

# Piles of Pine Needles

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Israel

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**Avraham as a child**



# 1

I was born in the town of Skempa in Poland, in the year 1935. No one remembers the day or the month. I arrived in Israel on 28/06/1950, and so the clerk in the registry office set the date 28/06/1935 as my date of birth, and so it remained. Skempa is one of the towns in the vicinity of the city of Lipno. Not far from Skempa there is a vacation area, with a lake and forests. Many families visit this place with their children in the summertime, to relax among the trees, to sail and swim in the lake, to walk in the area, and to enjoy the clean air and the wonderful view. My father owned a clothing store in the Skempa town square. Workers in the store were seated next to sewing machine, pumping the pedal forwards and backwards with their feet, while moving the fabric with their hands, under the needle that moved up and down, piercing the fabric. My father stood behind a table, cutting the fabrics with scissors. From time to time, people entered the store. Some purchased ready-made clothes, while others ordered them to size. When they ordered to size, my father would pause from his work behind the table, and would take his measuring tape, marking chalk, and pins, in order to measure, mark, write, and sketch.

The Skempa town plaza was square, and had four streets leading away from it, in each direction. I used to go and sit at the store entrance, on the top step. From there I could see the water-well located in the middle of the square and the passersby. On market days, the square was crowded and lively. Farmers from the neighboring villages and towns, would arrive with carts filled with vegetables, fruits, eggs, milk and dairy, livestock, farm products and handiwork, to sell, buy, or barter.

I loved to watch the farmers and their wares, to smell the strong scents, and to hear the sounds of the chickens and ducks, which mingled with the sounds of buying and selling. From time to time, they would pump water from the well, take a drink, and water the horses and other animals. In the afternoon, the farmers dispersed, left the town, and peace would return to the square. On the other side of the square lived my mother's sister, aunt Rivkah. She was older than my mother; her husband was named Shlomo, and they had three children, 14-year-old Shimeck, 12-year-old Phela, and 10-year-old Sarah. Aunt Rivkah and uncle Shlomo owned a supermarket, in which they sold flour, sugar, coffee, tea, sewing tools, and kitchen wares. One night my father took me to the square. It was full of people, noisy and bustling. My father put me on his shoulders and I could see horse-mounted soldiers, crossing the square. He explained to me that Germany declared war on Poland, and what I was witnessing, was the fleeing Polish army. Up until the declaration of the war, we were a happy family of five; father, mother, me, the

eldest, my sister Felusha who was two years younger, and my brother Hilick, who was two years old.

My brother Hilick's crying woke me up one morning. He was sitting on my mother's knees, wailing, and my mother cried with him. I approached them, and my mother hugged me and told me that during the night the Germans came and took my father. I never saw my father after that. Aunt Rivkah came to us and told us, that during the night all the Jewish men were taken, and all stores and businesses owned by Jews were closed. Only women, children, the elderly and the infirm remained. It meant that we would need to be prepared for a difficult life. Schools were closed. The Jews that remained rarely left their homes, fearing the Germans and young Poles, who would harass the Jewish women, elderly, and children, whenever they encountered them in the street. The kinder of the Gentile neighbors would buy the Jews food, and received high compensation and much gratitude for them.

One evening, our aunt and Phela visited us. The aunt told us that she will be going to Warsaw with her children, as there were many Jews there, and their conditions appeared to be better. Upon arrival, she would let us know if it would be worthwhile to come as well. Mother wouldn't let us out of the house. We would stand by the window and look out at the square, where German gendarmes and soldiers milled about. One night, mother woke us and told us that we must get dressed, because the Germans were taking us to some other place. Felusha and Hilick began to cry, and there were tears in mother's eyes. I felt that something bad was about to happen. Mother gave us something to eat, prepared two packages with clothing, and we sat down close to each other and quiet, looking at each other's expression. Suddenly, we heard a loud noise, and calls for the Jews to come out to the square. We went to the window and saw a few large, tarp-covered trucks, parked in the square. Felusha and Hilick began to cry again. Mother dressed us in warm clothing, put hats on our heads, hugged and kissed us, and said we would go out together, and must stop crying. We left everything behind us and exited the house. We never returned to that house..

Mother held Hilick in her arms and took some food as well. The square was already crowded with many women, children, and the elderly, but with no men. The men were taken to work camps. The gendarmes walked around with clubs in their hands and rifles on their shoulders, yelling: "Schnell! Schnell!" There were also many Poles helping the Germans to yell and push the people onto the trucks. We climbed on a truck, which contained many people. There were no benches and we stood tightly packed. The Germans closed the tarp, leaving no air, and darkness. Little children cried, the elderly coughed, and the mothers calmed. We drove for a long time, swinging to and fro, but we didn't fall because of the dense crowd. Children yelled that they were hungry, thirsty, and needed to relieve themselves. The

mothers were unable to help the children, and they instructed them to take care of their needs in their pants. This was one of those events that you never forget, as long as you live!

## 2

The truck came to a halt, and the back tarp was opened. Outside stood German gendarmes, yelling: "Get down! Schnell! Schnell". We were pushed to the opening, which was packed and tight. Many jumped and fell, the crying immense. The elderly that fell to the ground and had difficulty standing were beaten with clubs. Mother jumped down, took Hilick with one hand, and with the other helped Felusha jump. I jumped after her. Below stood Jews with a ribbon on their arm, who told mother in Polish to walk in the direction of a long white building. Mother, with Hilick in her arms, walked first, and Felusha and I followed behind her. The sky was grey and overcast, and a light drizzle fell. It may have already been evening. We entered the building, into a long and narrow hall. There were many people there, mostly lying on the floor on either side of the hall. Many children ran around in the passageway. This was the Shchegobo Ghetto. A fat woman with a black ribbon on her arm, stopped mother and told her in Polish, to find a spot on the floor, near the other people. She gave her a note, which listed the number of food rations she was entitled to, and told her to guard it well, as she would get no food without it. Mother looked to the right and to the left, and chose to sit in a spot that had children.

The woman sitting next to us asked mother where we were from, and mother answered her. She said they had already been in the ghetto for a few days, and gave mother a few words of advice: "One of the buildings has toilets and water pipes. Do not go there at night, because along the way children have relieved themselves, and because of the darkness, you might step in it and bring the stench inside. At night it is better to go outside to pee behind the building." She also told mother how to get food from the Capo with money. Mother opened the package she was holding, removed a pot that she had brought from home, and went to stand in the line by the kitchen, to receive porridge and sliced bread, according to what was written in the note in her hand. Hilick sat by me, and Felusha began to speak with a girl who was sitting and playing with a small doll. Mother came back with a little porridge and four small slices of dark bread. We finished our portion and Hilick asked for more. Mother removed three small cookies from the package, gave them to us, and took none for herself. Mother didn't say where she kept the money she had, but I knew and told no one. One night, before they took father away, I woke up and saw mother and father sitting by a table, on which stood a kerosene lantern. In spite of the dim light, I was able to see gold coins spread on the table. Mother unstitched all of the buttons from her sweater and coat, and from our coats as well. Father took pieces of cloth, wrapped three coins in each, and sewed them in place of the buttons

that mother had unstitched. She had kept all of the original buttons in a bag, so that she could sew them back, in place of the gold buttons, when the need arose.

Every day, the children in the ghetto were gathered in groups. The little ones were gathered by the mothers, who told them stories and taught them songs. Children that were my age and older, heard Biblical stories from the elders. I became close with Reuven, a child my age, from the family that sat next to us. Many times Reuven and I went outside and wandered the ghetto. Sometimes we found all sorts of things that people had thrown from the windows. Every so often, we saw bodies shrouded in white sheets being carried and thrown into a horse-drawn cart.

One day, while we were sitting in groups and listening to Biblical stories, gendarmes burst into the building, hitting the teachers, the women, and the children with whips and yelling that studying was not allowed. Fear rose rapidly in the building, along with yelling and crying. Amongst the hitters were "Capos", Jews that helped the Germans. The following day, early in the morning, some "Capos" burst into the building and yelled: "Everyone outside! Leave everything in the building! Leave at once!". Mother took Hilick in her arms and we followed her. We didn't need to get dresses, because we never took our clothes off. We exited to the center of the ghetto, where the elderly, women, and children from the four ghetto buildings were gathered. In front of us we saw ten poles. From each pole hung a rope with a loop. Under each pole stood a table topped with a chair, and near each table stood another chair. In front of us stood many SS soldiers, with guns in their hands. The guns were pointed at us. Suddenly shouts were heard: "Achtung! Achtung!" Silence prevailed in the area. Suddenly, we saw ten older people lead by the "Capos". Each elderly person was placed by a table. The "Capos" helped them climb on the tables and to attach themselves to the ropes. At this moment, a great cry was heard from the crowd, when people recognized their elderly family members and understood what was about to take place. The "Capos" yelled in Yiddish: "Quiet! If not, the soldiers will start to fire at the crowd!". The elderly people were placed on the upper chairs and their heads were placed in the loops, and then, very quickly, the chairs were removed from under their feet. In front of me I saw a hanged old man, who looked at me with big eyes that almost came out of their sockets. His tongue was hanging out of his mouth, his head tilted to one side, and his entire body swung from side to side. A horrible and frightening sight! A little boy of Hilick's age, in his mother's arms, pointed at one of the hanged men and yelled: "Grandfather! Grandfather!". His mother covered his mouth with her hand and wept quietly. The "Capos" yelled: "Go inside the buildings quickly. Anyone lingering behind will be killed from the soldiers' bullets!". Everyone began to run towards the buildings, while shots were heard, and there was a

great fright. We managed just barely to enter the building, and fell to the floor. Mother began to weep, and we laid down near her and cried with her.

Life in the building worsened, and everyone walked around sadly. The lessons were stopped. Among the hanged elders were two of the teachers from our building. I had heard that many people were dying of typhus, which was the reason that bodies shrouded in sheets continued to be removed from the building, during the day and night. Mother no longer allowed us to play outside, and would not let us go out to the toilets, either. She asked that we relieve ourselves by the fence, between the thistles. "Better that you get a sting on your bottom, than I get a sting through the heart", she said. A rumor was spreading that we were about to be moved to another place, because the Germans were afraid of catching the typhus disease spreading through the ghetto.

I cannot recall how long we spent at the Shchegobo ghetto, a year... maybe more. One morning, two "Capos" burst into the building and yelled: "In one hour, all of you are to be outside with your "schmattas" (clothes). You are leaving the ghetto". Much panic ensued. Rumors were spreading that there were concentration camps, from which no one leaves alive. Mothers were worried for their children, and repeated the sentence: "God, what is the children's sin, why do they deserve this?". Mother dressed us with more clothes on top of those that we were already wearing, and told us not to take them off, even if we got warm. She collected what we had in the building and we went outside. Outside, the tarp-covered trucks were already waiting, and people were climbing onto them. The "Capos" milled around and urged people to climb faster. SS soldiers stood around with drawn weapons, so that no one could escape. I heard that the sick and the exhausted elderly remained laying in the ghetto buildings. There they waited for their end. The truck filled with people, and the "Capos" closed the back opening with the trap. It was crowded, dark, and oppressive. We could hardly breath, and didn't know where they were taking us. The truck swayed from side to side, and sometimes tree branches scratched its sides. The older people moaned, children yelled and cried. Not all children were able to stand near their mothers and it was impossible to move them from place to place because of the dense crowd. Everyone was helpless, especially the mothers. The trip lasted a long time, and everyone was worried and exhausted. The elderly moaned and children fell asleep on their feet. It was all so similar to the first journey.

The truck stopped and the tarp opened. We had arrived at the "Gostynin" Ghetto. Here too, the skies were covered in black clouds, the wind was blowing, and the rain drizzled. The "Capos" yelled for us to get down quickly and wildly pulled down the elderly. The older children got down with a jump and the little ones waited for their mothers to help them down. The Germans walked between the trucks with clubs and yelled:



“Schnell! Schnell!”. When everyone got down from the trucks, they stood us in groups, each family separately. The first sight I encountered when we stood in our groups was, an elderly Jew with side-locks, running with an uncovered head, followed by a “Capo” who beat him with a club. After a short while, the old man fell down with his face to the ground. The “Capo” did not ease up and continued to hit him. Everyone watched, but no one said a word. An SS soldier stood at a distance with a gun in his hand, laughing.

One “Capo” stood in front of my mother and told us to follow him. We obeyed. We were the first to follow him, and behind us followed everyone else. When we arrived at the building, the “Capo” asked us to stand quietly and not to move. Only those called by name were to follow him into the building. We were called first. The “Capo” led us to a small room and told my mother to stay in it with the children. It was a small room, with a tiny window and a door-less entrance. When we lay down, crowding on the wooden floor, mother had to fold her legs, so small was the room! Mother took the pot and said she was going to get food. After she left, I poked my head through the entry way. I saw a long and dark hallway, with only two light bulbs. Many children ran back and forth along its length. On either side were many small rooms, and at its end was a stairwell leading to the second floor. We never went up to the second floor. I had heard that it too, had many small rooms, just like the first floor. My sister, brother and I approached the small window and peaked outside. We saw through vegetation a tall fence made of iron wires. Beyond the fence grew many trees, tall and dense. Mother returned with a pot full of porridge, many slices of bread, and... candies. She hid the bread and the candy and urged us to eat the porridge. While we ate, mother sewed a button onto her sweater. I was the only one who knew why there was a missing button in the sweater...

Over time, we also began to venture into the hallway. My sister would join the children playing on the floor, and I usually held Hilick’s hand and walked with him back and forth. One evening mother was sitting on the floor and talking with a woman who was holding a baby in her arms. We were standing by the window, looking out. A child my age came in and told the woman, who was his mother, that he was hungry. His mother told him she had no food, and he should wait until tomorrow. Mother went to her package, took out a slice of bread and three candies. She gave the child, whose name was Yaacov, the slice of bread and one candy, and to his mother she gave the two other candies. From that night, Yaacov and I became friends. The following day we went for a walk in the ghetto. Here too we saw sheet-shrouded bodies being removed. One “Capo” was walking around with a big black dog, and at the gate were Gestapo soldiers with guns.

