Did I wake you up?" "No, I didn't sleep at all," he said. Haya also tried to lighten the atmosphere, joining the conversation: "What were you doing all night?" "Well, you should know!" Willy answered dramatically: "On my left side I was supporting Annie's head, with my left hand I was stroking your head, and with my right hand I was trying to stifle Annie's shouts." But we fell silent very soon, and the attempt at joking soon faded away. I found out that Dora Abramovna, Sofia Umovna and Dr. Eckhaus, who had apparently arrived during the night, were with us. Like us, they sat helplessly, among the many children, maintaining a silence which did not improve the atmosphere. They did not intervene during the coming days, either. Our daily ration of water was brought by the boys, and our food was corn cobs, which we ate raw. Willy, Lonnie, and Borya Katz, who had joined them, provided Borya and David with water and corn cobs every two days, and each time Willy would tell me about their condition: "At least they aren't cramped," Willy said, adding as if he had just remembered: "Maybe we're going to have a visit, soon." I looked at him in surprise: "Maybe," Willy continued, "Friedrich's going to try to reach us with some food." I wondered who Friedrich was. "Well, don't you remember the German officer you nicknamed "Smiler"?" Although I knew he was involved closely with the partisans, I still didn't know what his role was.

"Friedrich told me that our orphanage was scheduled for burning, and at the last moment, with the help of Friedrich and some others, the disaster was averted." Willy also informed me that Friedrich was alert to every rustle coming from the orphanage: "He's ready to come to our aid in case of trouble."

The crowding and the body wastes, which some of the children had no control over, had their effect, and the smell began to trouble me after about a week in the shelter. On the morning of the eighth day of hiding, it was Willy and Lonya's turn to go out and fetch the water. They left earlier than usual, and Willy promised Haya he would obtain a towel. "If Willy gets a towel, at least we'll be able to drive out the stifling air," Haya said. When they did not come back as soon as they should have, anxiety began to gnaw. I was trying to calm Tania and Haya by telling them that they were most probably with David and Borya when two shots filled the air with horror, followed by a silence that was no less horrific. The mute stillness in the shelter also thundered with dread.

After an hour, we heard knocking at the door, which was camouflaged by whitewash and the absence of an outside handle. We hoped that it was Willy and Lonya, since they were the only ones who knew about the door. When one of the children rose to open it, at a sign from Dora Abramovna, there in the doorway stood Kolya and two SS soldiers, in all their terrifying height. Kolya shouted that all the men must come out. I do not know what signal was given to make everyone remain seated in silence, with not a soul stirring, not a soul going outside. The two soldiers next to Kolya seemed to be mere onlookers. Suddenly his glance fell on me and he asked in shock: "Are you still here? Get outside at once!" In a moment of hopelessness and insensibility, I remained where I

was, but when he threatened to blow up the whole house if I did not come out, the thought flashed in my mind to shout and alert Friedrich. I got up and went towards the door. He pulled me by the arm and flung me aside. The two soldiers remained where they were, but when I fell to the floor one of them came over, helped me to my feet and ordered me to move on. I walked, not knowing whether to shout or not, until I reached the door. I do not remember the first scream that escaped me, followed at once by screaming from all the children in the room.

I fell down unconscious. When I opened my eyes I was in the big "dining room". I was lying on the table and Dora Abramovna was wiping my mouth with a wet cloth. Beside her, as if in a dream, I recognised the smiling officer. He continued to smile at me, bending over me to whisper: "Your scream was clearly heard all the way to the gestapo!"

My vision blurred and I saw only the bodies of Willy and Lonya, lying in pools of blood in the doorway. It was this sight that had caused my insane shriek, bringing Friedrich, who, as I later learned, had driven away Kolya and the soldiers.

I lost all sense of being alive for the next two days, retaining nothing but the image of Willy and Lonnie lying in their blood. I heard Haya's voice. The darkness was thick and I could not see her, but gradually the faces of Tania, Haya, my sister Fritzi and all the children with me, to whom I had not given a thought in those two days, took shape. Haya's voice brought me back to reality. Did Tania and Haya know? I could not know this, but I could feel in the touch of Tania's hand on my arm that she, like me, had begun to take in what had happened. For the first time since the dreadful tragedy, we began to comfort one another in whispered, inarticulate words, which were of no consolation.

Fritzi expressed the feeling of relief when she said: "At last you've opened your mouth!" When silence returned I asked again: "How long?" This time it was myself I was asking. And Willy's voice sounded in my ears: "Until the Red Army comes! Until the Red Army comes!" I never imagined how close they were.

They came! They came that morning! At the end of April, when we had been in the shelter for about 10 days, we suddenly heard cries of joy from outside. They grew louder and louder and all of a sudden, as if they had gone crazy, Dora Abramovna and Sofia Umovna began to scream: "The Red Army! The Red Army!" Like a volcanic eruption, cries and screams began to mingle, the door opened and we burst out as one. In the big yard stood two tanks with Red Army soldiers on them. They were surrounded by a huge crowd trying to pull them off. In the midst of the excitement and turmoil I heard Borya and David shouting to us: " Come out, come nearer, they're ours! Our liberators!" And then a silence fell and the singing of the Russian national anthem rose from the crowd with one tremendous, ecstatic voice. I stood on one side, watching something I had never seen in my whole life. The Russian soldeirs got down from their tanks, mingled with the crowd and with no less excitement than ours, lifted up all the children, one by one, kissing them and showering them with sweets, cans of food, loaves of bread and loving words. Then they lifted a few of the children onto the tanks. The children's faces retined their stunned expression, but from where I stood I saw them waving their hands towards the gestapo, and heard them say: "They're still in there! They're inside the gestapo still!"

* * *

CHAPTER NO 21

AFTER THE LIBERATION

Following the liberation, for a whole day and night, crowds filled the streets of the ghetto, joyfully and continuously cheering the Red Army's soldiers parading on flower bedecked tanks, open trucks, and infantry powerfully marching in step over the smooth stones in their boots and their long greatcoats, leather belts, and caps with the earflaps lifted. Without a trace of fatigue, they sang Russian marching songs. I was particularly moved to hear "Wide is my Motherland" sung in soaring harmony. This was the song Lisa the cook had tried so hard to teach us in the kitchen, subduing her voice. People milled around together, like dreamers. The soldiers sitting on the tanks and trucks waved their hands and called out joyfully: "Hurrah! Hurrah!" The enthusiastic welcome in and beyond the ghetto, where they were swept along with the crowd, left many people lying drunk on the streets and pavements, having had too much to drink in their joy over the liberation, and we stumbled over them on our way back to the orphanage.

Two days later, when the excitement had subsided, we found ourselves back in the first orphanage. The bunks had been fumigated. They had also been covered by sacking mattresses stuffed with hay. We each received a rough linen sheet, a little pillow and an army blanket. The number of children per bunk was reduced and everyone was given sufficient space to sleep in. The meals also improved: For brrreakfast we received a slice of bread and jam and a cup of hot milk. Lunch, which was served in tin plates, with aluminium spoons, at the big table consisted of hot soup, a portion of canned meat and a slice of bread. Supper was

also a slice of bread and jam and a cup of milk.

Our spirits were further raised by the advent of officers and soldiers with medals on their chests. They sat with us and sang with the enthusiasm characteristic of the good, warm nature of Russians in general and the soldiers in particular. Some of them also amazed us by dancing the kazatzka and another dance, which stirred us just as much, to the tune of "Apple and Pear are in Leaf". They encouraged us to join them in singing the soulful Russian songs which symbolised freedom above all for us. A few of them who identified themselves as Jews, they were mainly of officer rank, came to us on the first few days, trying to trace their children and families left behind at the outbreak of the war. Little Jennitchke, Hayuta and Grisha, who had stayed with us, became the centre of their interest. They showered them with sweets and, mainly, fatherly warmth and affection.

In that week packed with emotion and events they also enlisted our boys: Yaacov, Asher, David, Borya, Mannyo, Samuel and Borya Katz. The day after their enlistment, when they came to say goodbye, our boys looked like soldiers in every respect. Dressed in khaki greatcoats over wide trousers that narrowed at the feet shod in high leather boots, with belts clasped around their waists, they stood erect. They looked so different from the way they looked before, they gave us a feeling of mixed pride and envy. They were proud. But not only of the uniform. They were proud to be given the opportunity to enlist and fight in the ranks of the army that was fighting the common enemy -- the nazi monster.

With the sound of rejoicing coming from inside the house, following us out onto the steps at the back, we sat down. "You know..." David began hesitantly and then stopped. I did not prod

him with questions, and the two of us sat looking at the moon, which was in full splendour, cruelly illuminationg the ruins of the kitchen. David fixed his gaze in that direction. "What did you want to speak about, David?" I broke the silence. And he, musingly, said: "How nice it is to sit like this. The air's so fresh, now that its been purified of the scum of humanity..." I tried to smile. I put my hand to my cheek to wipe away some hot tears that had gathered there.

"Enough, Anna, enough." He was trying to dispel the past that was so close, so fresh, so painful and so impossible to speak of, and the memory of the people we had known and loved together, who were no longer with us.

He told me about the burrow our boys had dug at Dora Abramovna's instigation, in which he, Borya and four others had taken shelter for ten days. Mouldy, cold, damp earth... "How did you find out that the Red Army had come?" I cut him short, not wanting to hear the description of their bunker, which I considered paradise compared to our shelter. "Grisha came on the last night to notify us that the Red Army was on the outskirts of the town and that the whole town, including the ghetto, was clear of enemy forces, which had been retreating en masse all day. So we came out of hiding the same night," he said and sighed at the terrible thing he was about to tell. He gave me a look and carefully, afraid to cause me pain, said: "I found them at the entrance to the house." He almost choked. "Were they still there?" I asked. And when he answered in the affirmative, my pain intensified and blended with the pain in his voice. "We moved them from there to the bunker," and again after a short sigh: "It was obvious that all the children would come running out when the Red Army entered, and we wanted to spare them the sight. We moved them

temporarily to the hideout, which was well-hidden." David did not mention their names, and I thanked him for this, in my heart. "Only the day after the liberation," he said, "were their bodies removed to the local hospital and after Borya and I had confirmed their identity, they were buried in the newly established military cemetry."

The designation, "military cemetry" was the most suitable in my opinion. More than "Jewish", or "Christian". I kept this to myself for quite a while, out of distress, and only told Tania some time later about the burial her brother had been given. And although it had been played down, she too considered it an honourable burial, worthy of Lonnie and Willy.