After a few weeks, aunt Rivkah and her three children joined us. She told us, that the situation in the ghetto in the town of Warsaw had worsened and that the hunger became a problem, because of the overcrowding. The

aunt had heard that we were in the “Gostynin” ghetto, and she bribed a goy to transport her and her children to “Gostynin” in his cart. The aunt’s children were already older, relative to us, which meant she was not as busy, and in a short time, she became active in the daily life of Jews in the ghetto. She had contacts with people and learned that there is a possibility of leaving the ghetto in order to buy food from the Poles in the nearby villages. It involved great risk, but was not impossible.

The aunt understood that her daughter Phela could be used for this assignment, as she was blonde, with big blue eyes, just like a “shiksa”. Phela had studied at a Polish school before the war, and had mastered the Polish language. Because of the risk, the aunt had many doubts, whether to send Phela to buy from the villagers outside of the ghetto. One morning, I didn’t want to get up. My mother put her hand on my forehead and told me I had a high fever. One of the doctors in the ghetto examined me, and determined that I had pneumonia. He said I had to be treated with cupping glasses on my back and cold compresses on my forehead, to reduce the fever. I also had to drink a lot of boiled water, and to eat nourishing food; eggs, milk, and pig fat, to ensure that I don’t weaken and my condition does not worsen. Mother sat by me and placed cold compresses on my forehead. The warm tears from her eyes trickled on my face. Aunt Rivkah brought me an apple and put small pieces of it in my mouth. She looked at me for a long time, and suddenly told my mother: “I will send Phela to the villagers, to buy the things the doctor ordered.”

The aunt bribed the head “Capo” with a golden Napoleon coin, which had been sewn as a button on her coat. He gave her a few zloty and instructed Phela when and from which fence to exit, and when and from where to come back, but he had warned her that if caught, she will not stay alive. If she was lucky, she would be sent to a concentration camp.

Phela left the ghetto, and the aunt did not eat or sleep until she returned. After walking several kilometers, Phela saw several village women along the road, selling their wares, which were spread out on the grass. She got everything the doctor ordered, except for the pig fat. Phela approached one of the villagers and told her she must purchase pig fat, as it is needed for a sick child. The woman sent Phela, accompanied by her daughter, to her husband in the village where she obtained a piece of pig fat. With all of the items in her possession, Phela returned to the ghetto safely.

Even after I recovered, Phela continued to leave the ghetto, to purchase different items which the aunt sold to interested ghetto residents. The aunt had much experience with buying and selling, from the time that she had run the supermarket. One morning, a few trucks entered the ghetto, accompanied by a large number of SS soldiers. Along with the “capos”, they went from building to building and told everyone to stand. They checked the small room, and instructed every tall man to go out to the ghetto square. Among the men

taken outside was Shimeck, the aunt's son. After all the buildings were checked, the men were loaded on the trucks and were driven away. They were never heard from again. The aunt was very badly affected by this. She lay on the floor for many days, crying, and did not eat or drink. Phela and Sarah sat next to her and cried with her. My mother went to her several times a day and begged her to stop fasting, because she would not bring back Shimeck that way, and it is only destroying all of us. In any event, the trucks will soon come to take us from here, and she would be better off taking care of her daughters and us, because without her we were lost.

The following day the aunt got up from the floor and sent Phela to the village, to one of the goys whose name she had been given by someone in the ghetto. She told Phela to tell him, that her mother requests of him, to come at night to a certain spot near the ghetto fence, as she wants to speak with him, and will pay him. That night the goy arrived and the aunt spoke with him. When she came back, she entered our room and told mother, that the goy would come on Saturday night and would take her and her daughters in his cart, to one of the villages near the town of Yegovo, a ride that lasts about a day. In this village, the aunt knows a man with a big farm, who made purchases in her supermarket. This goy did not hate Jews, and might find a place for her, her daughters, and for us. The aunt arranged with the goy, the cart owner, that a week after he took them, on Saturday night, he would come to take us. This is why she asked mother to come to the fence on the Saturday on which they were leaving, so that she and the cart owner could meet.

After the aunt and her daughters left the ghetto, people were saying that they were about to destroy the ghetto and to transfer all of us to concentration camps. Mother was worried and wanted to leave as soon as possible. She waited for the goy to come and take us, just as he had with the aunt and her daughters. On Saturday the goy arrived and told mother, to be ready with the children by the fence the following evening. Mother brought us food as usual, and we didn't leave the room. She warned me to tell no one of the departure from the ghetto. Even Felusha and Hilick didn't know.

## 3

In the evening, mother told me to hold Hilick's hand, to take him behind the building and to wait there. If anyone was to ask what we were doing, I was to answer that Hilick was relieving himself. Hilick and I stood quietly behind the building, surrounded by darkness. Mother and Felusha came, we stood closer to the fence, and the goy arrived. He helped us climb over the fence, took Hilick in his arms, and began to walk away. Mother followed him, holding Felusha with one hand and carrying a cloth-wrapped package in the other, and I followed them. We arrived at a spot where a horse-drawn cart stood. Felusha and I lay on top of the hay in the cart, and mother, with Hilick in her arms, sat by the goy who was leading the horse.

Mother looked like a gentle villager, dressed in a long skirt and wrapped in a fringed wool blanket. Her head was covered with a colorful kerchief. It was dark, the stars were shining in the sky, and the horse walked at a steady pace. During the ride, the goy told mother that when he brought the aunt to the village of Osovo the previous week, they had found a childless couple, who was willing to take Felusha as their daughter. If the ride ended well, mother could leave her with them. He would bring mother, me, and Hilick to his brother, who lives in Osovo, in the hopes that he can find some sort of arrangement for us, as he had not yet received any word from the aunt.

When the sun rose, the goy told my mother that it would be better if we didn't all enter the village in daylight. The villagers are early risers, and it will be dangerous for them to see a woman with three children. The goy directed his horse towards the forest that stretched along the outskirts of the town. Between the trees were piles of dried pine needles. He sat Felusha and me on the ground, each in the middle of a pile, and covered us with pine needles, as high as our necks. Hilick began to cry, for he too wanted to sit in one of the piles. The goy told mother to hold Hilick in her arms and to follow him. Hilick cried and told us to come with them, but the goy cautioned us not to move until he came to get us out. The goy, mother, and Hilick left. Felusha began to cry loudly and said she was afraid of the animals in the forest. Although I didn't know the truth about forest wildlife, I told her there were no animals, and that if we sat quietly in our piles, no one would come. Felusha calmed down. We sat quietly, unable to move our bodies. Occasionally we rolled our heads slowly from side to side. A sharp and pleasant scent rose from the pine needles. We became tired and fell asleep.

When I opened my eyes, I saw someone standing over me and watching me. I remembered that it was the goy who had brought us here. He told me to get out of the pile and to wake my sister, because we had to leave the forest. I woke Felusha, helped her out of the pile, held her hand, and we

followed the goy. Outside of the forest was a horse-drawn cart filled with hay. The goy shifted the hay sideways and told us to lie down in the cleared space. After we lay down, he covered us in hay and we started to move. I peeked through the cracks between the planks at the side of the cart, and saw people working in fields, cows roaming free, and children minding the herd, and thought...I wish that I was minding cows and not running from the ghetto. Only God knows where we will end up...

We entered the village, and dogs began to bark. Women standing on the sides of the road greeted the goy, and he replied in kind and continued on. We arrived at a farm yard, and the goy stopped the cart in front of the house. He climbed down, moved the hay, and told us to get down. A woman opened the door, told us to come in, and led us to a room, in which mother was sitting on the floor with Hilick on her knees. Felusha ran to them, and mother hugged her. I also went to them and we hugged. The woman entered the room with two cups of milk and gave them to Felusha and me to drink. Hilick came to me and sat in my lap.

Mother hugged Felusha, began to cry, and told her that she had found her a place, in which she could stay until after the war. Felusha cried, hugged mother tightly and told her she only wanted to stay with her. Mother wiped Felusha's tears, stroked her head, and told her she loved her very much. Mother explained to Felusha, that there is a war now, and the Germans don't like us, which is why she must go to the place they found for her. There is a Polish couple in town who have no children, and they are willing to take her as their daughter. Mother told her she will be happy there, and they will love her just like real parents, and she will have friends. Mother promised Felusha, that she would come for her after the war. At this moment, mother could no longer speak, she covered her face with her hands and her shoulders shook for a long time. Afterwards, mother said that when evening came, she would take Felusha to the Polish couple and would sleep with her there, for one night.

When darkness fell, the farmer entered the room. He was a short, fat man, with a mustache and small green eyes. He told mother that it was time to take Felusha to the Polish couple, and left the room for the kitchen. Mother turned to me and said that I was already a big boy, and she will find me a place. The farmer promised her in my presence, that he would guard me until she came back for me. Mother kissed me and hugged me tightly. She wanted to take Hilick, but he came to me, hugged me, wiped my tears and asked that I not cry. Mother took Hilick in her arms, called Felusha, and they left the room.

I lay on the floor and cried. The farmer's wife entered with a kerosene lantern, placed it on the table, and told me to get up and sit by the table. She brought a slice of bread and a glass of milk. Afterwards she returned, took the empty cup and the lantern, led me outside and showed me where to

relieve myself. I came back to the room, lay on the floor in the dark, and couldn't fall asleep. I had hoped that mother could find a place for me too, like they had found for Felusha. I remembered that I had no chance, as I had heard in the ghetto that the goys didn't want to keep Jewish boys, because they had a marking on their penis which identified them as Jews. What would happen to me? It was my first time alone in a foreign place, in a dark room.

I must have fallen asleep. When I awoke, there was already a dim light in the room. I remembered mother and Hilick sleeping at the couple who was willing to take Felusha. I approached the window, and the sky was overcast. Small houses with straw roofs were scattered around, with wide fields behind them, some green and some yellow. The woman entered with a tin bowl in which was a white soup with potatoes. She called me and told me to eat the soup, that it was good. I asked her when my mother would return, and she said that my mother would return after she had found me a place. I asked if I could stay with them, and she said she was afraid to keep a Jewish boy, and added: "One Jewish girl in the village is dangerous enough..." I wanted to go outside but the woman said that I mustn't be seen, because someone might inform on me. I also mustn't stand by the window, and must lie down on the ground. If I needed to go outside to relieve myself, I was to call her so that she could tie a kerchief on my head, to make sure no one recognized me.

In the evening, the goy entered the room with a lantern in his hand. I was sitting on the ground, he looked at me, sat by the table and said that my mother had not yet returned. Someone might have informed on her and the Germans might have her. They would hit her and her little boy, and she would tell them where I was and the Germans would come to kill us. The goy said, that tomorrow morning he would hide me under the hay in the cart, and would bring me to the road leading to the city of Yegovo. There I was to ask, where my aunt was. Suddenly he raised his hand and slapped his head, looked at me, and asked for my aunt's name. I told him that her name was Regina Pozmenter. He said that wasn't a Polish name, and I should say that I am looking for my aunt, Regina Poznenski. Then he asked for my name, and I answered that it was Avraham Strikovsky. That is no good, either. From now on, your name is Yuzek...He thought for a few seconds, and said that my name from now on is Yuzek Domanski: "Remember these names well, otherwise you will die fast". He took the lantern and left the room.



## 4

The following morning when I awoke, I saw the goy standing over me and telling me to get up fast, because we needed to leave before sunrise. We left the room, and his wife gave me a small package wrapped in cloth, crossed herself, and said that Jesus would watch over me, even though I was a Jew. We went out into the yard, which was still dark, and the dog barked a few times and then stopped. I lay down in the cart, the goy covered me with hay, and we began our journey. When the cart came to a stop, I climbed down. We stood by the side of the road, near a tree with a wide trunk and many branches. The goy pointed with his hand in the direction I needed to take and told me that if I hurry, I would arrive in Ligovo within three days. He warned me that if I was to see a motorcycle or car coming in my direction, I must get off the road quickly and lie down in the grass until they were gone. Before he left, he asked me a few questions, so that I would remember what to answer if I was met on the way: "What is your name?" "Yuzek Domanski" I answered, "Where are you going?" "I go to Ligovo, to my ciotka (aunt), Regina Poznanski" I answered, "why are you going to her?" I was flabbergasted, as I had no answer to this question. He thought for a while, scratched his head, and said that I must say that my mother is sick and has sent me to the ciotka. I promised that would be my response, and then he said that I can go and that God would watch over me.

I started walking in the direction he had shown me. The sky was bright, the sun was shining, I was very warm and sweaty, and my entire body began to itch. On the way I saw people traveling in carts or walking with tools on their shoulders, and in the fields I saw people working. The whole time I asked God to help me find the way to aunt Rivkah in Ligovo and to find mother there with Hilick in her arms. When I tired, I got off the road and sat under a tree. I opened the package that the farmer's wife gave me. It contained three slices of buttered bread. I ate one and continued to walk. I arrived at a town. People were wandering between small houses at the sides of the road. Near one of the houses, I saw an old man smoking a pipe. I approached him and said: "Zan dobre pana (Good Morning Mister,) the way to Ligovo is straight?" I had hoped that he would give me something to drink. He looked me up and down, thought a little and said that was the right way. I was very frightened by his look and continued walking quickly. The heat exhausted me. People, women and children walked towards me. I didn't look at them and didn't ask any questions. In my heart I hoped that no one would stop me.

The sun came down, the sky began to darken, and the cool air enveloped me. I didn't know what to do since the farmer never talked to me about nighttime. I walked off the road, looked for a tree with low branches,

sat under it and piled up wild green weeds into a pillow. I ate another slice of bread, wrapped the remaining slice, and set it aside. I lay down, placed my head on my "pillow", closed my eyes and wished that I hadn't stayed with the goy and had gone with my mother and Hilick instead. In my heart I prayed to meet mother, or to find ciotka Regina in Ligovo, and I fell asleep.

I opened my eyes, looked up, and through the tree branches saw a half moon and many stars. I felt something warm pressing against my leg. I got up carefully, and saw an average-sized dog lying next to me with his head on one of my legs. I wasn't afraid of dogs because at home we had a dog named Kenrak. Gently I extended my hand and petted his fur. The dog didn't move, he just opened his eyes and looked straight into mine. I lay back down and fell asleep.

When I awoke the sun was already shining and the dog was standing next to me. I looked for the last slice of bread, which I had wrapped, but it was gone. I realized that the dog had eaten it, but wasn't angry with him, even though I was hungry. I went back to the road and continued to walk. The dog followed me, and neither of us made a sound. We arrived at a village, and near one of the houses I saw a well similar to the well we had in our town square. No one was there, so I approached it and lifted the handle up and down, the same way they did in our square. Water began to flow, and I bent down and drank. The dog drank as well. We continued to walk. The sun stood in the middle of the sky, and I was very warm because I was wearing all of the clothing I had, one piece on top of the other. I was tired and hungry, so I got off the road, lay down under a tree and fell asleep.

When I opened my eyes, the sun was already at the edge of the sky and the dog was no longer at my side. I got back on the road and continued the walk. The sun blinded me, its sharp rays piercing my eyes like knives. In front of me I saw a few houses with red roofs, which appeared to be taller than the village houses. Among them stood out a church steeple. I was happy, because I realized this was Ligovo.

I continued to walk. When I got nearer, I saw stores with different foods, bread and fruit. As I smelled the food I began to salivate. Men and women who did not look like villagers, walked by with baskets filled with food. Outside of the stores, people sat around small tables and smoked cigarettes and pipes. Some of the tables were covered with bottles and the people sitting around them were drinking from cups and holding cards in their hands. I stood by for a few minutes and watched the people. After some hesitation, I approached a man seated at the table closest to the road and asked whether this was Ligovo. The man inhaled from his cigarette, narrowed his red eyes, looked at me, exhaled the cigarette smoke, and loudly said: "Look who is going to Ligovo, a little Yid".

He lifted his arm and grabbed me forcefully. I remained standing, shrunken as though trapped between pliers. I was shocked, scared, and

began to cry and scream: "Leave me alone! Let me go! My mother is sick! Very sick! I'm going to ciotka Regina in Ligovo." People from the nearby tables said that it would be best to take me to the "Sultis" (village leader). I continued to cry and yell: "Let me go! Mother, mother, help me!"

Suddenly a woman broke through the circle of people that surrounded me. She grabbed my shoulder, hugged me, kissed my forehead and yelled at the drunk man: "You should be ashamed! Let him go, this is my sister's son!" She pushed away the arm that was holding me, pulled me to her, and we walked away from there quickly. While we were walking, she held my hand, and told me not to be afraid and to stop crying. We arrived at her house. She sat me down by a big table, gave me a glass of water, and told me to calm down, because she wouldn't turn me into the "Sultis". She walked into another room and left me alone. I felt calm and remained seated.

A short while later, a boy about my age and a girl the age of my cousin Sarah entered the room where I was sitting. They stood facing me, looked at me, and didn't speak. The girl left and the boy stayed in front of me. After a few minutes the woman appeared in the doorway and told me to come into the other room. I stood up, and with hesitant steps walked towards the room. The room was large and pretty, with a window flanked by a large bed. A heavy man was lying in the bed. He looked at me and indicated with his finger that I should come nearer and take a seat in the chair next to him. After I sat down, he asked for my name and my destination. I answered him, just like the goy had taught me, that my name was Yuzek Domanski and that I must get to my ciotka, Regina Poznanski in Ligovo. I told the man that my father was in prison, my mother was sick, and didn't have the strength to take care of me on her own. He looked me straight in the eye, smiled faintly, and told me that tonight I would sleep in their house, and tomorrow morning their daughter, Genia, would take me to Ligovo to his sister. She knows many people there and may know where my ciotka is. The man called Genia and told her that tomorrow she was to take me to Ligovo. Genia would not agree to go with me, because it was a very long way. The father warned her that if she didn't go willingly, his belt might encourage her go. Genia lowered her head and remained silent. The woman whispered to me to approach her husband and kiss his hand, which I did. The woman led me to a small room with a mattress on the floor. She brought a bowl with water, bathed and fed me, and I fell asleep.

I awoke early in the morning. The woman had made me food for the road and I left with Genia. When we were away from the house, Genia told me to always walk ten paces behind her, and if I was to be stopped, not to say that I knew her, as though I was walking alone. We walked almost the entire day. Every so often, Genia turned her head to make sure I was still behind her. A couple of times we stopped to eat at the side of the road. Even when

we ate, she sat away from me. Throughout the day, she did not say a word to me.

When we arrived in Ligovo, I saw pretty three-story houses, a large church, and a cobblestone square. I stopped to look around me, amazed by the size of the houses. Genia urged me to keep following her. We approached a big house with stores at the front, and entered a courtyard through a small gate. We climbed the stairs and stood in front of a door. Genia knocked hard on it, twice. The door opened and facing us was a tall and heavy set woman with an apron on her waist. She was amazed when she saw Genia and asked after her father, mother and brother. When she realized nothing was wrong, she asked who I was. Genia said that her father had forced her to bring me to her to Ligovo because I was looking for my ciotka. The woman looked at me and then at Genia, instructed me to sit by the table, and told Genia to come into the kitchen to help her with the cooking. After she placed the food on the table, she yelled that the food was ready. That was when a thin, tall man and three children appeared from a side room. They all sat by the table, said a short blessing and began to eat. I ate along with them. In the middle of the meal the man turned to me and said, that his wife had told him, that I was looking for my ciotka in Ligovo. He asked for the name of the ciotka and I said that her name was Regina Poznanski. The man and woman looked at each other and didn't say a word. Suddenly, the woman got up and left the room.

After a few minutes, the woman returned with a young man. She pointed at me and told him, that I was looking for my ciotka and maybe he could help me. The man looked at me and said that his parents had a small farm in a village situated not far from Ligovo. The farm had a horse, cows, a few pigs, ducks and chickens. If I wanted to, I could live on the farm and help his parents with the chores. I didn't understand most of what he said, but told him that I wanted to. He told me that he would come back in half an hour and will take me on his bicycle to his parents' farm. When he left, everyone was silent and we continued to eat. The young man came back, I told the family "Dziekuje" and left with the him.

He sat me on his bicycle and cycled towards the village. On the way he asked for my name and told me that his name was Tadeus and his father is named Pan Viatek Skorbonski. We were traveling on a narrow road. To our right were fields, and occasionally I caught a glimpse of a few roofs. On our left, throughout the entire journey, was a forest. Tadeus told me that both of his brothers had been helping his father on the farm, but six months ago the Germans took his oldest brother to work in Prussia and a week ago, they also took his younger brother there. The only one remaining at home with the parents now, was his sister. His father had wanted him to leave the city and to come help him on the farm, but he was a tailor in Ligovo, and had a wife and two small children and he could not leave them. This is why he was

bringing me to his father, to see whether he will agree for me to help on the farm.

On the way we passed a tall cross stuck in the ground, around which was a fence surrounded by flowers. Tadeus explained to me that this was the place where their village, Gozshin, started, and that the fifth farm belonged to his father. We turned right onto a narrower road, and following a short time, we entered a yard. The first to welcome us was a large black dog. The dog was tied, and it barked exposing intimidating white teeth. Tadeus stopped the bicycle and I climbed down.

## 5

A tall, thin man with a mustache appeared in the doorway. His eyes were watery, his Adam's apple protruding, and a hat was drawn across his forehead. Following him was a small woman, with a round face and small black eyes. She wore a long brown skirt, reaching her ankles, and a kerchief wrapped around her head. Behind the woman stood a young girl, with green, laughing eyes and short dirty-blond hair. Her mouth was slightly open and a few white teeth showed through it. This was the daughter, Mariska.

Tadeus pointed to me and told his father that he had brought a child, to help on the farm for no pay, only for a little food. The father looked me up and down, burped, and asked his son where he had found me. Tadeus told his father that I had been looking for my ciotka in Ligovo and could not find her, so I agreed to come. The father burped again, looked at me and told his son to leave me, and he would see what I could do to help. Tadeus went to his mother, kissed her cheek, hugged and kissed his sister, and told his father he must return to the city before it got dark. The father told him: "May God watch over you and you arrive home safely." Tadeus got on his bicycle and began to ride towards Ligovo.

The farmer and his wife entered the house. The daughter, Mariska, approached me with a smile, asked for my name and told me to come with her and she would show me the farm. I followed her. To the left of the house, stood a long building, divided into sections. In the first section was a chicken coop. We went inside and the chickens were sitting on stands made of small branches. In a higher spot, sat a bigger chicken with black feathers on his body and red feathers around his head. His crest was big and red, resembling a crown. Mariska told me, that every morning the door to the coop was opened and when the chickens went outside, the eggs were collected. In the corner of the coop, on a surface covered with hay, sat a group of ducks. When the coop door was opened, the ducks existed towards a small water pool, which could be found behind the building, and towards the evening, they were brought back into their spot in the coop. The second section was a pigpen. Small pigs sat humming on top of a surface of hay and dirt. A big sow was lying in the corner and a few small pigs were sucking on its teats. The third section was a cowshed. The cows stood in it, with their rears facing the entrance. The cows were tied to a pole, with a rope wrapped around their necks. A few calves lay in a separate, fenced area. Mariska told me the names of all the cows.

The last section was a stable. We went in and saw a tall, wide and beautiful mare. She was white with black spots, which were spread all over her body. When we entered, the mare sounded a friendly neigh, perked her ears and turned her head towards us. Mariska approached her and petted her



head and neck. She told me to come near the horse and to pet her. I approached hesitantly, petted the horse, and felt the warmth of her body. Between the stable and the barn stood a black dog, tied to his doghouse with a chain. He wasn't barking, but rather he made friendly gestures with his legs, wagged his tail, and stretched the chain in order to reach Mariska. She approached him, petted his head, and he jumped on her with his front legs. I didn't go near him, and stood back. Mariska grabbed the dog hard by his collar, he stood quietly, and only then did I approach him and pet him.

We entered the barn. In the entrance was a hard surface, the sides of which were flanked with high piles of hay and straw, which were used in winter to feed the mare and the cows. To the side was a machine with a wheel, fitted with knives. Mariska explained to me that this was a machine for cutting hay and that it was operated with a special device found outside of the barn. The device was propelled by a horse tied to a horizontal pole and made to walk around in circles. So long as the horse walked around in circles he had to have his eyes covered. To the right of the barn was a small wooden building. This was the toilet. Mariska opened the door to the building. At its center, a large board with a hole was placed on the ground. Near it was a barrel with paper cuttings, to be used for wiping after using the toilet.

At the entrance to the farm, near the house, was a well. Above the well rested a large block of wood, which was wrapped with a chain to which a bucket was attached. To the side were three covered wooden barrels, filled with water. One was used for kitchen needs, the second for watering the mare, and the third for bathing on Sundays, prior to attending church in Ligovo.

We finished the tour, and the moon had already risen and lit the farm, which was now quiet. We entered the house. In the kitchen, facing the entrance was a large stove with room for three pots. In the lower part of the oven were two large pans for bread making. To the left of the oven was a door, which led to large room, with a long table, a few chairs and a bed, on which the farmer and his wife slept. This room had a wooden floor, at the center of which was a hatch for entering the basement. The basement was used in summertime to keep food, especially meat, milk, dairy products and the like. To the right of the oven was another door, which led to a room with two beds. Mariska slept in one bed, and in the other laid the farmer's old and blind mother. In the kitchen, in addition to the oven, stood a large cupboard, the lower part of which contained pots and pans and the upper part of which held dishes and utensils. Under the window was a large table with three chairs. Along the wall stood a bench, and under it lay two thick tree stumps, which were probably used by the children to sit on when they were little. Above the window hung a cross depicting the crucified Christ. Two small pictures hung on either side of the window. One depicted Maria with the

baby Jesus in her arms and the other depicted Joseph, Maria's husband, with little Jesus.

The farmer sat on a chair at the head of the table, his wife sat to his left and Mariska sat to the right. I was told to sit on the tree stump and the bench served as my table. I sat on the stump, facing the wall. The woman brought a big pot and placed it at the center of the table. On the table were slices of bread and butter. The farmer, his wife, and Mariska spread the butter on the bread and ate it with soup, which they had poured into plates. The woman brought me a plain slice of bread and a tin bowl of Krupnik soup with milk, crumbs and potatoes. Before they began to eat, they crossed themselves, lowered their heads, and loudly said: "Jesus our lord, we thank you for the food you give us so that we do not starve to death, amen!" The farmer looked at me and saw that I did not behave like them. He warned me, that before I eat I must do what they do and if not, he would throw me to all hell.

During the meal, the farmer loudly slurped the Krupnik from his spoon into his mouth. He breathed heavily, and would occasionally stop eating, and burp or fart directly into my left ear. I didn't move and didn't respond, as I was afraid that he would throw me out. The Krupnik that I got that day, in the tin bowl, was the best I had eaten until that very day. After the meal everyone said: "Thank you, lord Jesus, for feeding us to satiation, so that we do not die, amen."