That night David also told me about Natalya's daring actions, as he put it. She had been with him near Odessa the whole time. Now, said David, she was with her friend in K . "Where's that?" I asked in amazement, "I thought it was nothing but a code word." "Oh no, its about 25 kms from here, and 45 from Odessa. Natalya's also going to join the army soon". We went on, speaking about life and death, about what the vague future held for us. The sounds of celebration inside were gradually fading.

Early in the morning, the boys left the orphanage on their way to the front. That week the girls born in 1925-26 were also called up for early enlistment. On the morning of April 30th, on our way to the enlistment centre in the town hall, we had our first experience of the Workers' Festival, May Day, which was to begin the next day. The town was decorated with red flags waving from the roofs and windows of the buildings. The houses were adorned with garlands of flowers, coloured lights were stretched overhead and masses of people were working feverishly to refurbish the grey, deserted town I had seen when I was doing forced labour

under Kolya's supervision. It now received us with a rare spectacle that increased the intoxication of vitory for us.

The building was thronged with brightly dressed girls with plaits wound around their heads, and flowers of every imaginable colour in their hair. They had come from surrounding villages and from Balta to enlist, lending the place a festive atmosphere.

In the great passage, behind tables of all shapes and sizes, brought to serve the makeshift offices, sat uniformed officers who still made an impression on us. They were interviewing girls according to turn. We became part of the human landscape which had excluded us only a week ago. During those hours, which stretched until dusk, we got to know many of the girls fate had thrown together with us in a common service. One of them was Katya, who looked fragile, but who, in the course of conversation, revealed a biting tongue that bore witness to her sharp mind. She was from Balta, the only one of us born in 1923 and a social science graduate. She expressed her wish to join us and stay with us for the duration of our coming service.

At the table, facing the officer who greeted me in a friendly manner, I was relaxed and answered all his questions fluently. He noted the personal particulars with precision on the form in front of him, including father's name. "Anna Moisievna," he smiled. I corrected him: "Anna Faust." I spoke, read and wrote Russian fluently, and I related positively to the words "Dobra Volna", meaning volunteer, at the top of the form I signed. When I answered "Radautz, Bukovina, in Roumania", the officer triumphantly informed me that Roumania "no longer exists, because we have liberated that whole strip of our Motherland."

I left the enlistment office satisfied, holding the

authorisation of my fitness for service in the Red Army and a list of what I had to bring when I reported for duty on May the 15th. We had to report to the enlistment centre on May the 14th to get our uniforms. Sima and Haya were among the unfortunates who were not accepted by the Red Army, on grounds of health. Just because of my stupid cough, they're separating us!" Sima wept. Haya was rejected because of bouts of weeping. That evening Poldi visited me and told me excitedly that he had just taken Eva to the government hospital. "They've already put her in the labour ward!"

The city was in the throes of May Day celebrations, adorned and stirred like a bride on her happy day. Workers and soldiers marched in the streets, wearing festive clothes and waving red flags, and the singing of "The Internationale" accompanied us on all sides. I went with Poldi to visit Eva in the hospital where, congratulations to them, their first son had been born. He was named Boritchke, after Eva's father, Baruch. "My son's been born on the day symbolising freedom." "May your hopes come true," I said with a strange feeling of disbelief. "Other human beings will be born," I thought, "to fill the places of those who perished in this dreadful war." -- "Can't you see, Annie," Poldi cut into my thougts, in an amused voice, " the whole world's celebrating the birth of my son!"

I went to Katya's house. She and her parents received me heartily: "Is this the sweet girl you told us about?" asked the father. Her mother, warmly hospitable, said in motherly tones: "I'm so happy that our Katichke won't be on her own, and I hope you'll look after each other. There's no way of knowing where you'll be sent to and what kind of girls you'll be serving with," she said, as though trying to foresee the future.

In the two last weeks that I was in the orphanage, it changed

and gradually took on the character of a well-appointed, organised institution, which they filled with more children between the ages of 5-10. They were washed daily and dressed properly. Until we left, we helped to organise play corners for the young ones under the guidance of teachers who came from the local school to become acquainted with the pupils who were enrolled in their schools. In an atmosphere which promised a better world, we had a growing sense of our impending return home. I even deluded myself that by enlisting in the Red Army I would hasten this event. During this fortnight, I also managed to visit Eva, who had meanwhile returned to her room in the ghetto, and see baby Borichke, with his little white head and his blue eyes like Poldi's. A flood of tears blurred my vision. I turned my head to wipe them away. Poldi apologised for me: "I also shed tears of happiness." I said: "May your baby be very happy and never know suffering." And I thought: If a Jew, then a proud Jew, but where? I did not give much thought to this on that day filled with small happenings that distracted me from my true ambition "to be a free nation in our land."

On the eagerly-awaited day, 14th May 1944, we again went to the town hall. We were received by two charming Russian women officers in the storeroom. After waiting in a long line, they gave us our gear and an army knapsack in which to pack our personal belongings.

Anticipation and excitement kept me sleepless that night, and before dawn I saw Moussia already standing at the door of the isolation room. I hurried out of my bunk, followed by Fritzi and Tania, who had also been awake. The isolation room had become a wash- and dressing-room. After we had washed our faces and brushed our teeth, which had become habitual once more, I put on the uniform: a skirt and Russian shirt, which was too big for me, a

belt and boots. I then wound my braids into a bun, which supported the rim of my hat. When we were all dressed, we were amazed at one another. We were prompted to look at each other for lack of a mirror.

Katya and her parents, who had come to pick us up in their cart, were awaiting us outside. The parting from Dora Abramovna and Sofia Umovna, the only ones who had remained with us, was unemotional. Apart from a few brief words and a tear we tried to hide, we added nothing. But the parting from Sima was upsetting. It hurt me to leave her by herself in the orphanage, where she was being hospitalized for a thorough examination of her lungs. Sima herself behaved admirably, obviously trying to make it easier for us: "Have a good journey and don't worry about me, Annitchke, I'll be fine." Haya had parted from us as soon as she had heard of her rejection by the army, and had gone to Bershad where she had left her mother. I gave Jennitchke a parting kiss while she was asleep.

The only one to reveal signs of emotion was Dr. Eckhaus, who accompanied us to the cart. He also helped us load a sack of potatoes and four loaves of bread, which the orphanage had given us for food on the journey, onto the cart. After he had assisted us into the cart, he stammered a few words of goodbye, adding the reminder: "Girls, you're so beautiful, don't be seduced by the shiny buttons!" and when the cart moved off, I heard him say, as if to himself: "Take care of yourselves."

We reached the railway station, which I was seeing for the first time, with scores of other carts disgorging the girls we had met at the enlistment centre. Army uniforms had replaced their colourful clothes. A host of girls filled the square in front of the station building which we entered about an hour later. The huge building's roof had been destroyed in the bombing, revealing

the clear sky against a background of sooty walls hung with red flags that did nothing to hide their dismal appearance.

On a raised platform there was a table with a big vase of wildflowers, behind which stood two officers, a colonel and a lieutenant. The latter was announcing over and over through a tin loudspeaker: "Enter! Enter! -- Attention, attention Citizens!" When silence fell, the colonel began his speech with a short salutation and dwelt on the war imposed by the fascists, which had not yet ended. "But the nation has gone out as one against them, for we must repel the enemy until his final destruction." He also spoke about our joining the cruel struggle. "You are headed for Dombas," he said, "where work awaits you." I looked around to find out where this Dombas was, but the girls' closed faces and a certain degree of disappointment they showed, told me little.

The colonel concluded with thankskiving to "Our great leader, our Father, Stalin," and finally gave the signal for a mighty outburst of song: "In the name of Stalin our Father, in the name of the Motherland and the People -- Forward!" The lieutenant then introduced himself as our escort, Feodor Ologov. He promised to help us on our way to Dombas. Again at a signal, they concluded with the song "Arise enlightened land/ Arise to war/ Against the vile fascist/ We'll march to death/ To rescue the Motherland."

When they finished singing everyone streamed to the railway cars waiting to absorb us and the load of baggage the girls had brought with them, which consisted mainly of food. The platform was also thronged with recently arrived soldiers. We were 20 girls in our car. Fragrant, fresh straw was spread on the floor. Everyone found a place, with the baskets, sacks and boxes she had brought beside her. We sat thus for hours, waiting to move. But this only happened after midnight when another train arrived and

our carriages were coupled to it.

After a non-stop journey of two days, the train brought us to an out-of-the-way village whose small houses were seen in the distance. The train shunted onto a side track and after our cars were disconnected, the engine left with the front ones, which were full of soldiers. We stayed there for two more days until another train arrived and we were coupled to it for another stretch of road, again lasting two days. On the way we were disconnected again for two days and then re-connected. After this, we spent many days in a field awaiting the engine that would save us. Most of the girls' food ran out. Our clothes began to stick to our bodies from the perspiration caused by the growing heat. In the midst of this distress, which only our small group had ever experienced before, I pulled myself together and at one of the stops I set out on my own to find Feodor Ologov to ask for help. After a painstaking search of all the carriages I finally found him in an empty carriage, lying with one of the girls in a condition which embarrassed me more than it did him; but when I laid our distress before him he responded briskly, and effectively attended to my request. He mobilised a few soldiers in some nearby carriages and ordered them to bring us tins of water. In less than half an hour there were drums of hot water next to all the cars. We immediately began the task of bathing ourselves and washing our clothes, which we removed behind blankets. In the short time that remained until the train moved on, we strung the ropes produced by Feodor Ologov between the doorframes and hung out our laundry. The clothes waved in the warm wind all the way and were dry by the next stop. After this daring mission of mine, the girls began to turn to me with all sorts of requests, which I passed on to Feodor Ologov directly. As the journey progressed, I became willy-nilly

the spokeswoman for all the girls.

At one of the stops, which they informed us would last longer than usual, I organised groups of girls to scour the undergrowth. On my initiative we also filled tins of water. After we had gathered twigs, papers, thorns and other inflammable things we lit campfires on which we placed the tins with potatoes in them. When the water was at boiling point, there was the sudden sound of a train whistle and an engine appeared out of nowhere; with a speed we had not seen before, our carriages were coupled to the train and the engine driver's strong voice burst from the loudspeaker: "Into the carriages! Into the carriages!" In the uproar, some of the girls managed to put out the fire and, without considering the consequences, I yelled at the girls with all my might: "Stay where you are, don't put out the fires!" And I ran towards the engine. "Stop! Stop!" The engine driver was startled by my panicky cry and came down. An elderly man, heme running towards me in alarm. "What happened, girl? Who are you?" "Uncle," I said panting, "you can't go." "Why not?" Then I explained to him that the water we were cooking our potatoes in was almost boiling. He looked at me in amazement and asked in an amused voice: "What do you want, girl?" "We won't be able to get on the train until our potatoes are cooked." He laughed loudly and put his arm around my shoulders: "And when do you think your potatoes will be ready?" "In about ten minutes," I answered confidently. "Sure, sure." The man answered me and at once assumed a mock tone of defeat: "Well, go on, girl, and when you're ready, give me the order to move." And that's how it was. When the potatoes were sufficiently cooked and we had thrown out the water and put out the fires, I ordered all the girls to get onto the train with the potatoes in the tins. I ran to the engine to tell the good man that we were ready to go.