The farmer stood up, instructed me to follow him, and we went outside. It was cool, the moon illuminated the sky, and from afar dogs could be heard barking. The farmer pointed to the neighboring farm, and explained to me that a Polish farmer with German citizenship lived there. They had been neighbors for many years and had good relations, and so we needed to watch out for him, because he might cause trouble. We continued walking, and occasionally he would burp and fart. We arrived at the barn, and the farmer entered, with me following in his footsteps. It was dark, but our eyes became accustomed to the darkness. We climbed the piles of hay, and some of the moonlight peaked through the hay bales and the roof. The farmer told me that this was the place where I would sleep every night. He explained that there were many mice among the hay, but that the cats would watch over me, so that I wasn't bitten. The farmer broke open a bale of hay, spread it, instructed me to lie down on it, and left.

I remained alone. I heard rustling in the hay, and was shaking with fear. I was sad, and my eyes filled with tears again. I thought about mother and missed her. I asked God to watch over her and little Hilick, and eventually I fell asleep.

I opened my eyes fearfully. There was light in the barn, and next to me lay a yellow cat with white stripes across the width of his body, which looked at me through green, semi-open eyes. In front of me stood the farmer. My pants had been pulled down. The farmer instructed me to get up, and said: "I

knew you were a Jew, but wanted to be sure.” We left the barn, the sky was bright, but the sun hadn’t risen yet. The dog looked at me and didn’t bark. A few birds stood on a pole that stood in the middle of the yard, chirping. The farmer led me to the coop and said that later we would go the Ligovo, in order to register me with the clerk. I was very frightened, even though I didn’t understand the purpose of the trip.

When the farmer opened the door to the coop, all the chickens, closely followed by the ducks, stormed out. Many eggs were lying all over the coop. The farmer took a large wicker basket and carefully collected the eggs into it. Afterwards he gave me the basket and told me to do the same. When I was done collecting the eggs I was to go to the cowshed to watch how Mariska and the old woman (his wife) milked the cows. I was very scared of the journey to Ligovo, and thought about running away, but where to... I closed my eyes and asked mother to help me.

In the cowshed, I saw Mariska. She sat on a small wooden stool, very close to the hind legs of one of the cows, and her head rested on the cow’s stomach. Between the cow’s legs stood a large tin bucket. Mariska held in her palms two teats and pressed each one alternately, resulting in a stream of milk flowing into the bucket. Under the other cow sat her mother, and did the same. Mariska looked at me and laughed.

The farmer entered the cowshed and loudly announced that he was going with me to Ligovo, to have me registered. Mariska told him that I was a nice boy and could help them a lot, in place of the boys who were now in Prussia and in her place, when she marries and leaves home. Maybe it wouldn’t be such a good idea to have me registered, she suggested. The farmer burped, crossed his hands and said, that he must register me at city hall, in order to receive a note proving that I lived with them. This was because of the neighbor Rakowski, who was the village’s gendarme representative, and also because of the Germans, who came to the forest to collect the crow nestlings. I heard the word Gendarmes and shuddered. I told the farmer that maybe I could go to another village and he wouldn’t have to go to the clerk. The farmer told me not to worry, because the clerk was a good man whom he knew, and with Christ’s help, we would succeed. The farmer said he would take a duck to give to the clerk, along with some eggs and a piece of pork fat, which would also help. He explained to me that he needed me on his farm, and asked me to stay with him and not to run away. He burped and said, that if I ran and was caught, they would kill me like a dog.

The farmer went to the small water pool, in which the ducks were wading, some in the water and some in the mud. When he came near, the ducks ran to him with their wings spread, because they thought he was bringing them food, at which time the farmer bent down and quickly caught a duck. He told me to take a small basket and to fill it with eggs from the

bigger basket. The farmer harnessed the mare to the cart and sat down on the board up front. He told me to sit on the straw in the back and to hold the egg basket between my legs. Next to me lay the duck in a tied sack.

We arrived in Ligovo. I recognized the town by the church and the big square. The farmer tied the horse in a special place for tying horses, took a bucket from the cart, and went to fill it with water for the horse to drink. Afterwards he fitted the horse with a sack of chopped straw around its neck, so it could eat. He took the duck, and I took the egg basket, and together we walked towards one of the big buildings. We entered a large hall, which was quiet. All around were benches, and at the end, by a table, sat a man. We approached the table, and I saw that the man had white hair and glasses on his nose. The farmer removed his hat, approached the man, and I followed. "Zan dobri pana," said the farmer. The man raised his head and removed his glasses. The farmer pointed to me, and said that he wanted to add me to the list of people residing in his house, and that he happened to bring him some eggs, a duck, and a piece of dried pork fat.

The man looked at the farmer and at me, and asked how I was related to him. The farmer said I was his sister's son, from the village of Dobrize, and that I would be staying with him for a few months or more. The man heard the quacking of the duck from the sack, looked at the eggs, and said he would register me and would issue a new note. He told the farmer not to go and register me with the gendarmes, and that he would pray that we weren't caught. The farmer began to burp. The man wrote something on a piece of paper, took a device with a wooden handle, hit the page with it, and when he lifted the device, a round marking remained on the paper. The man stood up from his seat, gave the farmer the page, and took the duck, the eggs and the piece of pork. He blessed the farmer, with hope that he go safely and that God watch over him, and asked the farmer to come visit him, and to come pray at church. The farmer began burping again, looked at me, and marched towards the door, still holding his hat to his chest.

We left the building, and walked towards the horse. In front of us, across the square, marched two gendarmes with rifles on their shoulders. The farmer saw them and mumbled to himself: "I don't know why I did that." The farmer removed the sack from the horse's neck, climbed on the cart, and sat up front. I climbed up and sat in the back on the straw. When we left the town, the farmer called me to sit next to him, and told me that tomorrow I would start to work on the farm. Mariska would show me how to take the cows out to the pasture. If I was to meet any children who asked who I was, I was to say that I was his sister's son from the village of Dobrize, and that I was there for a few months.

During the ride, the farmer let me hold the reins, so that I could learn how to lead a horse. He explained that if I wanted to travel straight, I was neither to pull nor strike. When we neared the village, we passed the pole

with the cross, on which Christ was hanging. The farmer crossed himself, and told me sternly that I must cross myself and kneel, every time I passed a cross on the street, so that everyone would see. We neared the farm, and the dog began to bark. Mariska and her mother stood and watched us, and Mariska smiled. The farmer passed Mariska and told her to stop her stupid laughter and get back to work. The mother went inside and Mariska remained standing. The farmer took the cart near the stable, removed the horse's harness, and told Mariska to bring a bucket of water to water the horse. Afterwards he asked her to show me how to prepare the food for the pigs.

In front of the kitchen entrance was a porch with shelves, which contained work tools. On the floor were containers for milk, buckets, and baskets piled one inside the other. Facing the balcony was a large trough, in which the food for the pigs was prepared. Mariska entered the kitchen, and came back with a giant pot of semi-cooked potatoes. She emptied it into the trough, added sour buttermilk left over from the butter churning, took a stick fitted at its end with a bent piece of sharp steel, and began to mash the potatoes into a porridge-like batter. Afterwards, she put part of the batter into a bucket, went to the pigpen, and I followed. When she neared the pigpen, all of the pigs crowded near the fence. Mariska poured the contents of the bucket over the fence, into the trough in the pen. She gave me the empty bucket and told me to go get the rest of the batter from the porch, and to pour it into the trough in the pen. She waited by the pen and I started to transfer the batter as she had asked.

The bucket was heavy, and when I tried to lift it over the fence and into the trough, it fell on the head of one of the pigs. The rest were frightened, and scattered all over, wailing. Mariska entered the pen, poured what remained in the bucket into the trough, and told me that the next time I should only fill half the bucket, because her father will be angry if it happened again.

Towards the evening, I went with Mariska to get the cows from the pasture. We exited through the back gate and walked on a dirt road, which passed through a grove with very tall pine trees. The grove led to a field, and we continued walking through wheat fields. To our left was a deep, narrow ditch. Mariska told me that the fields on the other side of the ditch belonged to the neighbor, Rakowski, and that we had to be careful that the cows didn't pass over into them. It was especially important to watch out when they were untied and roaming freely. We reached the pasture area, where the cows were crouching and chewing their cud, and the calves were playing with each other. When the time came to return the herd to the cowshed, we raised the cows. They started walking towards the farm on their own accord, while the calves hopped from side to side. Mariska walked on one side of the ditch and I walked on the other. She said that tomorrow morning she would go out with me and show me how to tie the cows in the pasture.

We arrived at the cowshed. Each cow took its set place, and only the calves didn't want to go inside. They ran wild and escaped. I chased after them, and Mariska laughed while Tzigen barked and bared his teeth at the calves. Mariska's mother came out of the house with two buckets, one of which she gave to Mariska, and they went inside for the milking. The mother told me to gather the ducks into the coop, to make sure the chickens were all in their place, and to close the door. I did as she said.

When I returned to the cowshed, Mariska was milking the last cow. She told me to sit next to her, and let me experience the milking. I held a teat in each hand, squeezed and pulled downward, alternating teats. Suddenly a stream of milk poured through into the bucket, but the other stream spilled on the ground. Mariska began to laugh uproariously, and I was frightened and stopped squeezing. The mother yelled and told Mariska to finish the milking.

When we left the cowshed, the sun had already set. We entered the house, and the mother told me to go out to the porch, and to use a brush to clean the potatoes, which were immersed in buckets, and to put them into the big pot. When I finished cleaning the potatoes, I entered the kitchen. The father, mother, and Mariska were sitting around the table and eating. On my bench was a bowl of Krupnik, and a slice of bread. I wanted to sit, but the mother told me to take the buckets in which the potatoes were immersed and to pour the water outside of the gate. I did as she said and sat down to eat.

The farmer burped, farted, turned to me and told me to say the blessing they had taught me yesterday out loud. Afterwards he turned to Mariska and told her to wake me tomorrow before the milking, so that I could gather the eggs and prepare the food for the pigs before we took the cows to the pasture. After the meal I went outside with the farmer, we walked through the gate, and turned right towards Rakowski's farm.

The farmer crossed himself, prayed, and asked Jesus to watch over him and his family, and that the neighbor wouldn't tell the Germans that he was holding a Jewish parobak (slave). Afterwards, he turned towards the moon, peed, and told me to also pee. Even though I needed to, nothing came out. We walked to the barn, and the farmer told me to climb up to the place where I had slept the night before, warning me not to pee in the hay.

After the farmer went inside the house, I went out quietly, approached the fence, and peed. Luckily the dog didn't bark. I returned to the barn, climbed the piles, rearranged the hay, and lay on my back. I heard noises, probably from mice, closed my eyes, put my hand on my chest and asked mother to watch over me so that the mice wouldn't come to bite me. I opened my eyes and saw the ginger cat, lying at my side. I closed my eyes and fell asleep.

I felt a tickle on my nose, and when I opened my eyes I saw Mariska kneeling down next to me and tickling my nose with a piece of straw. She



told me to get up, because she needed to go milk the cows and I needed to gather the eggs and prepare the food for the pigs. We brought the cows to the pasture, Mariska tied them to pegs, and we walked to the field that the farmer was plowing. We waited for him to reach the end of the furrow and raise the plow out of the ground. The farmer instructed Mariska to go help her mother. Afterwards he turned to me and told me that I needed to learn how to plow, because the plowed field would be planted with potatoes, so that there was food for the winter. The farmer continued to plow, and I followed him and saw how to plow, starting with the outward furrows, and passing furrow by furrow, while keeping an even space between each furrow. The farmer plowed until the sun had passed through half of the sky. The mare was already tired, and he released the pole that was tied to the plow, connected it to the cart, and we returned to the farm.

The following morning, we took the cows out to the pasture and left them untied. Mariska said she had to return to the house and that I was to stay and watch out that the cows don't cross over to the neighboring farm. In the evening she would come to help me return them to the cowshed. I wandered between the cows. Suddenly I saw a small dog, followed by a small girl the same height as me, with a few cows. The dog neared me and wagged his tail, and the girl stood still near me, in silence. We crossed looks. Her hair was golden, her eyes blue and her face was red. The girl asked me for my name, whom I came to see, why, and for how long. I answered with my set answers, and asked her for her name and where she lived. The girl said that her name was Anya, she lives in her grandparents' farm, her mother is unmarried, and she does not know who her father is. She wants the war to end because then she would be sent to school and would have friends. We sat on the grass, and she watched me for a long time and said, that I look like a pale, weak child, like the children in Ligovo look, and not like the children from the village. Over time, I met another boy, a little older than me, who lived in one of the villages. The boy had a whip, and every time he walked by me, he raised his whip up and I could hear it whistle. I envied his whip.

Every day I did my set chores. Occasionally the farmer would tell me to tie the cows in the pasture and to return to the farm. Once when I returned, he took out the cow manure from the cowshed with a wheelbarrow, and piled it behind the cowshed, so that he could use it to fertilize the fields when needed. There was another wheelbarrow in the yard, and the farmer told me to take it and to help him take out the manure, which I did. That afternoon he told his wife to give me a piece of meat, because I had worked hard.

One day, we all went to the field, in a cart piled with sacks of potatoes. We filled buckets with potatoes from the sacks, and each of us, in our own plot, placed them on the plowed furrows, a hand's width apart. Afterwards, the farmer returned with the plow, created a new furrow, and covered the old

furrow in which we placed the potatoes. Towards winter, we dug a big hole behind the house, and poured into it the potatoes that we had collected in the field. We covered them with a lot of hay, which we then covered with dirt. In the winter, the snow covered everything, except for a small hole, which we used to take out potatoes for eating and for feeding the pigs.

Each farmer made sure to order lumps of turf in time for winter. The lumps were kept in a shed near the house. In winter, the lumps were used to burn wood in the stove, to warm the house and to cook. One day, before winter, two men arrived at the farm. The farmer harnessed the horse to the cart, and the men sat in the back part of the cart, with their legs dangling over its sides. I sat by the farmer and we rode through the fields, until we came to the river. We continued along the river, up to the spot where the river became very wide. On the river's bank, was a device with a large crane, which had a rectangular mold at its edge. The men operated the crane, lifted square black lumps of turf from the water, and laid them on the ground to dry. If the lumps weren't properly dried they would crumble.

In the afternoon, the farmer told us to take a break, took out a large loaf of bread, a lot of meat, and a jug of milk, and we began to eat. After the meal, the men undressed and jumped into the river naked. I stood at the river's bank and watched. Suddenly, someone pushed me and I fell into the water with my clothes on. I don't know how long I was in the water, but when I opened my eyes I was lying on my face in the grass, all wet. I recalled what happened and began to weep silently. I continued to lie down, too embarrassed to get up. One of the men approached me and apologized for shoving me into the water, because he didn't know I couldn't swim, since everyone in the village knew how to swim. He told me to get up so that the sun could dry my clothes. In the evening we returned to the farm.

One morning, Mariska woke me and told me to tie the cows in the pasture and to return to the farm, because her grandmother had died and she wanted me to help her prepare the food for the meal that followed the funeral. When I returned from the pasture, a pretty black cart stood in the yard, harnessed to two black horses. A few men, women and old people walked around the yard, crossing themselves and praying loudly to Jesus and to Maria the "Matka Boska". Suddenly, people came out of the house, carrying a black coffin, which was topped with a small bouquet. The farmer walked behind the coffin, his fingers crossed, burping occasionally. The coffin was raised onto the cart, and afterwards a coachman dressed in black climbed up, followed finally by the farmer and his wife. The cart began to move and to exit the yard, followed by three more carts filled with older people.

Mariska was the only one that cried. She wiped her tears and told me to go into the house with her. We entered the big room; Mariska opened the basement hatch, and went downstairs. She passed me packages of meat and

some bottles of spirit through the opening. We set the table in the middle of the room. We brought long boards from the other room, tied them on the table, and Mariska covered them with two white sheets, so that we made a large table. Mariska set the table with bowls, glasses, forks and knives, which she had brought from the kitchen cupboard, and began to slice the meat and the bread into slices. She sent me to the field to collect some colorful flowers, to decorate the table. When everything was ready, Mariska gave me a thin slice of bread, covered with a piece of meat, and told me to go to the pasture, stay there until the evening, and bring the cows back into the cowshed.

I arrived at the pasture. An old cow was crouching and chewing its cud. The rest walked around, chewing grass. In the field beyond the furrow, I saw Antek, the boy with the whip, walking around his cows. When he saw me, he started swinging his whip up and down and making screeching sounds. Antek asked me if I wanted to buy the whip, and of course I agreed. I told him that I had no money, and he agreed to sell it to me, for fifteen eggs. I didn't know how many fifteen was, and Antek showed me the five fingers on his hand, and told me that if I brought three times as many, I would get the whip. I promised to bring five eggs each week. The following day I dug a small hole behind the coop, to hide the eggs in. I brought five eggs to Antek after only two days.

On the third day, when I bent down to the hole to put more eggs in it, the farmer stood over me with a thin branch in his hand and began to hit me. He told me that if I wanted a whip, I would be getting one now. I screamed and promised not to take any more eggs. The farmer stopped hitting me, waved the branch in his hand and told me that if I continued to steal eggs, he would kill me. I returned the eggs to the coop and never went to see Antek again.

One day, I sensed that something was going to happen. Unusual things were happening in the farm. The milking and taking of the cows to the pasture were done earlier in the morning. The farmer told me to rake the yard and the path leading from the farm to the road. Mariska swept the kitchen floor, which was made of dense earth, and covered it with yellow sand, which she brought in with a bucket. In the large room, the table was set, like it had been on the day of the grandmother's funeral. A goy arrived, cut the farmer's hair, and then sat me on a chair and shaved my head. Mariska stood by and laughed. I was told to half-fill two barrels, and boiling water was added to each barrel. The farmer entered one barrel and his wife scrubbed his back and head. When he got out of the barrel the wife entered the same barrel and bathed. Mariska bathed in the other barrel, and I followed her.

After the bathing, the farmer wore a black suit, his wife wore a black dress, and Mariska wore a floral dress. They dressed me in a white shirt and long pants that belonged to one of the sons. They were too big for me, and

everyone laughed. The woman folded the pants and the shirtsleeves, and we entered the large room. At the sides of the table were plates, one with pears and apples, and the other with malins (raspberry). At the center of the table was a jug of water flanked by a glass. At the head of the table was a chair covered with a white sheet, and on the wall hung a cross and the picture of Maria with the baby Jesus in her arms (they had moved the picture from the kitchen). The farmer, his wife, Mariska and I sat on the bench, which stood by the wall and served as my table on normal days.

The farmer crossed his fingers, burped twice, arose from the bench and said, that this was how we were to sit until the priest came into the room. He turned to me and said, that when the priest enters, I must stand up, approach him, kneel before him and kiss his hand. If he asks me who I am, I am to give him the standard reply. Suddenly bells rang and the dog barked. The farmer jumped from his seat, and yelled excitedly, that the priest had arrived, and ran outside. A young, balding man of average height entered the room solemnly. His face was round and white, his cheeks pink, and his eyes blue. The man wore a black gown with a gleaming white collar. He looked at us, smiled a charming smile, and said: "May God bless you." We kneeled, crossed ourselves, and answered: "May God bless you, father." He sat in a chair, and said that he hoped the war would end quickly so that everyone could continue to attend the church in Ligovo regularly. In the meantime, we must pray at home. He took malins (raspberry) from the plate, put it in his mouth, and said that he was in a hurry, as he needed to visit other villages. The woman approached the priest, kneeled, and kissed his hand. The priest placed his other hand on top of her head and blessed her. After her, Mariska approached, and he smiled to her and blessed her as well. It was my turn next, so I neared him and knelt. The priest looked straight into my eyes, I kissed his hand, and he placed his hand on my head and said: "May God watch over you." I answered "amen" and returned to my seat. I felt good and remembered my father, who was also bald and blue-eyed. When the priest left, we continued to kneel before Jesus and Mary, and were thankful that they had sent the holy priest.

One night, Polish partisans came to the house of Rakowski, the neighbor who had received German citizenship, gave him a sound beating, and took all of the food stored in his basement. After they left, Rakowski came running to the farmer and told him to quickly ride to the gendarmes in Ligovo to tell them what had happened. The farmer feared the partisans, but once they were far enough away, he took out his horse and rode to Ligovo, to the gendarmes. Later he told the other neighbors, that Rakowski forced him to go to Ligovo. The following morning, two trucks filled with German soldiers arrived. They went from farm to farm in the three neighboring villages and told all the residents, to leave their homes and enter the patch of

forest facing our farm, across the road. Over several hours, many men, women, and children gathered in the forest.

Among the German soldiers, was one dressed in civilian clothing, wearing a hat, who spoke Polish. He told the men to stand to the left and the women to the right. I stood behind my farmer. A German officer walked through the group of men and told three of them to leave the group and stand in the middle, facing the armed soldiers. Afterwards, he went through the woman and told three women to leave the group and stand in a row with the three men. Among the three women was my farmer's wife. Six Germans stood and trained their weapons on the men and woman in the row, while six other Germans knelt and also trained their guns at them. The German officer spoke and the man with the hat translated his words: "Because you allowed the Polish partisans to rob our representative, Rakowski, we will now only kill six people. If it happens again, we will kill one hundred. Be warned!"

The farmer's wife turned to her husband and loudly said: "Watch the farm and the children". The German officer raised his arm and began to count: "Eins, Zwei..." My farmer, as if awaking from a dream, yelled: "Mr. Officer, wait!" The German officer lowered his arm, the soldiers lowered their weapons to the ground, and the man with the hat asked the farmer what he wanted. The farmer crossed his fingers, burped, and said: "It was I who informed the police that the partisans came to my neighbor. Two of my sons are in Prussia and my wife is the only one that helps me with running the farm. If you kill her, kill me as well." The man translated for the officer and asked the farmer which of the women was his wife, and after the farmer showed him, he pulled her aside and selected another woman. Shots were heard and all six people fell on their backs, resembling trees that had just been cut down. The officer approached each of the lying people and used his pistol to shoot each one once more in the forehead. Then everyone was told to leave the place quickly and to go home. Everyone scattered. After a while, I heard that many of the farmers were angry with my farmer and wouldn't speak with him, because he saved his wife at the expense of another woman.

On Sunday, following the murder in the forest, my farmer woke me and asked that I collect the eggs, prepare the food for the pigs, tie the cows in the pasture, and return to the farm. When I returned from the pasture, everyone was already dressed in nice clothes, and ready to go to church in Ligovo. The farmer told me to climb on the cart and to sit on the hay in the back. Mariska said that we were going to church to pray, because her mother was saved from death. When we stopped at the church in Ligovo, there were already several carts with horses. At the entrance to the church was a small stand topped with a bowl of water. The farmer told me to dip my fingers in the water and to cross myself. We entered the church, which wasn't very full, and I knelt and crossed myself as instructed by the farmer. The interior was very pretty, and from afar I saw Jesus hanging on a large golden cross. Many

candles burned and all around were many drawings and statues. The farmer told me to go outside to watch that no one steals the horse. After the church service, the farmer, his wife, and Mariska, went to visit their son Tadeus, who lived in Ligovo, and gave him a basket with eggs.

On occasion, Mariska would go to the forest to collect blueberries, to bake the cake that her boyfriend liked. He would go down to the basement, use a spoon to remove the cream from the milk bowls that were stored there, and would eat the cake with the cream, as he liked to do. Afterwards, the farmer would get mad and yell at Mariska, and she would cry. One day, Mariska went to the forest to collect blueberries and a snake bit her above her ankle. She came back red and crying, with a swollen leg. Her mother tied a rag beneath her knee, and her father took her to Ligovo on the cart. When I returned that night with the cows the farmer's wife was sad. I offered to help her with the milking, and she showed me how to milk, even though I already knew how. From that night on, I regularly milked two cows, morning and night.

Mariska lay in the hospital for several days. A few weeks after she recovered, she married her boyfriend, and they slept in the big room. Occasionally the farmer would yell at Mariska, because her husband would steal the cream from the basement and because of him they couldn't make butter. Mariska's husband didn't work on the farm. He would leave each morning and return late at night. One night, he came with a horse and cart, Mariska helped him load a few things on the cart, and they went to his village.

On one of the rainy days, the farmer told me not to tie the cows to the pegs, and to stay in the pasture to make sure they don't cross over into Rakowski's wheat field. I took the cows to the pasture, which bordered the neighbor's field. It was raining, and I was cold and fell asleep. When I awoke, I saw that the cows were not in our field. I heard sounds from the farmer's wheat field. I jumped over the ditch and saw that our cows were in Rakowski's wheat field. They were chewing the spikes and crushing the yellow wheat, which was ready to be harvested, with their legs. The cows were spread out all over the field and it took me some time to gather them. I was very angry at the damage they had wreaked, so I found a stick and hit them as I cried. I was afraid to return home, because I knew what was awaiting me. Suddenly it occurred to me, that I shouldn't tell anyone what happened, and within a few days, the wheat will straighten out.

I returned home. The cows' udders were filled with milk and they wanted to be milked. The farmer's wife came out with two buckets and started milking one of the cows. She asked me what happened, since the cow had a fuller stomach than usual, and it produced much more milk than usual. She moved on to the next cow, and it too yielded more milk. The farmer's

wife said that they must have eaten more than usual because of the rain. I remained silent.

A few days later, while I was in the pasture with the cows, the farmer arrived with a tree branch in his hand and yelled at me, that I am ruining him and shortening his life. He said that he would have to pay Rakowski two whole sacks of wheat grain, for the damage caused by the cows, when they trampled his wheat field, which happened because I wasn't watching the cows. He hit me with the branch, and I cried and held my hands over my head. He warned me that if such a thing happened again, he would throw me out, and he didn't care whether the Germans caught me. I cried and promised him, that it would not happen again.

One morning, I was helping the farmer to tie the horse to the long and thick wooden pole in the yard, which was used to operate the machine in the barn that chopped the straw and the hay. The farmer covered the horse's eyes with a rag and told me to sit on the pole, in the spot where it was connected to the machine. That way, the horse would feel that someone was watching her. The horse walked around in circles for many hours. I noticed that occasionally she would lift her hind leg and hit her stomach with her tail. She was behaving oddly. I went into the barn and told the farmer about the horse's odd behavior. The farmer went outside to look at the horse, and said she had another hour's work still in her, she was a strong and healthy horse and nothing would happen to her. When the work was done I took the horse into the stable, brought her water and food, but though she drank, she would not eat anything. She continued to lift her hind leg and to hit her stomach with her tail. I noticed that she was shaking, and shivering. I neared her head, and saw that there were tears in her eyes, as were in mine. That night the horse miscarried a small white foal. The farmer never spoke of it.

In winter nights, they placed a sack of hay and a blanket on the kitchen floor, and this was my bed. I was warm because of the coals in the oven, which warmed the small kitchen. Every morning I would fold the blanket and put it on the kitchen porch along with the sack. The farmer made me boots for winter. The soles were made of wood and the upper was made of a tough fabric. The fabric was connected to the wood with small nails. Instead of socks, I wrapped my legs with rags. The farmer wore the same kind of shoes.

In the winter we rarely went out to the pasture, and the cows were fed in the cowshed. Occasionally we would take out all the manure and pile it behind the cowshed. In the evenings we would light the small stove in the large room. The farmer would sit in the chair nearest the stove and burp, his wife lay in bed, and I sat on the small tree stump by the stove. Every so often I would stoke the fire with a block of turf.

Every evening, the farmer would look at the crucified Christ hanging on the wall and tell me stories, about the bad things the Jews had done. He

said that the Jews were evil people and that they had crucified Jesus. The farmer also told me, that the Jews would catch Polish children, place them in a barrel spiked with nails, and would roll the barrel until all of the blood drained out of the child, and during their holidays, they would mix the blood with flour and bake special bread. The farmer said, that Jews always made trouble for the Poles and would steal their money. Even God hated the Jews and punished them because they killed his son, Jesus. But the merciful Jesus ordered them to be forgiven. This was why he kept me on the farm.