This audacious deed of mine, as the girls defined it, immeasurably enhanced my status in their eyes and after I had been in the Dombos district for three months, thousands of kilometres away from my home, my father and Sammy, it served as a convenient base for escape.

* * *

CHAPTER NO 22

VOROSHILOVGRAD

An adventure-packed, month-long journey went by. I became aware of loneliness and longing for Father and Sammy, who seemed to be at the other end of the world. On June the 15th, 1944, we came to the town of Voroshilovgrad , in the Dombas district, south of The Ukraine. At last we left the carriages and were transferred to a three-storey building in the centre of town. The upper storeys housed soldiers, war invalids. We were lodged on the lower floor, eight girls to a room containing eight field cots, eight small cupboards with a little mirror on each. Along one wall was a cupboard with eight cubby holes.

As soon as we arrived we were enthusiastically welcomed by the soldiers milling around in the big yard, who called their companions. They poked their heads out of the high windows, cheering: "Hurrah! Good to see you girls!" The two ruddy, heavy-fleshed house-mothers, Luba and Sonia, received us. They gave us our bedding and led us in groups to the one and only shower in the house. We were invited to the first meeting that evening, in the clubhouse in the yard of the hostel. The director of a military plant welcomed us. He was a young man in his thirties and told us about the plant's function, which was the manufacture of Katyusha rockets and spare parts. He spoke of the important jobs we would do at the lathes, in the metal workshop and in the rest of the departments, replacing the boys who were needed at the front. He frequently mentioned the war, which was still unresolved. On hearing his words about serving the Motherland, with which I agreed wholeheartedly, and which he repeated endlessly, thoughts of my own remote, maybe imaginary homeland crept into my heart.

All those figures who had ignited the spark of longing for my own homeland paraded before my eyes, starting with the cell leader in Radautz, until Dr. Eckhaus; the song that Sofia Umanovna had taught us in the orphanage echoed in my mind. In the end, a committee of five girls was elected to represent the girls. Katya and I were among those chosen.

Before the meeting disbanded, a man introduced himself as the works manager of the field crops and asked for thirty volunteers to work in the fields for the first fortnight. I had the luck to be among the first to volunteer and Fritzi, Tania and Katya also managed to be included in the list. Only Moussia was not with us. As a treat, they announced that there was to be a party in our honour on Sunday evening. We started work the very next day at the plant. The volunteers were only taken on a tour. We were given dockets for the restaurant for a month. The daily ration we received after standing for ages at the hatch, was a quarter loaf of dark brown bread weighing 500 grammes because of its dampness, a ladle of soup which immediately gave rise to the joke that one had to take a swim in it to find a pea or cube of potato. After this meal we went back tired and not particularly satisfied.

We spent the whole of the afternoon discussing the exhausting visit to the plant. It looked like a big exuberant city divided into departments, in which the strength was being manufactured to turn the tide of the war which was still raging. But we were also occupied with our own small problems. Another four days remained until we were to begin our work in the fields. A gift from heaven! Enough time to prepare something to wear to the first party in our honour. Our uniforms and our few civilian clothes were unsuitable for the occasion. My eyes fell on the big sheets, which seemed superfluous to me. I decided to use one of them to sew myself a

white blouse to match my black skirt. I began the job at once: the scissors, which were all I had in memory of my Mother, bless her, and some cotton thread my father had sent us, came in very useful. Tania, Katya and Fritzi followed my example. By the next day the blouses were ready, with high collars and puffed sleeves embroidered with green crosses. Other girls saw the blouses and also decided to sew, so that our room became a sewing room where a number of blouses, each of a different and imaginative pattern, were made under my direction. When Luba heard of the misuse of the sheets, she reprimanded me after I had taken responsibility. She wrung her hands, "Have you no idea what you've done?" I apologised and promised that I would in future take care of army property, which was holy in her eyes. However, contrary to my fears, the outcome of the incident was positive and the relationship between Luba and I became that of mother and daughter. She began to take care of my friends and me; at first she provided additional work for us, that is, additional income, by bringing all sorts of mending from home, in exchange for food she prepared at home. Later, when I worked night shift I was also invited to her house. She even did not hesitate to bring sheets and blankets from the storeroom she was in charge of, and Tania, Fritzi and I sewed blouses for her family, as well as two coats made out of blankets, for her grandchildren.

The party was held in the plant's clubhouse. My heart thumped with excitement on seeing, after years of being cut off from normal life, many couples dancing. The abundance of lights, the table standing along the wall, loaded with plates of cookies, sunflower seeds and jugs of water lent the party a truly festive air. I met the director, who had welcomed us the night of our arrival. When he invited me to dance, he asked me with a smile

whether he was drunk. I immediately understood his meaning and, in the same humorous tone, answered that he was perfectly sober, and that it was my twin sister. He also asked what ethnic group I belonged to, and not waiting for an answer, said confidently: "You aren't Russian, right? Armenian?" I did not answer, but when he asked where I was from, I told him from Radautz, in southern Bukovina, without using the word Roumania. He admitted that he had not heard the name of the town before and, in the middle of the dance, took a notebook from his pocket and carefully wrote down the name of the place.

The fact that the director had not only dnced with me, but had also written something in his notebook was not lost on the girls and they began questioning me as to how and where and what he had noted in his book. Not thinking I would have to prove it, I answered that he had noted my name and address, promising to come and visit me one of these days. With the first light of dawn I awoke to the sound of Luba's voice informing me that the truck was waiting outside. Half asleep, still under the influence of the pleasant experience of the night before, I got up for the day of work in the fields that awaited us. Fritzi's eyes were red and her lashes were full of dried mucus. It turned out that she had contracted a severe eye-infection and Luba decided to keep her home in order to take her to the clinic at the plant. There were no benches in the truck and we travelled standing up, holding onto the sides. On the way we saw the sleeping city and its ruins which cried out: "Here a full-scale war raged!"

The wide field revealed itself in its full splendour. A mighty sea of standing crops glittered in the rising morning sun. This heartwarming sight was able to drive away thoughts of the war rubble we had seen on the way and in the town itself. My eyes

embraced the expanse, I bowed to the stalks of wheat inclining their yellow heads in eternal blessings of peace as a light wind blew among their rows. I filled my lungs with the fresh summer morning air, pure air calling out to life, banishing the smell of death. Tania, standing beside me and apparently feeling the wonders of nature as I was, said, lowering her voice in deference to the surrounding calm: Unbelievable! Unbelievable! All this still exists!?"

The works manager's base voice called us to the wooden shack at the edge of the field where we received our ration of bread and a big jug of hot, sweet tea and our work tool -- a scythe. We divided into groups of 5 and went to the field to cut and bale sheaves under his guidance. With the setting of the fiery sun that had beaten down on our heads all day, countless sheaves had been baled and we had left behind us a gigantic, stubbly, ugly, bald patch in the sea of stalks.

Our great excitement at the sight of the field at sunrise now gave way to backache, tiredness and hunger at sundown, and as I lay wakeful on the bed of chaff under the open sky, I was too exhausted to feel any wonder at the sight of the many stars that appeared in the dark night sky, a kind of marvelous backdrop for the field.

Our situation did not improve in the following days, and every day produced a few girls who felt ill and went back to town, for treatment, with the truck that brought the food and the plant's nurse. Katya was among them, having developed a running stomach and vomiting. Despite everything, Tania and I swore to hold out. When the week was over, that is, on Saturday, we felt encouraged and eagerly awaited the truck that was to take us to the hostel. That Saturday, when we were taking our 15 minute noon

break, I declared to the girls: "We've won!" They regarded me in amazement, and one, Galina, responded mockingly: "Another victory like this and we're done for!" However, when the truck arrived we all revived and jumped onto it with renewed strength. When the truck moved off, the girls opened their mouths with such singing that our arrival was announced to the whole town. The celebration lasted no longer than the journey itself; all night long the girls groaned and complained of backache. I felt completely paralysed, and all Fritzi's efforts to massage my back to ease my pain were of no use.

Fritzi also had not had an easy time of it that week. The eye-infection had improved after treatment with boracic solution, and the nurse decided she was able to work. Moussia, Katya and Fritzi, speaking all at once, told about work at the lathes. I gathered that they had suffered more from boredom than from the work. "Luckily my eye was still sore," Fritzi joked, going on to describe the ugliness of the fellow in charge of her, "he's a metre-fifty and has the face of a mouse." Unlike her, Moussia and Tania had drawn handsome instructors, who were also experts at the lathe. The next day was Sunday and the girls woke in the mood for fun. I decided to stay in my room all day and gather strength for the coming week. When Fritzi tried to open her eyes, she discovered that they were stuck together with mucus again, and the inflammation was even worse.

I tended Fritzi all day, laying compresses of water on her eyes, until I suddenly had an idea. I removed the compress and asked Fritzi if she could bear the infalmmation till the next morning. Fritzi caught on immediately. We let Tania, Moussia and Katya in on our secret, too. The next morning, they helped us put our strategem into effect. When Luba came to wake us for the trip

to the field, I was in Fritzi's bed pretending to be asleep, and Tania, in a voice that Luba could hear, woke Fritzi, who was in my bed: "Get up, Anna! Oh, what's happened to your eyes?" Tania's act was excellent. Fritzi, who was usually afraid to take a chance, also stood the test. Luba also seemed to be taking part in the act when she cried: "Hell! Have you also got an inflammation in the eyes?"

Anna, who was Fritzi, remained in the room and I went with Moussia to the plant instead of Fritzi. When I got there I discovered that my part was much easier than Fritzi feared. I found Ugly Andre without any difficulty and stood next to him at the lathe. He greeted me: "Good morning, Fira," and his voice sounded warm in the cold, grey void of the work cubicle. During the day he came to my assistance when I went wrong, such as when I did not find my work clothes and he reached under the lathe and handed them to me with a tolerant smile. I was not sure if I was standing on the correct side of the lathe so I said to him, in a subdued, humorous voice: "Andre, how about starting from the beginning today? Teach me the trade!" His face, which really was ugly, shone with an affectionate smile and he quickly told me where I should stand, how to watch closely what he was doing, and he explained the construction of the lathe and its operation.