When spring arrived and the snow melted, many black crows appeared in our area. They settled on the tall pine trees that grew adjacent to the farm. Every day they would crow and fly to the fields in search of food. The crows repaired the nests damaged by winter, and laid eggs in them from which nestlings emerged. One morning, when the nestlings had grown a little and could already fly from tree to tree, a group of German officers arrived. They came in a truck and in cars, entered the grove, and began to shoot the crows. The farmer told me to quickly take the cows out to the pasture, and to stay there with them until after sundown. When I returned in the evening, the Germans were already gone.

The farmer gave me a bucket and said, that I should enter the grove and look for injured or dead nestlings, on the ground between the trees. I found a few nestlings and brought them to the kitchen. The farmer's wife skinned them, cleaned them, and fried them in the pot. They ate, and I was also given some. Even though Mariska was no longer living in the house, they still would not let me eat at the table. I continued to eat on the bench behind the farmer.

One day, the girl Anya came to me in the pasture with a book that had big letters and drawings. She sat down and began to read from it. I asked her what it was, and she said that the war was over and that the children were attending a school nearby, in the big village. When I returned to the farm that night, I told the farmer what I had learned from Anya and asked to attend school with all the children. He told me that I was a Jewish parobak (slave) and that he would not register me for school. I didn't need to read or write to work on a farm.

One day, while I was milking the cows, a man with a coat and a white hat entered the stable. A rifle hung from his shoulder, and he began to untie the horse. I quickly ran and fetched the farmer, who approached the man and spoke with him. The man removed the weapon from his shoulder, aimed it at the farmer, climbed the horse and galloped away from the farm. We didn't know if he was a German soldier who had escaped the Russians, or just a thief posing as a German. The farmer bought a new mare. She was large, brown, and had a white forehead and white stains on her ankles. The vendors said she was a strong and healthy five-year-old Belgian horse, well suited for hard work. The farmer invited the vendors into the large room,



where they ate smoked pork, drank vodka and smoked cigarettes. The farmer sat in the room with the vendors, ate and drank nothing, and just burped. Afterwards they went outside and the farmer led the mare into the stable. I brought her water in a bucket and gave her some chopped hay. In return for the mare the vendors received a large pig, a few sacks of wheat, ducks and chickens. They loaded all of it on the cart and left

The new mare was good, strong, and facile, but I missed the white old horse with the teary eyes. On one bright day, after I had returned to the farm from tying the cows in the pasture, I saw the horse harnessed to the cart. On the cart were a few ducks with their wings and legs tied, a few chickens in a pierced crate, eggs in a basket and lumps of butter that were laid on large leaves. The leaves were spread out on a long and thick board. The farmer told me to climb the cart and to make sure that the board didn't shake and the butter didn't fall off. We went to a market in a town that was larger than Ligovo. On the way we saw many people carrying baskets with food and many carts tied to horses. On each cart was a woman or a girl, helping the coachman. The closer we got to the town, the more carts we encountered. We entered the town and rode towards the square, which was already crowded, and where the vendors had already covered the ground with their wares. On the other end of the square was a row of carts with horses. We rode nearer and found a place between the carts. The farmer directed the horse backwards, we entered the row of carts, and he told me to go to the well with a bucket and to fetch water for the horse. After the horse finished drinking, the farmer hung a sack of feed from her neck.

Men and women passed by the carts and examined their contents. They were nicely dressed, the women mostly, unlike the farmers in the villages. By the time the sun reached the middle of the sky, everything on our cart had already been sold. The farmer told me to stay in the cart and not to leave it. He took the money and left. I climbed on the cart, sat on the wagon driver's seat and looked at the houses around me. People walked by our cart, looked inside and found it empty, and then moved on.

After a while, the farmer came back with another man. The man looked me up and down, and I looked at him and at the farmer and didn't understand, thinking that perhaps I had done something wrong. The farmer said to the man: "This is the Yid I told you about, I am prepared to sell him." I was petrified. The man whispered something in the farmer's ear and he told me to stand up. I stood up, the farmer neared me, pulled down my pants, and said to the man: "I told you he was a Jew, look." I was ashamed and tears ran down my face. I lifted my pants and looked the man in the eye. He smiled at me, but I hated him. The farmer and the man moved away.

After a few minutes, the farmer returned with a loaf of white bread and a small package of sausage. He told me to fetch water for the horse. I went to the well and filled the bucket with water. I was thirsty and used my cupped

hands to drink water out of the bucket, before I brought it back to the horse. The farmer told me to sit next to him and we left town. I looked at him and told him, that I didn't want to go to the Jews; I wanted to stay with him in the village. He calmed me down and told me not to be frightened, because he wouldn't return me to the Jews so quickly. He handed me the reins, broke off a large slice of bread from the loaf, spread some sausage over it, gave it to me to eat, and we returned to the village.

Life on the farm continued as usual. One of the farmer's sons came back from Prussia with a short fat woman. She was holding a little baby in her bosoms. The son, woman and baby, moved into the large room. The brought a small bed for the baby from someone in the village, which rocked from side to side. The son brought a sack of old clothes that he had found along the way. Among all the clothes was a pair of shoes, each belonging to a different pair and of a different size. The shoes didn't fit them and they decided that I should have them, for attending church only. I was very happy to have shoes.

The farmer and his wife never played with the baby. They were unhappy that the son had brought the woman without a wedding, and she also wouldn't help them with the farm work. The son walked around with the farmer a lot and they talked. One day the son disappeared and the woman stayed behind on the farm with the baby. After a few weeks, the second son also returned and began to work on the farm. I continued helping as usual. Several months had passed since the man in the market had been interested in me.

## 6

One Sunday, we heard a loud noise. We went outside and saw a small car driving on the path and entering the farm. When the car came to a stop, a big fat man, two soldiers, one armed with a rifle and one with a pistol, and a woman all emerged from it. The woman stood and looked at me. Instinctively I yelled: "Ciotka Regina!" She ran towards me with open arms and tried to hug me, but I ran away from her. I hid behind the farmer's son, holding him tightly around the waist. I cried and said I wanted to stay with them rather than go back to the Jews. The farmer led the guests to the large room. The son took me to the kitchen, where I continued to cry and repeated that I didn't want to go to the Jews. The son took out a large axe from under the cupboards, lifted it up with his two hands, approached the wall, and swore to the holy Christ that he would crack the head of anyone who tried to take me away. When I heard him, I calmed down and stopped crying. I wiped my tears and began to laugh from the happiness that filled me.

The guests emerged from the large room. Other than the aunt, they were all happy, smiling and laughing. This was the first time I'd ever seen the farmer laughing. He laughed and burped. The aunt looked at me with tears in her eyes. Everyone went outside while the farmer had a whispered conversation with his son in the small room. The son took the axe, hugged me and told me to come out with him to say goodbye to the guests. The guests were sitting in the car and waving goodbye with their arms, and I responded by waving my hands wildly. The car turned around in the yard and stopped with its front pointing towards the road. Suddenly one of the soldiers stepped out of the car, without his gun, approached me and grabbed me tightly. I couldn't move, and he lifted me and walked straight towards the car. The back door opened and he threw me in, onto the knees of the other passengers in the back seat. I began to scream, crying and kicking. One grabbed my legs while the other held my arms, and the aunt, who was sitting between them caressed my head and face. The aunt wiped her tears, and told me not to worry because no harm would come to me, only good. She promised to watch over me and that soon I would meet my sister Felusha. She would care for us as she did for her own daughters.

The car sped away from the farm. From that point on I never returned there, never again saw the farmer, his wife, his two sons and Mariska. Fifteen years would pass, before I sent them a crate of oranges and a letter from Israel, and they would reply with a thank you letter and pictures of the family members.

After a while, I found out how the aunt had discovered the place where I was staying, how she got there, and how she managed to take me away from the farmer. When the war ended, the aunt took her two daughters

and went to the goy who had helped them escape from the ghetto. He told her, that he had also helped her sister and her three children escape the ghetto, and had taken them to the barren couple, the Dombrovskis. They agreed to take Felusha, but under the condition that she would stay with them even after the war. They wanted her to remain their daughter forever. He told the aunt, that her sister had no choice, and had left the child with them, after spending one night with her there, and the following day she took the baby and went to find a place for the baby and the older child. He said that she had asked him to watch over the older child until she found a place for him, and that she would then come to collect him. When she didn't come back, he sent the child in the direction of Ligovo. The aunt asked him if he had heard from her sister and the children since then. He said that the daughter was with the Dombrovskis, the older child had not been heard from, and that there were rumors that the Poles turned in her sister and the baby to the German gendarmes.

When the aunt arrived at the Dombrovskis, she was met by a tall, beautiful girl, clean and well-groomed, with long dirty-blonde hair flowing past her shoulders. Everyone kissed, ate cookies, drank tea and looked happy. When the aunt said that she wanted to take the child, the atmosphere changed. My sister Felusha began to cry and said she didn't want to leave. The woman said she wouldn't give her up at any cost. The aunt suggested that she and her daughters come to live with them and they could all be one family. The woman refused and asked the aunt to leave immediately. The aunt had no choice. The war had just ended and the Polish government was still in disarray. The Poles murdered many Jews who had wanted to return to their homes. Felusha seemed well taken care of and happy. The aunt decided to leave her with the goyim, feeling that her life had at least been spared.

From there the aunt traveled with her daughters to the town of Skempa, where they had a two-story house. The upper floor served as a residence while the lower floor was a general store. When she arrived at the house, she found two unfamiliar families living in it. She told them that she was the owner, that the house belonged to her and she lived in it before the war, and that now, she and her daughters wanted to return to live in it. The aunt and her daughters were slowly surrounded by large thugs, one of whom threatened her that if she and the girls entered the house, they would not come out of it alive. Everyone would think that Hitler had taken care of them, and no one would know exactly what happened. The aunt took hold of her daughters and drew away from the house. She wandered the town, and did not encounter a single Jew that had returned.

From there she traveled to Lipno, a larger and prettier town than Skempa. Many Jews had already returned to the town. While there she ran into a relative, named Legal. He was a moneychanger and dealt in the buying and selling of valuables. Legal told her that during the war, he hid at the

home of a Shiksa, and when her husband died, he converted to Christianity and married her. He invited the aunt and her daughters to his home, and told them that due to the rise in anti-Semitism in Poland, a group of Jewish survivors was organizing to leave for Germany, with the aid of The Joint and UNRRH. The aunt told him that she had found her niece, Felusha, but that the goys with whom she was staying would not agree to return them, and the girl also did not wish to leave them. She also told him that she didn't have any reliable information regarding her sister and her two sons.

Because of the danger they were in, the aunt and her daughters could not remain in Poland. They joined the group of Jews that was preparing to leave for Germany, to the displacement camp in Feldafing, near Munich. Because of the hardships they encountered on the roads and the erratic train traffic, the voyage to Feldafing lasted a month. In Feldafing, the aunt ran into another relative, Bernard Cohen, who had helped her secure lodging near him. Feldafing was home to a Jewish school, a "Heder" where Torah and Talmud were taught, sports clubs, and youth clubs. The aunt's daughters began to attend school regularly. The aunt could not stop thinking of Felusha, who had stayed with the goyim in Poland, and had repeated her story to some of the more influential people in the camp. They advised her that it would be very difficult and dangerous to return to Poland now, especially for women, because of the anti-Semitism and the murders, and also due to the absence of organized transportation. Even in Germany chaos reigned and many Nazis were hiding under civilian clothing. They would, however, help her financially if she was determined to return to Poland.

One day, the aunt received a letter from Legal, the converted Jew. He had told her that a farmer stopped him in the market one day, and showed him a Jewish boy of about ten or eleven, whom he wished to sell for a price. The child's name was Yuzek Domanski, and he had a round face, gray eyes and dirty-blond hair. The child would not speak to him, but he saw that he was Jewish. When the aunt read the letter, she decided to return to Poland in spite of all the risks, to take her niece from the goyim and to save the Jewish boy from the goy. Whether he was her nephew or not, she was determined to save the Jewish boy. The aunt discussed her voyage to Poland with Bernard, and asked him to look after her daughters.

The voyage back to Lipno, in Poland, lasted over a month. Transportation conditions were very difficult following the war. The only person she knew in Lipno was Legal. His Christian wife welcomed the aunt kindly and provided her with a place to stay.

Because of his occupation as a moneychanger, Legal knew Jewish policemen and law-enforcers in civilian clothing. He introduced the aunt to Czunko, a Jewish officer who had served in the Polish army. Czunko was a nice, sympathetic man, with a kind heart. The aunt told him about his niece and about the Jewish boy that the goy had tried to sell. Czunko told her that

he would see what could be done to return the children to the Jews. The aunt told Czunko that she had no money, but that she owned a house in Skempa to which she was afraid to return, because the occupants had threatened to kill her. She said she was willing to sell the house in order to raise money to liberate her niece and the boy.

Two days later, Officer Czunko asked the aunt to accompany him. They arrived at a large gray building. Czunko spoke with the policeman that stood in the doorway. The policeman called a man from inside the building, who led them inside into a large room, where they were instructed to sit and wait. Within a few minutes, a tall, broad-shouldered man with a large head and a mane of black curls entered the room. His eyes were black, round and small, and shifted from side to side. Above them were thick black brows connected to each other. The man extended his arm to the aunt, introduced himself with the name Sakovitz, and invited her to sit. He brought out a bottle and three small glasses and they drank. Sakovitz asked the aunt to tell him her problem. The aunt repeated everything she had told Czunko, and began to cry. Sakovitz calmed her and said he would look into the matter and would get in touch with her.