After work, when we returned to the hostel, I was relieved to hear that Fritzi's visit to the nurse at the clinic had also passed without a hitch. The nurse showed great medical expertise when she pointed out that medicine was aware of the phenomenon, that is, that when one twin was affected by a disease, so was the other. I learned to like Andre within a few days, finding that he had a sensitive, good, humane soul. Meanwhile Fritzi recovered and was placed at another lathe.

Because of his diligence Andre could turn out double the established production norm of nuts for screws, earning himself the title of "Stachanov". This entitled him to an additional food docket, which he gave to me several times, urging me in his characteristically modest way: "Take it, Anna." I had told him we called ourselves both Fira and Anna. "I've succeeded because of you and your help." He also more than once shared with me the sandwich he brought from home. I also learned to roll a cigarette out of newspaper scraps, which he kept in his shirt pocket. The crudely cut tobacco, also wrapped in newspaper, was kept in the other pocket. During night shifts, when I was tired, having sewed for Luba duing the day, Andre would send me out to rest in the cornfield outside the plant, covering up for me when necessary. Luba, the house mother treated us, particularly me, in a motherly way. Evrything could have been fine, had it not been for our spiritual distress and the longing for Father, Sammy and for home, which had become so much an abstract that none of the four of us could define the concept. When the other girls would talk longingly about their homes and families, we would drown in yearning for a world that no longer existed. Yearning that became indefinable pain, since there was no place on earth we could consider home. Moussia also somehow stopped mentioning her brother in Palestine. Fritzi and I focussed our longing on Bucharest, the "home" we did not know at all, only because our loved ones were there. I saw this city as a transit station to the land of my dreams. Moussia and Tania regarded Russia as their Motherland, "because there's no discrimination here and they don't bother us because we're Jews". But it was very soon revealed that the atmosphere was plastered on, and if a flake of this plaster fell, the rooted antisemitism that flourished beneath it became

apparent. We first discovered this when Fritzi's instructor, Alexei, began to court her without much finesse, and when she did not respond to his advances, he called out contemptuously: "What, doesn't it suit you to go out with a Russian fellow, Sarah?" rolling the letter 'r'. "I'll find you someone called Abrasha." The incident annoyed me and in the queue for the next day's food ration, I passed him and called out: "Ivan, where were you when the Germans were in Voroshilovgrad?"

He gave me a furious look. He baited Fritzi so much that day that she burst into tears and left the lathe. Unhesitatingly, as members of the committee, Katya and I went to the works manager to lay a complaint. He listened with obvious impatience and finally exclaimed: "So what?" I threatened that if he did not intervene I would refer it to the director of the plant. "OK," he said between his teeth and transferred Fritzi to another lathe.

The incident aroused my fears and anxiety and thoughts of desertion came to my mind. Awake that night, I did some soul-searching: Why were we here? Who were we serving? I questioned all that loyalty of ours to those who had liberated us from the German hell. The truth, I tried to pursuade myself, was that the liberation was merely coincidental, and that it was more "hatred of Haman the Wicked than love of Mordechai the Jew", and danger lay in wait for us when the war was over. And anyway, it was hard to live in the shadow of others' pity. I summed up what I had often thought: a person had to strive to live in his or her own land. To hope. And to hope meant to make hope in the heart and nurture it every day, for it alone could achieve the desired goal: a life without fear in a place without masters. The next day, as we were about to end our morning shift, we were informed suddenly

The tumult before the visit began early in the morning with the arrival of a platoon of cleaners who began feverishly to remove the metal shavings which had piled up under the lathes. And the lathes began to work at a crazy, deafening pace. Andre seemed possessed by a dybbuk and he urged me to hurry and pass him the steel pipes, which he placed in the lathe at an accelerated speed, pressing me to move the vast accumulation of nuts from the lathe to boxes.

I was also caught up in the excitement. But for an entirely different reason. The decision ripened in me to exploit his visit to lay my problem before him. The hope that he would be able to help us gained strength and my thoughts raced frantically; how to begin, where to begin, and would he listen to me? How much time would I have at my disposal? All this while working feverishly. Andre, who sensed my excitement, gripped my arm and tried to calm me with a few words of encouragement: "Don't worry, Anna, you're absolutely OK." In so doing he balanced my thoughts and hopes at the same time. When I raised my head I saw all eyes turned to the entrance. The director, Velya, came into the department with his entourage of managers marching after him. And then, as if at a command, all heads bent over the lathes, and the work which had already been in full swing, was given extra impetus.

I kept track of the entourage, who were whispering together and turning to Velya now and then to point out this or that particularly outstanding lathe. And when they pointed at Andre I encounterd Velya's eye and our looks crossed. Despite my embarrassment, I did not drop my gaze and he smiled fleetingly in my direction, but immediately turned his gaze on Andre and a wide smile of admiration appeared on his face. I wondered for a moment if he remembered me.

Having stopped for a moment beside the lathes whose operators were known as outstanding workers, he turned and greeted us, too, and after a few words of encouragement to Andre, he addressed me: "How are you, little Armenian? How's the work, do you like it?" His flow of words allowed me no time to recover and I answered him in a low voice: "Andre's a good teacher and his relationship to me is comradely, thanks to him I have come to like the work. But I have problems," I heard myself saying. He stopped me and, speaking carefully, said: "Come to my office tomorrow and you can talk about it." He took a notebook from his pocket and made a note of the appointment. "Don't forget, Anna."

I could not sleep all night. I considered and reconsidered the claims I would make in support of our discharge. I decided not to say anything but the truth, to tell him only about the reality that had brought us here and the fact that we were foreign nationals. But what if he countered my claims by saying that his government was not the guilty party? That the war was still being waged against the real guilty party. When I fell asleep I had a horrific dream. I saw myself imprisoned in a narrow, dark room with a heavy steel door shut against me. I beat on the door with my fists, calling for help, but my voice was not heard. By morning I was again ready to cope with whatever was to come.

I was working nightshift that week, and on the Thursday morning I hurriedly dressed in the white blouse and black skirt -- my best clothes. I carefully wound my braids around my head, and as I was leaving the hostel, my friends encouragingly assured me I looked perfect. On my part, I promised to speak for them and try to get permission for them to have a short holiday.

Standing in front of the two-storey building where Vallya's office was, the decision to openly request our discharge

crystallized itself in me. When I was inside I approached the first clerk I came across and asked her the way to Vallya the director's office. Without looking up from the many papers before her, she asked me in a bored voice: "Do you have a permit?" I was supposed to submit a request first, with a convincing reason which would be thoroughly examined and if the desired appointment was granted a date would be set. Any normal person was likely to lose patience and give up. "Permit for what?" I exclaimed in surprise. At last she raised her head, looking at me in amazement: "When did you submit your request?" Fortunately I did not become confused: "I don't need a permit! Its a personal meeting." She gaped, wide-eyed, examined me with curiosity and finally said disbelievingly: "Wait here." As she turned to the door behind her, she looked back: "What's your name, girl?" Anna," I said. She disappeared behind the door and after what seemed like an eternity came back and invited me, with exaggerated politeness, to follow her.

Vallya received me warmly, even rising to greet me and extending his hand as he invited me to be seated opposite him. He eased my embarrassment by opening the conversation himself. It became obvious from what he said that he knew everything about me, or almost everything, and not only about me but about all four of us. He told me that the day after the party he had taken the trouble to look at a map and had found that Radautz was in Roumania and was not under Russian control. And after a short pause: "I understand that you are foreign nationals, but you did right in volunteering for the army that liberated you from the German hell." He made a patriotic speech, which left me in no doubt that my carefully prepared claims would run aground. He sat comfortably, with plenty of time, in his spacious armchair. Every [illegible] he would look straight into my eyes, while I tried to

meet his gaze. Only later, when our meetings became more frequent, did I find out what he was looking for in my eyes. "Theres a Jewish charm in your face and eyes." I was embarrassed by his gaze and his patriotic speech, and wished I was outside already. He suddenly asked in a very personal-sounding tone: "Why did you say you were of Armenian extraction?" "But you were the one who decided that!" I said, adding: "To tell the truth, I don't know a thing about that nation." Encouraged by the atmosphere that had developed in the meantime, I declared: "I have never denied my Jewishness, nor did I mean to do so that evening." A flicker of uncertainty in his eyes made me smile: ""Are you also Jewish?" He did not answer and only smiled at me. Then, with a grin: "I know that you're all accepted by our Russian girls," and, giving it importance, he added: "After all, you're a member of the enlisted women's committee." I nodded and took the opportunity to refer to the subject of my visit. The meeting lasted over an hour and he finally hinted that if I could bring him a petition with at least 100 signatures, he would weigh the possibility of obtaining permission for me and two other girls of my choice to go on a special mission to Balta to bring food and winter clothing for the girls from their homes. Surprised at this chance, which I would never have imagined, I hesitantly replied that I would discuss it with the girls.

I told Katya and Moussia about it. Their excitement was no less than mine and we began to spread the word among the girls. The results were not long in coming and many of them approached us asking to sign the request even before we gathered for the meeting, which we held in the club of the hostel, which Luba put at our disposal. I told those present about my meeting with the director and that I had brought up their request for a short

leave, but that he had replied, to my regret, firmly in the negative. His purpose in asking me to his office had been to suggest the mission of bringing food and winter clothing from the homes of those girls who would sign the letter of request (which I had prepared in advance). The director intended sending us to carry out the job. Their response was so surprising, that I found it hard to believe.

That same week, when I presented the letter of request to Vallya with the signatures of most of the girls, more than 100 in number, he also looked surprised. He praised me, without much enthusiasm, for my promptness. He pushed the letter into his desk drawer. I gained the impression that he was sorry he had brought up the idea of the mission, which he had never taken seriously. Thereafter, I was invited to his office again to discuss the details of the mission. I came to see him twice a week. Later, we also met outside the office and as a result of these meetings our relationship deepened and the barriers fell after I met his parents, when he invited Fritzi and I for dinner at their house. It was a terrific experience for us. His parents welcomed us with the hospitality typical of the Russians I had had the opportunity to meet on close terms. But the heart of the experience came from his old grandfather, who was sitting in an armchair when we came, his feet covered by a blanket despite the August heat. He asked us to sit close to him and displayed deep emotion at our Jewishness, as though we had appeared out of his distant past, on which he dwelt longingly the whole evening. When the meal was served -- and it was pure Russian cuisine: borscht, roast potatoes, puddings -- he suddenly asked us in good Yiddish: "And do you know how to make gefilte fish, girls?" After which he sang us a Yiddish song he remembered from his childhood. I recall a few lines of it: "Maybe

I'm building castles in the air, and maybe the sky is bluer than blue." Then he spoke about his deep feelings for the Jewish people, which he had abandoned over sixty years before, as a young student, when he had met his Russian wife. At the end of the evening, as we were leaving, he gave us the compliment I had first heard from Vallya: "You should know that Jewish girls have a special charm. And what are your plans when you are discharged?" We answered that our goal was Palestine. His response was astonishing: he sighed and told us about his younger brother, Mendel, who had gone to the holy land to build a national home. "I think my brother Mendel took the right step for the Jewish people. Remember girls, the world only gives credit to those who have a home!"