A few days later, Czunko came to the aunt and told her, that she, along with him and his wife were invited to dinner at Sakovitz's house. The aunt asked how he could help. Czunko said that he was a Jew, a Russian security operative in Poland. The Poles knew that he was capable of moving things along and were aware of the power he wielded. Czunko asked the aunt not to talk to anyone about it, not even Legal.

In the evening they arrived at the Sakovitz house. The door was closed, and when they knocked on it, a small hatch opened. A pair of eyes peeked out and a man asked what they wanted. After they identified themselves, he opened the door and directed them to the upper floor. A young woman with large black eyes, and long, straight black hair opened the door for them. She wore an elegant black dress and wore black boots. The woman, who introduced herself as Henka, hugged the woman and Czunko and invited them to come through to the living room. On the sofas in the room sat Sakovitz, along with three young men. Sakovitz rose, extended his arm to the guests, poured them a drink, and led them to the dining room. In the dining room stood a large table surrounded by many chairs and topped with several bottles. Sakovitz sat at the head of the table, and asked that the aunt and Czunko sit on either side of him. Czunko's wife, Henka, and the young men sat down in the other chairs.

The men brought in the food from the kitchen and the meal lasted a long time. Sakovitz said, that he had managed to sell the aunt's house in Skempa to the mayor, for the sum of one hundred and fifty thousand zlotys. The mayor used the municipal coffers to pay for the house. Although it was not considered a large sum, due to the devalued currency, only the mayor

was able to purchase the house, because no one else had much money. With this money, the aunt could pay the goy twenty thousand zlotys for the boy and pay fifty thousand zloty to the goyim for the girl. Afterwards, she could stay with the children at the Sakovitz house, until she was ready to return to her daughters in Feldafing. Sakovitz told the aunt that Legal was a crook, and that if he hadn't personally watched over him, he'd have gone to prison long before. The aunt collected her belongings and moved in with Sakovitz and Henka.

One evening, Sakovitz came home early and told the aunt that the following morning they would go to collect Felusha. The next morning, after breakfast, they went downstairs and entered a waiting black car. Sakovitz sat by the driver and told the aunt to sit in the back, between the soldier with the rifle and the man with the pistol. They arrived at the village in the early afternoon and knocked on the Dombrowski family's door. The woman opened the door and when she saw them, crossed herself and tried to slam the door shut. Sakovitz put his foot between the door and the doorframe. They entered the house, the woman sat on the bed, Sakovitz and the aunt sat on the chairs facing her, and the soldier and the man stood behind them. Sakovitz asked the woman where her husband and the girl were, and she didn't answer. He whispered to the aunt, that they would remain there until the husband and child returned and wouldn't allow the woman to leave, so that she couldn't call for help.

Sakovitz told the woman, that he was sent by the Polish government to take the girl, but that they wouldn't take her without rewarding them, for having taken such good care of her. They deserved a reward, and the aunt would pay them generously. The woman placed her hand on her chest and said she would not give the girl up for any fortune in the world. The woman explained that this girl had saved their marriage, and that the child's mother promised that she would leave them the girl forever, and that she was now their daughter. Sakovitz explained to her that legally, she was required to return to child to her aunt. The woman stood up, wanting to leave, but Sakovitz ordered the soldier to stop her. The woman genuflected in front of the statue of Christ, which hung on the wall, and began to cry. The aunt rose from her seat, placed her hands on the woman's shoulders, and told her that they could come with her and they could all live as one family. The woman removed the aunt's hands from her shoulders and said that she was born in this village, her family had lived in it for many generations, and she would never leave it. She called the aunt a witch and said it was a shame she had survived the war. The woman said that they would have to kill her before they could take the girl away, because she couldn't live without her and would never give her up. Just then a beautiful tall girl with a dark blue ribbon in her hair entered the room with a school bag on her back. She ran to the woman, hugged her and began to cry. This was my sister Felusha.

Sakovitz told the aunt, to put the fifty thousand zlotys on the table and told the man to hold the woman. Sakovitz caught hold of Felusha and started moving towards the door. The woman fainted, and the aunt stood by helplessly, looking at the woman lying on the floor, and wanting to go to her. But then Sakovitz yelled at her that if she wanted the girl, she would have to get into the car quickly. In the car, Felusha sat on the aunt's lap and cried the whole way, until they reached the Sakovitz house.

The aunt took her to a children's clothing store and bought her a dress and some socks. Afterwards she looked for a shoe store and bought her sandals. Regardless, her mood did not improve and she remained sad and teary, threatening to run away. The aunt would not leave her alone even for a moment, and told the guard not to let her out of the building. Within a few days Felusha's mood improved, and she began to smile and cooperate with the aunt. They went to buy ribbons together and the aunt tied them in her hair. After three weeks, the aunt was certain that Felusha could be left alone with Henka. She spoke with Sakovitz about collecting the Jewish boy from the goy in the village of Gozshin. A few days later they came to the village with the car, settled the transaction with the farmer, forcibly kidnapped me, put me in the car and left the village. I cried the whole way until we reach the Sakovitz house in Lipno.

When the car stopped, the men opened both doors and got out. The aunt remained seated and I remained in her lap. She told me that we would go out to the street and walk a little, and she would show me the pretty town of Lipno and buy me ice cream and chocolate. I did not respond. Sakovitz poked his head into the car and told the aunt to come out. She got out and pulled me after her. The aunt told Sakovitz that she wanted to walk with me a little, out in the street, and Sakovitz nodded his head and told one of the men to follow us. The aunt stopped near a place where children were standing and licking cones with something brown and white in them. She bought two cones, handed me one, and began to lick the other. I watched her and did the same, and found it very sweet and delicious. My mood improved, but I still had not spoken. I was very angry with the farmer who had promised not to give me away, and had betrayed me by returning me to the Jews. I was also angry with the aunt for coming to collect me.

We continued to walk, and the aunt bought a package of chocolate, broke off a piece and told me to put it in my mouth and suck. I sucked, and it was sweet and good. Tears were streaming from the aunts eyes, while she told me she worried for my mother and my brother Hilick. She told me that she had found my sister Felusha and that she was happy to have found me as well. I didn't understand her happiness, for I was not happy at all, had not yet seen Felusha, and had no desire to talk to the Jews.

We arrived at the Sakovitz house. The guard opened the door, and we climbed up to the second floor and entered a room where four men sat and



smoked. The window was open, but the smell of the smoke remained. The men stopped smoking, looked at me, and asked whether I was the boy that the farmer had sold. They said that the farmer knew how to take money for me, but didn't know how to feed me. The aunt told them, that the most important thing was that I was still alive, and that she would ensure that I got good food. We entered the kitchen. On one side stood a stove, and on the other a table, a few chairs, and a cupboard with glass doors, which held many dishes and towels. The aunt told me to sit by the table (finally, by a table!). I sat. She took a bun out of a box, buttered it generously and topped it with jam, and gave it to me to eat. Afterwards, she placed a large pot of water on the stove and said she was going to get a towel and soap. When she returned, she held a large bowl in one hand, and a large package in the other. She undressed me and mumbled to herself that my body was covered with lice. The aunt said that with such a thick layer of dirt on my body, it appeared that I had never been washed. I told her that I only bathed before going to church. Tears streamed down her face...

When she took off my shoes, she noticed that they were not the same and that one was bigger than the other. I told her that Yatzek had brought them for me from Prussia, and that I only wore them on Sundays, or when we went to church. The aunt mumbled, "Church...church". I stood naked, and the aunt checked the water in the bowl and told me to step into it. She placed all of my clothes in the big pot of boiling water, which stood on the stove.

Just then a young woman came into the room, her eyes big and black, her long black hair arranged around her head and held with pins. She wore a checkered shirt, a tight black skirt, and black, low-heeled boots. She looked at me with surprise, and the smile that took over her face exposed white teeth. She asked the aunt: "Is this the child that was with the farmer in the village? He looks like he just came out of a concentration camp". Afterwards she turned to me and said that the farmer must not have given me food, and I told her that he did. The aunt went to Henka and told her that my name was Avramek, and that they would give me a lot of food from now on.

The aunt asked Henka whether she happened to have a shirt and pants in a size that might fit me. Henka said that she had a sewing machine, and she would alter clothes to my size, from pants and a shirt belonging to one of the men. Until then, I can wear the bigger clothes belonging to the men. The aunt scrubbed my neck, hands, and legs, with a brush and soap. She replaced the water several times, and said that for a first bath this would do, as my body was already red from scrubbing. Henka brought me clothes and I wore them. The shirtsleeves nearly reached the floor, and the pants were so long they covered my head. The two women began to laugh, and I joined them. They said that I could sleep in the clothes for now, while Henka altered clothes to fit my size.

The aunt brought me into a room that had two beds facing each other, and told me to lie in one of them. Before she came in to sleep, she went to wash my clothes, which had been soaking in the large pot on the stove. I remained in the room on my own. I lay on the bed and felt clean, with the scent of the soap, but I still wanted to return to the farmer. I did not want to be with the Jews, who killed Polish children in order to drink their blood and bake matzos.

I opened my eyes and found the aunt standing near me with a smile on her face. She said it was time to get up for a new day, to eat something and to go for a walk. She brought the shirt and pants that Henka had fixed for me. I wore them, and they more or less fit me. I wore my shoes, because they hadn't yet got me shoes that fit. When I was dressed, the aunt led a girl into the room that was taller than me, and had her hair gathered into two braids, tied with a thin blue ribbon. She wore a pretty white dress, with blue and red flowers, which reached her knees. On her feet were white socks and white sandals. The girl was pretty, her eyes big and green, her lips full, her hair dirty-blonde, and her face sad. She stood facing me, and we looked at each other.

The aunt pointed at me and told the girl that I was Avramek, her brother, and she should hug and kiss me, because it had been a long time since we had seen each other. No one moved. Felusha said that I was not her brother Avramek, because he had been a beautiful child, with a head full of hair, and was taller than her. The one facing her was ugly, short, thin and bald. The aunt turned to me and told me to say something to my sister that both she and I would remember, in order to prove that I was Avramek. I recognized Felusha. She had hardly changed at all, except for growing taller and fuller. I thought of something we had in common..."To you remember when the goy put us both inside piles of pine needles in the forest, when we escaped from the ghetto with mother and Hilick?" I saw tears in her eyes.

The aunt approached me, led me closer to Felusha and told me to hug her. We hugged and cried. The aunt hugged us both and cried as well. The aunt recovered quickly and called us into the kitchen, where she gave us buns with butter and jam, a glass of milk, and a cube of chocolate. Henka kissed the aunt, Felusha, and me. She told the aunt that she would buy me shoes, because the shoes I wore would ruin me feet. The aunt told her she had many expenses, and that when her financial situation improved, she would buy me new shoes. She looked at my legs, laughed, and said that maybe in the meantime my feet would grow into the shoes. We left the house and began to walk in the streets. The aunt bought us ice cream and we sat on a park bench and watched all the people. Mostly they were old men and young women with babies in their arms. The aunt told us of the hardships that she and her daughters experienced after they escaped the ghetto. She had been a cook in a Polish work camp, and sometimes cooked for Poles in their homes. The

girls would help goyim around their homes. The aunt and the daughters were in contact throughout the war.

After lunch, Sakovitz brought Czunko and the men, and told the aunt to take the children with her to have pictures taken. Perhaps in the future, these pictures featuring the rescue of Jewish children would help us. We entered a photographer's store, and when we were inside, the photographer locked the door. Everything had been prearranged, and the photographer led us to a back room. First he photographed Felusha and me hugging each other and facing the camera. Afterwards he stood the aunt between us, and finally he photographed the whole group with Felusha and me sitting on the knee of Sakovitz and the aunt. Following the picture taking, the aunt took Felusha and me for a walk and to watch a movie. One of Sakovitz's men followed us everywhere we went.

During dinner, the aunt told Sakovitz that she had to return to Germany, to her daughters. She also said that Felusha and I would have to start school. Sakovitz became solemn, and told her that she mustn't travel on her own with the children. The roads were bad and the trains were worse, and there were many thieves and robbers. Even if you had no money, they attacked you first and then looked for money and jewelry. He told us of a friend of his in Warsaw who held the same position and rank. The Joint offices, which took care of the survivors, were located in Warsaw. Perhaps they could include the aunt in one of the groups being moved to Germany. Sakovitz asked for a couple of days in order to look into the matter. Two days later, Sakovitz told the aunt to prepare, because we would be going to Warsaw the following day. He gave the aunt an envelope with a note that listed the name and address of his friend. The envelope also contained many currency notes. The aunt's eyes filled with tears, and she mumbled that the day would come when she would be able to repay Sakovitz for all of the things he had done for us.

The next morning, we awoke early and following breakfast; Sakovitz's driver arrived and told us we had to go. The aunt hugged Henka, they both cried, and the aunt said that she hoped they would someday meet again. Afterwards Henka hugged and kissed Felusha, then came towards me, hugged me, and gave me a long package, which contained a pair of her boots. She said this package would remind me of her. Many years would pass, before I met her again in Israel, when she was already old and sick. I would not believe that this was Henka, who had given me her beautiful boots.

## 7

We entered the car with tears in our eyes, and drove to the train station. Next to the driver sat the man who had been our constant escort. We got out at the train station, and the man took the suitcase from the aunt, began to walk, and we followed after him. We entered a massive structure that had no walls, only a few poles that supported a roof. From afar we saw many trains, and people walking in all directions. We continued to follow the man. We reached a platform along which stood a very long train with many cars. People were boarding and we did as well, following the man. The conductor approached us and asked for tickets. The man handed him the tickets along with a note of money. The conductor saluted and said that everything would be all right. The man wished the aunt a safe journey, turned around and left the train. The conductor led us to a closed cabin, opened the door, told us to sit in the empty spaces, and placed our suitcase overhead. I sat down by the window, with Felusha behind me, and the aunt behind her. Facing us sat an older man with a big mustache, who was reading a newspaper, and next to him were two old ladies, one reading a book and the other napping. The man averted his eyes from the newspaper momentarily, looked at us, and then continued to read.