At the end of August preparations for celebrating the first anniversary of the liberation of Dombas were started in the town and at the plant. Everybody was busy and the matter of our mission was shelved, but when we met, I drew encouragement from Vallya's repeated assurances that the matter was being attended to. Until the day of the celebrations, the 8th of September, when there were many festive events in the town and a gigantic march in which I participated together with all the other workerst. Each department held its own party and there were very many. I was invited by Vallya to the Plant Management's party. He came to fetch me in the evening, and we met outside the hostel, when he hinted for the first time that the mission had been authorised. "You'll soon be able to leave." I was stunned and out of my mind with happiness. Then I felt anxious about parting from Fritzi. After Vallya had made his speech, among the first of many, the evening began, and Vallya suddenly asked: "Are you ready to travel?" I answered that

react before I found myself outside with Vallya. The accordion, which began to play just then, sounded like a song of farewell.

I do not know if Vallya guessed my decision not to return, but from his parting words, once he had handed me documents certifying my mission and that of my friends, with food vouchers for the journey and three railway tickets to Balta, which he had in readiness, I understood that he was saying goodbye to me for good. The duration of the mission was to be one month.

That night, while the whole city was celebrating, I called Tania and Katya from the workers' party and we we made our final arrangements. Only Fritzi saw us off at the station. The leavetaking from my sister was the hardest part, because both of us knew that our next meeting was shrouded in mist. I promised her heavy-heartedly that I would see to it that she followed me.

We got onto the Kiew train at three thirty on the morning of the 9th of September 1944. I first sensed approaching freedom when I showed the railway inspector the documents, which allowed for an extension of their validity on presentation to the militia officer at the railway stations (in case of disruptions of railway traffic, which our superiors acknowledged). Fortunately the journey took less than the expected time and we arrived in Balta in the early hours of September 14th and I was able to have lunch with Katya's parents, who never stopped carressing and kissing her and showering her with everything of the best. First I went to the orphanage, which I still regarded as my home, but as soon as I arrived it was evident that the house had become strange to me. I was received by new counsellors whom I did not know, as I did not know the children, also new. Jennitchke, whom I had hoped to find, was at kindergarden when I came.

From there I went to Dora Abramovna, whom I really wanted to

see. And indeed, she received me like a returning daughter. She was still a counsellor at the orphanage. She told me the news she had about the deaths of some of the best of our boys at the front, including David, Asher, Freda Frank's boyfriend, and Yaacov. Together we lamented the loss of those so dear to both of us. But I felt I could not bear to remain with her in the depressed atmosphere of her house and I gladly accepted Katya's parents' invitation to stay with them. I stayed with them for a week and

Katya, Lucia and I collected the many parcels that flowed to Katya's house from the parents of the girls on our list.

I tried to find my friend Sima, whom I had left in hospital. I only found out where she was on the last day of my stay there. She was with a Jewish family that had moved outside the ghetto, but I was unable to visit her because that day the opportunity arose for me to travel to my desired destination -- Czernowitz, in northern Bukovina. I did not notify Katya or her parents about my departure, leaving them a letter of thanks and farewell, which I left on the crate full of parcels. I apologised to Katya for not accompanying her back to Voroshilograd. I mounted a cart headed for Katubsk, where I arrived that evening.

There I spent the first night on my own beside the main road to Odessa, waiting for a lift. The feeling of loneliness and fear that gripped me at the sight of drunks swaying on their feet as they passed by, the barking of dogs in the yards of nearby houses, forced me to remain open-eyed all night. These were the first of my hardships on the way to Czernowitz, where I hoped to steal over the border into southern Bukovina, which had remained beyond the Soviet zone.

Withdrawn and shivering in the cold I sat on the edge of the pavement until first light which arrived with the rattle of a

truck that made me jump up from where I sat. I held out my hand to ask for a lift and it stopped beside me. The soldier-driver, who looked like a Georgian, asked: "To Odessa?" and my heart leaped. In no time I had climbed in, assisted by the soldiers sitting in the back of the truck. There were also two women there, and the sight of them calmed my fears at being alone with all those soldiers. However, my fears were unfounded. I looked like an Armenian to them as well. In less than an hour on the uneven road we arrived in Odessa.

The driver let me off at the big marketplace which was already thronged with people at the many flower and vegetable stalls, which were mainly filled with sweet Odessa grapes as big as plums.

I spent the whole day in the city's dirty streets which were full of drunken sailors, whom I met at every step. This sight was taken for granted by the pedestrians, who kept out of their way.

I was tired of looking for a familiar face or someone I could trust enough to ask the way to Tegina on the Bessarabian border, and I turned back to the market to buy something to eat. It was five in the afternoon and I found the market deserted, apart from a few stalls where they were selling jars of wine to passersby. People drank the wine like water, emptying the jars at a gulp. I was very thirsty at the sight of the dark red liquid and hurried to buy some, too, a whole jar, and without taking stock, I drank it down. I felt the results of this hasty drinking, which was almost my downfall, when I came to the railway station and sank helplessly to the floor. Hundreds of people were crowded there, soldiers and civilians with their bundles next to them waiting for days on end for the train to arrive.

and hope that my luck would not desert me, in Grandfather Efriam's words, which were still preserved in my memory: "You need just a little luck to change bad luck." Which indeed happened. In my near senseless state, I felt a soft handstroking my arm, and I picked up the whisper: "Annerl or Fritzike, is it you?" It was Hilda, my late Aunt Roza's cousin from Berhomad, on her way to Czernowitz, like me. She was coming from the concentration camp in Golta. In her forties, she had once been a beautiful, elegant woman. She had left her husband, who had been the owner of a successful sawmill, and her two infants in a mass grave in Golta.

Exhausted, bent, looking like a woman of sixty, she was on her way back from there.

At eight in the evening when the train to Tegina arrived, Hilda made me get up in a hurry, but my head and legs were leaden, and although my mind had cleared, I was unable to stir from my place. She lifted me and, with me leaning on her shoulder, my feet dragging, we came to the train, which was already loaded with passengers who had climbed onto the roof and filled the landings between the coaches. All I remember of that eight-kilometre journey to Tegina was that I sat on the edge of the lower step, my feet almost touching the ground, conscious of Hilda's arms strongly holding me from behind, while she sat on the upper step. In my daze, I felt the train stopping for inspection and I heard Hilda say to the policeman: "This is my daughter and I can't move her because she's critically ill." I also remember that on hearing her words I squeezed her hand, which lay on my chest, to thank her. Afterwards, when we were standing on the platform at Tegina and I was fully alert, Hilda told me that the train had been held up for inspection for fully two hours and she had almost died at the thought that I might not revive.

We spent the night together beside a fire made by some soldiers next to the railway track. We also received some canned food and bread from them. The next day, having despaired of finding a train to carry on our journey, we drifted around the town where we found a hostel run by a Jew from Soroka, the only remaining Jew in the place. Because of her legitimate papers and the story that I was her daughter and had lost mine, the Jew let us stay for three roubles a night. That night another misfortune struck. After years, ever since we had left home, I had my period and had it not been for Hilda I would not have known what to do. We finally managed to get a train, going to Beltz, three days later. As Hilda's daughter it was not difficult for me to get onto the platform, and from there to the train. And then the train was side-tracked at one of the intermediate stations and the passengers were ordered to get off and go to another train going in the direction of Czernowitz. There was pandemonium and people ran towards the other train, which was already packed to capacity, without any available space. I managed to reach it through an almost impassable crowd and climb up to one of the windows, just as it began moving out of the station in low gear. I turned my head to find Hilda in the tremendous crowd left behind on the platform, but I could not see her.

* * *

CHAPTER NO 23

CZERNOWITZ

In October 1944, I stood on the platform in Czernowitz station, not knowing where to turn. I looked for Aunt Wexler's apartment in the Street of the Russians, going by memory. I did not know at the time that most of the city's Jews had remained in their homes, through Popescu, the mayor. He doggedly protected them and managed to save them from being exiled by claiming that the city needed them as experts and artisans.

The meeting with Mr. Wexler, when I finally found him, was disappointing. He was afraid to offer me hospitality: "If only you had at least come straight from Transnistra. But from Dombas! And a deserter, yet!" -- Aunt Wexler had died long before, and her son Mokkie, who welcomed me heartily, could not persuade his father to regard me as a welcome guest. I stayed with them for only one night and then continued my search. I am not the only one who encountered coldness from people who had remained safely at home not giving shelter to anybody.

In Red Square, in the midst of a huge crowd, I met Poldi. He asked no questions, embraced me enthusiastically, and took me to Eva and Borichke. The child had grown and immediately took to me. I stayed with them, carrying the boy in my arms until the name "Anna's identity card" stuck to him. Poldi was working in a dental clinic and through him I met Lena, an assistant at the clinic, with whom I became very friendly. I was 'underground' for three months and Lena and her mother were my only contact with the outside world.

On my 19th birthday I received papers which Poldi had acquired for me. I was listed as Anna Gold on my identity card and my residence was with my 'brother', Leopold Gold. From then on I

was able to move around freely and my status as a deserter was annulled. I was looking for ways to bring Fritzi to me. In the end, Poldi helped me with this, too, obtaining papers which enabled me to travel legally to Voroshilograd, to buy "medical instruments for the clinic".

On 8.3.45 I set out for Dombas. Since I already knew the road and its formalities (inspections, stopovers at customs houses) I was able to reach the platform at Dombas by the 23rd. This time, fate turned against me and I was stopped by the railway militia. As a matter of fact, they thought I was Fritzi, her picture having been distributed to the militias since she was suspected of attempted escape after my desertion. I was released with the warning not to try escaping again. But it was going to be difficult not only to get Fritzi out, but to avoid getting her even further involved in complications.

I remembered that Vallya had once pointed out a friend of his grandfather, who lived alone not far from the plant. She helped me to contact Fritzike and my friends. With their help I managed to get out of town without any further harm. I returned by train without any papers, being most careful to integrate with the crowds waiting at the stations.

In Kiew, I was left alone in the waiting room, with an officer in the uniform of the Red Army dozing next to me. Even in his sleep he guarded the revolver in his pocket, covering it with his hand. When I noticed pickpockets moving among the sleeping people and stealing their meagre possessions (they removed one sleeping soldier's boots) I awakened the officer next to me. I thought he would take action against the thieves, at least to chase them. But he covered his face with his cap and pretended to be sleeping until the pickpockets had finished their work and

gone. After he had warned me of the danger in getting embroiled in strangers' quarrels, we started to converse. Obliged to be careful I answered his questions: I'm Armenian and my parents are in Odessa." He hesitated a moment, and then whispered in my ear: "You're a good liar, girl. I'm also Jewish and I'm also going to Odessa." I gathered that he was hinting that I could join up with him. He began telling me that he was a native of Rabnitz in Bessarabia, where he had been conscripted into the Red Army at the outbreak of the war, leaving behind a wife and year-old baby. He also told me about the battles he had been in on various fronts, and recently, when he was wounded, he had been given leave to look for his family. For a moment, as he breathed deeply, I felt that something was happening in me that I dared not voice. I learned from the rest of his story that his wife had died and the little girl had remained alive by a miracle. He was travelling to Odessa where there was a big orphanage, in which he hoped to find her. Hearing these words, I thought my heart would explode and I asked him cautiously: "Are you Grisha, Jennichke's father?" He was totally shocked, and gripped me forcefully, his shaking hands jerking my whole body: "Who are you? Where's my child?" Only when his emotional storm subsided was I able to tell him that his little girl was in Balta. I told him the story from the beginning: where we had come from, how we had ended up in Balta and all that had happened to me until I got there, and how I had found his Jennichke who had been like a little sister to me for two years. His shaking hand clutchedo me all the while, with a self-restraint that amazed me and filled me with admiration for him. Apart from a tear that rolled down the scar on his face and some words to encourage me to go on speaking, he did not interrupt my story till I reached the reasons for my being where we had met. I then

revealed to him that I was headed for Balta, giving my reason. After a long silence, a happy smile came to his face: "And so, my girl, we're both changing course." And then, excitedly, "I'm afraid you'll have to bridge the gap between Jennichke and me, she probably doesn't remember her daddy..."

I made the journey to Balta in Grisha's company and he protected me like a big brother. We left Kiew at night, by regular passenger train, and with his help I even managed to get inside and find standing room for us. After a few hours, we reached Zmiernivka in the early morning, and there we changed trains for Harkov, staying for about two days, walking about the city, where the extent of the destruction was worse than that of any other city I had passed through. The only building still standing was a small cinema in the suburbs. We went on to Dniepepetrovsk, which was also a ghost town. The sight of some feathers flying in the air on the outskirts of the city remains engraved on my mind, recalling pogroms more than war. The bridge over the Dnieper had sagged into the river with only the handrail showing. The sights we came across depressed me and Grisha said sadly: "These cities will rise again, but my Jennichke's mother, who was young and lovely, will never come back." For the first time he expressed his anxiety about little Jennichke, from whom he would have to part again, when his leave was over.

At the beginning of April as evening fell, we arrived in Balta and went straight to the orphanage. This time we were received by Dora Abramovna, who was on duty at that time, and she was happy to see me, certain that I was again on a mission (she did not know about my desertion and I did not tell her, either). Meanwhile she was examining Grisha curiously. Suddenly, from one of the low tables where the little children were sitting and

eating supper, Jennichke saw me and with joyful cries of "Anna! Anna! My Anna!" she darted towards me. Grisha was right, she did not even cast a glance at him. I gathered her in my arms and felt her tiny, firm body and the tiny hands stroking my face. Grisha stood all the while as though nailed to the spot and when I pointed at him and cried: "Jennichke, look, I've brought your Papouchka to you!" Dora Abramovna turned her head in surprise and the three cousellors who were in the room clustered around us, and only Jennichke reacted as Grisha had foreseen, hiding her head in my neck. She looked at him with curiosity only when I put her down. And only then did Grisha rush over to her, lift her in his arms and clasp her to his heart, whispering over and over into her ear: "How you've grown, how you've grown my little girl!" And I stood behind him, whispering to her "Its your daddy, Jennichke, its your daddy!" She lifted her head and examined his face while a look of disbelief appeared on her little face. Dora Abramovna, who was used to such scenes (a few fathers had appeared recently, Little Grisha's among them) went over to her, took her face between her hands and said: "Do you remember Grisha's daddy who came back? And Mannichke's daddy?," and she added a few more names until Jennichke was convinced and accepted her father's presence.

After about two days, I left Balta with Sima. She had papers stating that she was returning to Czernowitz, released from service because of chronic bronchitis. Most of the way was uneventful. I was only involved in an interrogation by an officer in Kishinov, who refused to accept my excuse. We got away from him with great difficulty with the help of a woman sanitation worker and by exploiting the crush of people. We were now very careful and we found a truck transporting sacks of fodder to Sokorny. This was the town my friend Freda Frank came from. We looked for

someone from her family. It emerged that Freda herself had returned from Dombas and was living with her aunt, Mrs. Steinberg. It was a moving meeting and most of the night was spent telling stories about the fate of friends and acquaintances. "The Russians," Freda said, "listed all the children born in Bessarabia and southern Bukovina, to send them home, as they said, promising to help them find their families. We were happy to be leaving the orphanage and we saw the home-sending project as an opportunity for rehabilitation. Our exit from Bucharest assumed the character of a national celebration. The train that came to fetch us was decorated with flowers and slogans and on a huge banner that ran the length of the train, written in eye-catching letters were the words "War Orphans Returning Home". Crowds of people stood on the platform to see us off, wishing us "Bon voyage, children! Bon voyage!" We were divided into groups in Odessa. The little ones were left in the local orphanage and the older ones, born in 1925 and 1926, were sent in two groups to Dombas, to contribute to the war effort. One group reached Stalina where they work in the coal mines, and the other group, to which I belonged, reached Constantinovka, where we worked in a military plant." Freda told of her escape, with Bella Sandler. A woman sent by her aunt, when she discovered that Freda was in Dombas, had arrived in March 1945 to smuggle her out and bring her to Sokorny, for which she was paid a lot of money. "This woman," Freda continued, "came and took me, and Bella from Constantinovka joined me. She had brought forged papers for me and conducted the two of us to Odessa. In Odessa the woman disappeared, and we made the rest of the journey to Sokorny under great hardship."

Freda's sad news that most of our boys and girls were in Dombas left me depressed. Mrs. Steinberg worked hard at getting me

a permit testifying that my papers had been lost and permitting me to travel to Czernowitz. And train tickets. Wonderful, motherly Mrs. Steinberg gave me back my faith in humanity and my hope for a better world.

I cointinued to live with Eva and Poldi in Czernowitz and Sima lived with relatives she discovered there. She also found work as a sanitation worker on the railway line and thanks to her I was employed as a cashier at the same place. After being accepted I passed a one-month crash course in bookkeeping. I also became efficient at deciphering the documents passengers presented in order to receive a ticket from me, whether for a distance of a few kilometres or for thousands of kilometres to Moscow. The previous cashier had been in an advanced stage of pregnancy, but the manager would not allow her to leave, "even if she has to give birth in the office, unless she finds a replacement". That was when Sima had said to him: "I have a friend who's an expert in the field, maybe she'll agree to come." Sima always believed in all innocence that there was nothing I could not do. And so I became a cashier, to the satisfaction of my superiors, until the next journey became possible after Germany surrendered in May 1945, and the Russian authorities began repatriating refugees to Bukovina.

* * *

CHAPTER NO 24

THE RETURN TO THE CITY FROM WHICH WE WERE EXPELLED

The rumour about the repatriation of refugees from northern Bukovina took wing. Jewish survivors of the camps in the Ukrainian wastes quickly began to form long queues. Battles were still being fought along the border, mainly in Jassy. Like most of the refugees, we had remained within the Soviet zone, mostly in the Bessarabian city Yedinetz, and in Czernowitz.

Poldi rose at midnight on the 13th of August to take his place in the queue in front of the registry office, and only succeeded in submitting the written request for himself and his family, which included me, in the late morning. Sima submitted a separate request. The next two weeks were full of anticipation and, indeed, the transit permits reached us a few days before the date set for our departure, the 18th of September, 1945 -- exactly one year after I had left Voroshilograd. My friend Lena and her mother came to say goodbye to us and I handed them my identity papers to keep for Fritzi when she arrived in Czernowitz. There were rumours that the Dombas conscripts would only be discharged together with the Red Army soldiers. I felt in my heart that Fritzi would also have enough courage to desert. The scenes that had characterised the wanderings of the past four years reappeared. Scores of carts turned up and began to unload the meagre possessions of the people who were being sent away. Cries in Yiddish, Russian, Roumanian and German again sounded in the dark of night, and pandemonium reigned once again as they found places at the border station. Lamps dimly illuminated the place

We lay little Boris, who was now one and a half years old, on our few bundles. Eva, Sima and I sat on the ground next to him while Poldi went to see what was happening at the contol counter. He returned with the news that the transfer was going smoothly and that they were not being too strict. As dawn was breaking, we heard our names being called. The officer examined the permit and signalled for me to cross. Sima and Eva came after me, without any trouble, to the Roumanian officer seated at the control desk, who greeted us coldly: "Welcome back home". Here, too, there was a tumult; drivers of trucks, busses and carts stood at a distance, shouting out their destinations. Sima and I parted from Eva, Poldi and Borichke, who were headed for Sigat in Transylvania, where Poldi hoped to find some surviving members of his family. We climbed into a cart going to Radautz. We were the only people going there.

We passed greening fields, where we saw peasants gathering the harvest before the snows came. The cart bounced over the river stones, throwing us about. Sima kept pinching me and asking in an excited voice if this was a dream, if we were really going back to the city where we were born and where we spent our childhood, and which we had been away from for four whole years. Not a soul was there to recieve us. "And where do you want to get off?" the driver suddenly asked. I stood up to see where we were, and discovered the broken-down road sign which informed us that this was Plop. Behind it, another sign said "Mount of the Cross". There was also a sign with Radautz on it. We asked the cart driver to stop.

While I was looking around, trying to stop the tears that were choking me, I saw a woman crossing the road. She was stooped

and her steps were slow. Without raising her head, she came over to us. She was wearing a faded summer dress and high winter shoes, in her hand was a tattered suitcase. Her face reminded me of someone I could not recall. She muttered to herself as she walked. Sima recoiled, as thoiugh she had seen a ghost. Suddenly she cried: "Bertha! Its Bertha's mother!" When she heard Sima's cry, the woman came to a halt next to us, raised her head and almost dropped the suitcase as she called out wonderingly: "Why, you're one of the twins! And Sima Kuperschmid, isn't it?" She embraced us with feeling: "I'm Bertha's aunt. Bertha is gone. They're all gone. Her mother, grandfather and grandmother never came back. My sister, her husband and their only child, were also left behind in the same pit." From her we heard about the deaths of my friends and their families, among them Rebecca, who had been so close to me and whom I had hoped to find among the living. "Yes, girls, I wish you a good life. You're still young and the future's ahead of you," and she lifted the suitcase, breathed heavily and sighed: "I'm old already, I have no more future, I just have time to lick my wounds," she said as she walked away.

I left Sima as she turned in the direction of the house that once was theirs. Rumour had it that one of her uncles had returned and was living there. I went the other way, to my parents' house. We had arranged to meet between 6 and 7 next to the Great Temple. I carried on to the municipal park, which I crossed with rapid steps. The benches were empty and there were only a few mothers walking their children along the paths, which had not changed at all. The cultivated flower beds and the same blue, pink and white lilac bushes stood in bloom, spreading their intoxicating fragrance. I also passed through the market thronged with people [illegible] Thus I came to Fratautzer Street, to the Great

Synagogue, the Temple. Next to it was the secondary school we had attended, and behind it the firebrigade station facing the German Club. I approached the Temple and looked at it as though I was seeing it for the first time. The doors were open, and with hesitant steps I ascended the marble stairs. I went into the hall in the hope of finding somebody I could ask if they had seen Father or Sammy, or heard of them. The beadle who received me was from Sirat. He had come to Radautz after being in a concentration camp in Transnistra. He told me about families who had returned, and invited me to his home. I thanked him, but went on my way.

I stood in front of the house that was once our home. I was shocked at the neglect I was seeing. A broken fence and high weeds. The wicket gate leading to the entrance had been ripped out. There was a giant lock on the door. I looked for the flower beds -- but only the lilac bushes were still there. To my surprise I found a narrow path through the weeds and the prints of the big shoes that had trodden it. I went along it to the storeroom, where the door stood wide open. There was a big lock on the kitchen door as well. I climbed the ladder and went into the house through the attic. Among the scrap I found some objects that aroused a wave of memory. I concentrated on them and allowed my mother's stories to re-surface within me.

Eventually I drew up the ladder and used it to descend into the house. I found signs of recent use: when I went to our room, mine and Fritzi's, I found the two beds in place. On each there was a sheet, a pillow and a woollen blanket. One of the carpets, which used to be in the big room, was spread on the floor and our table was by the window, with two chairs next to it. An unfamiliar floral cloth covered the table, and on it was a lamp full of paraffin, and a box of matches. The lamp glass shone with

cleanliness. On the bedside table next to Fritzi's bed was a book with a red cover and I did not have to guess its contents. It was the book of Bibi stories that Fritzi and I loved. On winter evenings, Mother would sit in our room and read us installments of the adventures of the little motherless girl, Bibi. When we were older we learned to read the stories, which were written in German Gothic script. I put my hand on it and a tremor coursed through me. "Mother", I whispered silently.

I ran to the kitchen. I felt none of the unbearable fear of the dark that I used to feel in the past. Somehow I was aware of calmness and happiness enfolding me. I felt my way to the window that faced the yard. I opened the two windows and with a surprisingly light push, knocked aside the boards blocking them. I was dazzled by the light that burst into the kitchen. Then I looked to see what was around me. The sofa was in place, covered with a rug and with a pillow and a blanket on it. The dresser, where there always used to be food in the bottom cupboard, was also in its place, its open doors revealing its emptiness. The table in the middle of the kitchen was covered with a new, white oil baize cloth decorated with blue flowers.

Two relatively fresh slices of bread lay in a little basket on the table. A plate of apples stood next to it. It was now clear to me that Father was somewhere around. This was his favourite food! I decided to stay where I was till he returned. Tired and moved, I fell into a deep sleep.

When Sima saw that I did not turn up for our appointment, she came to look for me at my house. Because of its abandoned appearance she decided I must be at the neighbours, the Nikiporiuk family. Which is how they heard of my return. They found me [illegible]. They told me that Father would come over the

border every week, sleep in the house, and then return to Bucharest. He had been in the house the day before, but had told them this time, that he would not be coming back in a hurry. "Father was really in despair," but they could not explain why. I understood that the relationship between them was not as it had been in the past. An expression of theirs: "The poor Jews, we heard all about what was happening on the other side of the Dniester," showed that there was reason to be wary of them. I suddenly understood that this was the end of a dream and an illusion; there was no bridge between me and what had been. I felt my heart contract. All the years of my exile I had dreamed of coming back to live in my house. But if the human scene I loved so much was no longer there -- the bridge to the rest of the landscape was also gone.

It was from the Sheffer family that I first learned of the extent of the tragedy that had befallen the Jews of Radautz, and of the holocaust that had stricken all of European Jewry. They had returned from Yedinetz after having been in Mogilov for a year. They were among the few families who had not only come back with their son, Jackie, now nine, but with the addition of another child, born there. Mr. Sheffer had found a way to rehabilitate himself since his return home. He again had a truck, which had been his living before the war. Luckily for me, he was planning to leave for Bucharest that night and he agreed to take me with him. There was a long conversation that night in their house: I heard what had happened to my mother's family in Suceava. They had been in the Mogilov ghetto together, and also, in the last year, in Iedinetz. Some of them had returned to Suceava. Bianka and Sidi were in an orphanage in Botoshani, in Roumania, where they had been sent from the orphanage in Mogilov. They told about Uncle Max

and Aunt Janet's eldest son who had come back from Auschwitz, and the story of his fantastic escape. They also told me about Uncle Max' death and that Aunt Janet was in Botoshani. I felt like a survivor of Noah's Ark, after a terrible deluge of blood, which a few members of a scattering of families had survived.

It was after midnight when I climbed into the back of the truck, on top of some sacks of flour. We made the journey to Bucharest in three days. When we arrived, and Mr. Sheffer was speraking to some merchants who were waiting for him in the yard, I slipped away. I left a message with the gatekeeper telling Mr. Sheffer that I was going to my father and would be in touch with him in Radautz.

* * *

CHAPTER NO 25

THE MEETING WITH FATHER AND SAMMY

It was early and there were few people to be seen. I walked along the road. I found a solitary woman sitting waiting on a bench at a tram stop. I asked her how I could get to Cutzitul D'Argent Street and she asked where I was from and whether I had slept in a flour mill. "You can't get onto the tram like that," she said and although the tram arrived, she did not get on it, but stayed to help me clean off the flour with a hairbrush she took from her bag. I told her I had come to find my father, whom I had not seen for four years. Only then did it dawn on her that I was a refugee from Transnistria and she decided to be late for work and accompany me on my search for my father's house. We changed trams to reach the end of Cutzitul D'Argent St., and together we combed house after house asking after two men named Faust. Thus we came to King Caryl Park. I begged her to go back and leave me, promising to let her know the moment I found Father and Sammy.

I carried on my search of houses, yards and shops until late in the afternoon. I was almost at the beginning of the street, where I went into a grocery shop and asked if they knew the Fausts, by any chance. The man behind the counter calmly asked me: "Who are you looking for, the father or the son?" I was unable to utter a sound and burst into tears. The woman beside him immediately realized who I was. "This must be one of Mr. Faust's girls!" she shouted. Everyone in the shop was gripped by excitement. "Your father left only two hours ago for Fokshany

where he has a friend, a member of the communist party who was in jail with Anna Pauker for years, to ask him to help get Fritzi's release. And your brother Sammy's supposed to come here [illegible] eight to get the key your father left

for him," Mrs. Babat, the owner of the shop, told me.

And indeed, at eight o'clock, after the shop had closed, there was a knocking at the shutters, "Its Sammy!" Mrs. Babat cried in excitement. When Mr. Babat raised the shutter, I was sitting in a dark corner, where I could watch the door, paralysed with emotion. Sammy's figure appeared in the doorway, and in a quiet voice he asked if Father had left the key with them, apologizing for disturbing them after closing time. According to the agreement between the Babat couple and myself, they were supposed to tell Sammy gradually about my arrival, but my strength failed and I rushed over to him. And just as in the many dreams when my cry was not heard, so it was when I fell into his arms. Then the cry escaped me "Sammy! Sammy!" and his cry sounded in my ears: "My sister! My little sister!"

We stood helplessly hugging each other for a long time in the presence of the Babat couple and several neighbours who knew Father and Sammy and who had been in the shop when I came, returning in the evening to wait with me until Sammy arrived. The sound of quiet weeping could be heard. My brother Sammy was first to recover, he held me tight, looked at me as if he could not believe his eyes, and whispered: "Come, Fritzike, let's go home." Mrs. Babat held out a basket of provisions, "Take it Sammy, we'll work out the bill tomorrow". When we were outsie, I said, "But I'm Annie, not Fritzi." By the light of the streetlamp I saw that his face had hardly changed, and a wide smile of embarrassment appeared on it: "And where did you leave Fritzike?" Then, after some hesitation: "Didn't you marry a Russian officer?" I was stunned for a moment by the unexpected question: "Where did you get that idea?" But Sammy pulled me along, not weakening his grip. After only a few metres, we came to the very yard I had

skipped for fear of a dog that had barked at me and jumped against the fence when I approached. "Quiet, Urso!" Sammy called, "Can't you see this is my sister Annike?" I then noticed that Urso had black fur, like Urso the first.

I sat in Father's small flat with Sammy, as if in a dream. It had a big kitchen and a small room which was also their bedroom. It had two beds, a closet, a table and two chairs. Sammy told me about an embarrassing encounter between Father and a certain girl and it became clear to me that as a result, they had suspected me of betraying my sister and my people. I told Sammy about an evening in the "Krassny Dom" Club, to which I had been invited by Borya from the orphanage. Borya had meanwhile become an officer in the Russian Army. I told him how I had there met the girl from our town, who had told me she was "having a great time" with her officer, and "knew many officers", and to protect myself, I told her I was married to Borya. When she had asked me about Fritzi later in the evening, I made the mistake of telling her.

"A weight has been lifted from my heart," said Sammy, "I'm only sorry for Father who has to suffer for another three days because of that unfortunate mistake." So we sat until one in the morning, the well of questions never drying up. They ran into each other, preventing any thought of food or sleep, in spite of the food Mrs. Babat had packed for us.

It was nearly morning when we heard Urso barking. Sammy jumped up as though he understood the dog's bark: "Its Father!" And I heard Father's voice saying, exactly as he had to the other Urso "Quiet, Ursu, you'll wake the neighbours!" I imagined him pushing his fingers into the dog's black fur. Sammy hurried to the door, motioning me to hide and opening the door as Father was

[illegible] Father." I could see him standing in the

doorway through the glass panel, as I hid behind the door. "What's happened, haven't you been to bed?" Father exclaimed in surprise. And when he entered and saw the celebrative food on the little table: "Who's been here?" "Father, there's been news of the girls," Sammy said. "Where are they? Quick!" And Sammy hastily calmed him. "They're alright, Father, they're alright." I could see Father standing dumbfounded with his back to me, taking deep breaths: "I had a feeling on my way to Fokshany, and I got off the train and took the midnight train back to Bucharest." He turned to sit in the chair facing the door. It did me so good to see the expression of surprise on his face and his sudden leap from the chair, when he discovered me.

"Sammy, why didn't you tell me? Why didn't you tell me, Sammy?" He said over and over when I was in his arms and tears of sorrow and happiness wet my face and neck. Sammy stood behind him shouting into his ear -- to prevent any mistake: "Father, its Annike!" Only after several repeated shouts did Father take in his words and straighten his head. I saw the sprinkling of premature grey -- he was 49 then, his sorrowful dark eyes looking pleadingly at me, and his humiliated voice, as he asked: "Where have you left Fritzike?" Knowing exactly what he meant, I answered him as quietly as I could: "Father, Fritzike is alright and will soon follow me." I had a sudden rush of powerful longing for Fritzike, such as I had not felt all of that year, the first ever to separate us since our joint birth. Father felt this, as he told me in his relief at having heard the true story from me: "I knew you would not abandon your sister." In his eyes, Fritzike was still the younger of the two of us, child of his old age, and he relied on me as on the older daughter.

Friends and acquaintances of Sammy and Father came to express

their good wishes. Father boasted that his girls had known how to take care of themselves. At first I did not really understand what he meant, but when I heard some of the horror stories about the cruel rapes the SS had committed, and about the girls (who were not many, as far as I knew) who had given themselves for a little food -- I understood. Sammy was wiser than anyone of his age that I knew and he understood how to steer the conversation with me so as not to hurt my feelings. When I told him frankly about things I was only prepared to dredge up from my memory when talking to him, such as the horrors of the deaths I had seen, vicious rapes I had witnessed through the orphanage windows, I saw him biting his lower lip, berating the whole world for being full of violence and slaughter, as was said of the generation before the Flood (he also made those associations!). "I will not let anything like that happen to my children!" I said. Sammy agreed, but warned me of Father's feelings, which had not changed regarding Palestine, and he was insisting that Sammy should re-apply for medical school, even though he had been thrown out in disgrace with all the other Jewish students.

(NB cont. B:Mel25a)

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Father was very concerned about me and strongly insisted that I should see a doctor for a medical check-up. Only when I went in to Dr. Wagner did I notice that the plate on his door read: Doctor of Psychiatry. To save him any embarrassment I said we had to take Father's concern seriously. I soon discovered that my mental condition was "stable and good". He told me about mental traumas and deficiences resulting from prolonged suffering in the camps. And he said that "wise and understanding" Sammy's suppport was also important. He said to Father, who was waiting outside, in Yiddish: "Moshe! May all the daughters of Israel be as sound as your daughter!" Father's eyes glowed with happiness.

Father's attitude towards me changed after the visit to Dr. Wagner and he became as I had remembered him. He began making demands on me again, and although I did not like it, I did as he said. As a first step, he enrolled me in an external school which had classes on several levels according to the needs of the students, who were aged 17-30 and over. The school was established by the Jewish community for refugees from Transnistria, like me, who had not managed to complete their schooling for their matric. To my surprise I adapted very quickly to the atmosphere of study and I devoted myself to my studies until the beginning of March 1946, when I returned from school in the evening and Father told me that Sima had been to visit us. She was in Bucharest, he said, handing me the address she had left for me at the Hashomer Hazair's kibbutz-training branch, 'B'nei Avodah'.

That very evening, when I arrived to visit Sima, I was welcomed as a comrade, just as I had been welcomed by Ze'ev, the

Berel, and he was also the secretary of the movement. I moved the next day to live with Sima and the rest of the comrades, whom I did not know, but who shared my ambitions and had the same goal: immigration to Palestine.

During the first weeks of my stay at the training branch I dared not visit Father and he did not visit me. Only Sammy came almost every evening and I heard about Father's anger at me, when he found the letter I had left telling him of my decision. Sammy also encouraged me: "At last you've broken the ice, I'll also join you the moment Fritzike arrives, and Father will soften up, too."

After only two weeks, one morning when I was on my way from the bakery with a sack of bread on my back, I met Father at the gate. For a moment I was confused and I nearly threw the sack down, but it was Father who took the unexpected step when he came and lifted the sack from my back and placed it on the pavement. Then he embraced me and said in a subdued voice: "If this is what you want," he pointed at the heavy sack, "so be it, have it your way." But I promised Father, beside the sack of bread, that when I reached Palestine, I would do everything I could to continue my studies and attain the profession I had dreamed of: an educator in Israel. In an uncertain voice, Father wished me success. I then visited him often, together with Sima, and our relationship was good again.

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CHAPTER NO 26

FRITZI ARRIVES

Two weeks before my departure for Palestine, in June 1946, Sammy came running to me: "Fritzi has arrived and she's in Siret!" This was in the telegram he took from his pocket. Father left by the midnight train for Siret to fetch Fritzi and we estimated that he would be back in about a week. Sima and I were given a day's leave to get the house ready for their arrival.

Fritzi upset these arrangements by turning up only a day after Father had left to meet her. A friend I knew from the training branch met her on the tram, and naturally mistook her for me. He brought her to us and there was an emotional reunion. She had arrived with a group from Czernowitz, under the auspices of the Secureni rabbi. It was a project run by the religious movement, Agudat Yisrael, which worked to bring children returning to Roumania to a hostel they had established in Bucharest (most were later sent to the United States). She had tried to find us in Radautz, from where she had sent the telegram. Meanwhile, the group had arrived almost at the same time as the telegram.

When we were all sitting together again, Fritzi told us about the day she had decided to desert. It was at the beginning of December 1945, and she had received double pay at the end of night shift, for her high work norm. That morning a letter had arrived from Mannyo, written in Leipzig. He proposed marriage and said that if she accepted him, he would get leave and come and fetch her. He had obtained her address through Dora Abramovna when he called on her to find out what had happened to Fritzi.

Fritzi had gone to the market in high spirits, but on putting her hand in her pocket to pay for some cornflour, she found that

the money had been stolen and the letter was gone. She had begun to weep in despair, and the crowd that gathered could do nothing to calm her. A Jewish kiosk-owner invited her into his kiosk and when he understood what had taken place, he suggested she try her luck in Moscow.

"If you get to Moscow," he comforted her, "you'll be able to join the thousands of refugees that have gone there from Kazakstan, Uzbekistan, and Siberia. They're making their way home to Poland and Czechoslovakia. The Soviet authorities are even assisting them by putting special trains at their disposal. In a few hours a freight train loaded with coal will be leaving for there." Right then the decision took shape. The fear which had always stopped her from running away now vanished. She took her things and arrived at the station minutes before the coal train left. A woman who was already sitting on a pile of coal helped her to get up and they travelled like that for a whole week.

At Moscow railway station, it looked as if the whole world was full of refugees. Thousands of men, women and children, with their belongings, filled the gigantic hall and the area in front of it from end to end. Fritzi merged into the crowd and slept on the floor. The following morning she found a Jewish woman with five children beside her. She passed the waiting time in helping the family, and they were shoved onto the train together. On the journey, she sold all her possessions for food: a few carrots, corn cobs and sunflower seeds, the only food that was to be had. When she got off in Saniatin, on the border of Bukovina, it was December and she was shivering with cold and barely able to remain on her feet.

A cart brought her to Czernowitz (a total of 15 kilometres)

Aided by Lena and her mother, Mrs Goldstein, she regained her strength. She kept repeating how much she owed them: they took her in and tended her for weeks, under the supervision of a doctor Mrs. Goldstein called specially. It was they who put her back on her feet. The identity card in the name of Anna Gold was also useful when she found work in a sewing workshop, until she joined the group travelling with the rabbi to Roumania.

After these events, I was called to the training branch and told that the candidates for immigration, myself among them, were leaving shortly. I hastily packed a few belongings and was soon ready with the little knapsack we were allowed. Fortunately, the departure was delayed for two days, which I spent with my family.

Father, back from his journey, told me what was happening in Radautz. He told me that Orenstein, the 'bad man' of the stables at Somilova, had meanwhile returned to Radautz with his family and had been tried by the Roumanian authorities and sentenced to 25 years in prison. And good news: Father had met the Meller family and they told him that their son Milo had come back from Moscow a short time earlier and was at a training branch run by the Zionist Youth movement in Bucharest, and he was also due to leave for Palestine any day. It was not difficult for me to understand Father's wish that I try to meet Milo Meller, since he was from our town and Father knew him and his family well.

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CHAPTER NO 27

TO ATLIT ON THE "HAGANAH"

On the truck, together with groups from other Zionist youth movements -- Habonim, Betar and others -- we came to Timishoara in Transylvania, where we stayed for about two days until the rest of the groups arrived to join us on the journey to Zhimbolia a small village on the border of Yugoslavia. From there we continued to the Danube, which we crossed by raft to Belgrade. After eight days we went on to Zagreb in Croatia, where we stayed another 3 weeks.

We boarded the illegal immigrant ship, "Haganah", at the beginning of August 1946 and reached the territorial waters of Palestine on the 14th. But great quantities of water penetrated the hold of our ship where we were lying in the darkness on narrow bunks. When the danger of sinking increased, we were all moved up on deck. Two British warships approached us. They transferred us onto their own decks and sailed to Haifa Port, which I saw rising up the slopes of Mt Carmel, shining its lights at us as though in welcome. We continued to see these lights for the next two weeks from the three ships anchored outside the port, to which the British had transferred us, until they decided to place us in the detention camps at Atlit. In the two weeks that we were on board the ships, I enjoyed the waters of the Mediterranean for the first time. I would get into the sea every day with the other swimmers and we would swim all day long from ship to ship, visiting our friends from whom we had been separated by the British. I was also the postwoman for separated couples who did not know how to swim. I secretly hoped to meet Milo among the swimmers, since he was an outstanding swimmer and was the one who had taught me to swim.

But I hoped in vain.

In Atlit, the British separated the boys' living quarters from that of the girls. However, after two or three days a mixed club was organised in one of the huts. My friend Tova went there to dance on the very first evening. I was not at all surprised when she told me, on her return, that she had met a fellow from Radautz, whose name was Milo Meller: "A marvelous dancer!" The next evening I joined Tova when she went to the club, and there met Milo, with whom I was to establish my home and family in Israel.

The hope I had planted in a hidden corner of my heart, which had strengthened my spirit in my wanderings through all the circles of hell, was fulfilled.

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THE END

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TRANSLATED FROM THE HEBREW BY RIVA RUBIN