I looked out through the window. I saw cranes, tall buildings, many trees, spacious green fields, and cloudy skies. Suddenly a horn sounded and we felt a great jolt. The cranes, trees, fields and buildings began to move. I turned to Felusha and told her, that outside everything was moving backwards. Felusha was frightened and repeated what I had said to the aunt. The aunt leaned over to us and explained, that during train travel it seems like everything outside is moving backwards, but in fact, everything remained in the same place, and it was we who were traveling forward. I asked Felusha if she'd like to sit by the window, and we switched seats.

The aunt reached into the bag that was resting on her knees, took out a package of chocolate, broke it to pieces, and offered some to the man and the women sitting facing us. The man helped himself, but the women did not. We ate some and enjoyed the sweetness. Felusha turned to me, looked me in the eye, and asked me very seriously whether I was really her brother, because I was so thin and small, and she was taller than I was. I told her that I remember the time that she was shorter than me, but her face remained exactly as it was, and so I recognized her. I suggested that she ask the aunt to find her another brother if she didn't like me and turned my back to her.

We traveled for a long time, and during the journey we alternated between sleep and wakefulness. The aunt took out rolls with sliced sausages and we ate. The man facing us stood up and told the women next to him, that he was going to the cafeteria. The conductor opened the door and announced

that we would arrive in Warsaw in fifteen minutes. The aunt took a sweater out of her bag and dressed Felusha in it. She got up and tried to lower the overhead suitcase, and the man sitting across from us helped her. The train stopped. The man and the two women exited first, and we walked behind them. The station was crowded with many people. The aunt told us to hold hands and to walk close to her. Felusha offered me her hand, and when I looked at her, she smiled. I took her hand and we walked behind the aunt, hand in hand.

We left the station, and the aunt stood and looked around, as though she was waiting for someone. Suddenly, an unshaven, white-haired man donning a hat appeared. He asked her where she needed to go, and the aunt took a piece of paper out of her bag and read him the address. The man raised his hands and told her that the place listed on her paper was very far. For two hundred zloty, he would be willing to take us there in his carriage. The aunt told him the price was too expensive, and that she was only willing to pay one hundred zloty. The man looked us over and said the price was fair, as he could see we were poor. He took the suitcase and began to walk, and we followed. We came to an area filled with horse-drawn carriages. Most of the horses had sacks of feed strapped to their neck, just as I had seen at our village, when we went to church. We approached the man's carriage, and the aunt told me to sit up front, next to the coachman, while she and Felusha sat in the back.

We embarked on our trip. The carriage cover was open, and on the way we saw destroyed houses, caved in roofs, and debris piled on the ground. Many stores lined the streets, and people were walking leisurely between them. The weather was cold, and white clouds floated in the sky. The sun was about to set. We traveled for a long time, until the man stopped the horse, and after the aunt paid him we climbed down.

We arrived at the house for which the aunt had been looking. An old woman opened a porthole in the door and asked the aunt whom she needed. The aunt told her she was looking for the Levkov family. The woman opened the door and directed us to the second floor. She tried to carry the suitcase for us, but the aunt would not let her. We climbed upstairs, and the aunt knocked on the Levkov family's door. A woman opened the door and asked the aunt if she was Mrs. Pozmenter, and whether these were the children she had rescued from the goyim. The woman hugged the aunt, and told her that her name was Anna, Levkov's wife. He was at work and would return after dinner. She told Felusha and me to sit by the table, served us tea and cookies, and whispered that after such a long journey, we had to eat and drink. She took the suitcase and told the aunt to come with her. They entered one of the rooms and we remained seated by the table.

After a short while, the woman and the aunt emerged from the room, the woman entered the kitchen, and the aunt sat next to us and told us that

the kind woman had prepared a room for us, and we could stay in it for a few days. After we had eaten the cookies and drank the tea, Anna took us downstairs for a walk, saying that we had just endured a long journey and needed to get some fresh air. She led us to a park. Along the way we saw a few statues and tall buildings, some of which were in ruins. Among the buildings that remained intact, some were pretty and some were ugly. We sat on a park bench for a while. Afterwards, Felusha and I stood up and walked around in the area. Anna and the aunt remained seated on the bench and talked.

In the evening, Levkov arrived. He was a tall, thin man, with slicked back black hair, and wearing a black suit. When he saw the aunt, he asked her if she was Mrs. Regina, approached her with a smile, took her hand and gave her a kiss. Afterwards he looked at us, smiled, and asked if we were the children she had saved. He said that Sakovitz had told him about the children and the aunt, who wanted to reach her daughters in Germany very quickly. Since the aunt could not under any circumstances travel on her own, he would make every effort to arrange a meeting with the Joint representative, the rabbi Kahan, who could be of assistance.

The aunt helped Anna serve dinner, which included bread, butter, salted fish, and fruit. After dinner Felusha and I sat on a sofa and looked through a picture book that the aunt had bought for us. Felusha could already read a little Polish and explained to me what was written under every picture. The aunt sat with Levkov and Anna at the table, and they drank tea and talked. It was already late and the aunt had noticed our yawns, and said we should go to sleep, as our day had been a hard one. We stood up and wished a good night to the couple, who were still sitting by the table. We followed the aunt into a room that had two beds, facing each other. Under one of the beds was a low box, on which another mattress was laid. Felusha and the aunt slept in the beds and I slept on the mattress.

During breakfast on the second day of our stay in Warsaw, Levkov told the aunt to get ready, as he would be taking us to rabbi Kahan in a couple of hours. The rabbi was sick, but had agreed to see us because of the urgency of the matter. We reached a big house surrounded by a tall fence. Levkov showed the policeman standing by the gate a piece of paper, and we entered the yard and walked towards the house. At the house we were greeted by a man, who after speaking with Levkov led us to a room in which two women were seated at desks piled with papers. One of the women approached us and told us to follow her. We climbed a staircase, and were met by a woman wearing a military uniform, who wished us a good morning with a smile on her lips. We followed her to a big white door. She knocked on the door, opened it, and asked us to go in. We entered a large darkened room, at the end of which stood a big bed with golden pillars. Next to the bed stood an electric lamp covered with a lampshade. On a large desk were books, papers,

pens, and an inkwell. On the bed lay a big, handsome man. His hair was graying, his beard long and black, and his shirt white. The man was resting on pillows and a blanket covered him up to the waist. This was rabbi Kahan. Levkov approached the bed and nodded, offered his hand to rabbi Kahan and asked after his health. The rabbi signaled with his hand that we were to come and sit on the chairs. The aunt sat down first, and next to her sat Levkov. We stood behind them. The officer sat near the rabbi's bed, holding a notebook and a pencil. The walls of the room were covered with large, beautiful pictures, framed in gold. The windows were covered with dark shades that blocked out the light from outside. There was a chair in one of the corners with a military jacket resting on its back. It had the insignia of an officer, and on the seat was an officer's hat.

The room looked very impressive, and was very quiet. There was a special feeling to it. Everyone was looking at the rabbi, and he looked back. His gaze moved from one to the next, until it had settled on the aunt. He asked her in his clear voice what she needed from him. The aunt took a deep breath, and briefly recounted her experiences since the beginning of the war. She asked him to help her return to her daughters with the children. She had no money for the journey and had also been warned that she must not travel alone, as the roads were very dangerous. Her daughters needed her, and she missed them and they her. The aunt began to cry. Everyone was silent, and the aunt sighed and asked to be excused for her crying. The rabbi calmed her and said he would try to fulfill her request as soon as was possible. She could join a group of Jews that was leaving Poland for the "Bialik" camp in Salzburg, Austria, and from there she could continue her journey to Germany. In the meantime, we would receive food rations just like the remaining survivors in Warsaw. He asked Levkov if we could continue to stay with him until matters were settled. Levkov said that we were his guests and could stay for as long as we needed. He told the rabbi, that Mr. Sakovitz, his friend and commander from the Russian army, had sent us to him and that he felt obliged and honored to host us in his home.

The rabbi turned to the officer and asked her to prepare a package of rations sufficient for five people, and to include some clothing for the children. Afterwards he instructed her to record Levkov's address and our names, along with the aunt's, and to add us to the list of Jews departing for Austria shortly.

The officer stood, asked the aunt to bid farewell to the rabbi, and to follow her. The aunt approached the rabbi and he offered her his hand and told her to be strong, because she now had to care for four children. He promised to do all that he could for her. The officer led the aunt to another room, in which we were registered along with Levkov's address. The aunt was asked to provide passport photos for the three of us, and Levkov promised to have them within two days. When we left, a soldier was waiting

for us. Next to him were two packages, which he said were for us. Levkov wanted to call a taxi, but the soldier said that the rabbi had requested that we be transported in his car.

When we arrived at the Levkov house, the aunt opened one of the packages. It contained tins of meat, coffee, cocoa, chocolate, sardines, cigarettes, candies, and many other treats. The aunt told Anna that the contents of the package were for them, as they were our hosts. Anna was offended and said she would take nothing from her guests. Levkov suggested that the aunt could sell some of the goods, in order to earn some more money for expenses on the journey to Salzburg. The second package contained coats, socks and a beret hat. I wore the beret and never removed it, until the day that it had crumbled to pieces.

After lunch we went with Anna to be photographed. One of Levkov's men accompanied us the entire time. Afterwards we went in to a hall that had many small tables surrounded by chairs. Levkov joined together two tables and we all sat around them. A woman with a white apron approached Anna and asked what we wanted to order. She ordered a blueberry cake and lemonade for each of us. The cake was delicious. We sat there for a long time, while people came and went. When we left, it was already dark outside, and we walked around a little, and then returned to the house. After dinner, the aunt boiled water in a big pot, poured it into a large bowl, added cold water and instructed me to undress and to climb into the bowl. She scrubbed my neck and my arms with soap and a brush. While scrubbing, she began to cry and asked me again, whether I had ever been washed. I answered again that I had bathed in the barrel for Christmas, and they had shaved my head.

In the evenings, following dinner, the aunt would sit at the table with a block of paper and an inkwell. She wrote with her right hand and leaned her head on the left. She sat and wrote a letter to her daughters every night. Each page was stained with round circles, the stains of the tears that flowed from her eyes as she wrote.

The next few days were quite boring. We walked around the streets of Warsaw, or played with a large rubber ball that the aunt had bought us. During meals the aunt was agitated, and kept repeating that we had to find a permanent place, so that we could begin to study. We had missed several years of schooling. Her daughters were also growing and needed her with them, and she missed them terribly. One day, rabbi Kahan's driver arrived and told the aunt, that she was to come to the rabbi's house the following morning at ten. The aunt understood that something was about to happen. Also present at the meeting with the rabbi were a few more men and women. They were told that they would have to be at the train station the following Sunday at six in the morning. Each family was to bring food for an entire day, as they would travel by train as far as Krakow. The rabbi's representative would accompany them and would take care of all the



arrangements. They were to obey him, to remain closely together, and to watch out for each other. Under no circumstances were they to disembark from the train without his consent. At the end of the meeting, each of them received an envelope with some money, to be used to purchase rations for the journey.

On the Saturday night prior to the journey, Anna prepared a special meal. Levkov told the aunt that he would arrange for a taxi to wait for us near the house the following morning at five. After the meal, the aunt washed Felusha and me and we went to sleep. Only then did the aunt pack our belongings, in the suitcase and in boxes. The following morning, the aunt woke us early. It was still dark outside, and we dressed quickly. Anna had given each of us a cup of cocoa with cookies. We left Anna with hugs and kisses, and the aunt and Anna cried and embraced for a long time. Levkov urged them to say goodbye, so that we would not miss the train. He helped us bring our belongings to the taxi and the driver arranged them in it. Levkov handed a note of money to the driver, and told the aunt she would not need to pay at the end of the ride. We said our goodbyes to Levkov, and began our journey.

## 8

Already waiting at the train station were several families, who stood surrounded by suitcases and packages. The aunt recognized some of them from the meeting at the rabbi's house. She approached an older man wearing a hat, whom she had seen at the rabbi's house the previous day. Next to him stood a young woman, with wavy dirty blonde hair, dressed in an elegant suit. Next to her was a nicely dressed boy who was shorter than me, and also looked younger than me. His face was round, his hair cut short with some bangs on his forehead, and his smile exposed a large gap between his two front teeth. The aunt started speaking with the woman, and they bonded almost immediately. The woman introduced herself as Rachel, her husband as Moshe, and her son as Adash. Their family name was Blanck. Moshe stood off to the side and smoked, and Rachel took out a bag with candies and offered them to us. Adash approached Felusha, began speaking with her, and they laughed. Later Felusha took out the ball and they played off to the side.

More people began to arrive. The man who was escorting us to Krakow gathered us together and told us that we would all sit in the train together, in the same car. He said it would not be crowded because it was Sunday, the day of rest, and people usually liked to sleep late, and so it was decided that we would leave early. If all went according to plan and the train wasn't stopped for inspections, we should arrive in Krakow by nightfall. From there we would travel by truck through Czechoslovakia until we reached Vienna, and from there we would continue by train to Salzburg, where the "Bialik" camp, which had been erected especially for the survivors, was located. The man suggested that we try to rest or sleep on the train, since we had a long night of difficult and treacherous travel ahead of us. The aunt and Rachel had found two adjoining benches. Mr. Blanck sat at the end of the bench and smoked, and I sat near him. Felusha and Adash played with the ball, and Felusha was cheerful and happy because Adash continued to make her laugh. I watched the people coming and going, some of whom stood in groups, smoking and talking. Our group included about twenty people, most of whom were older. We were the only children.

Our escort came back and handed out train tickets according to a list he was holding. The aunt removed buttered rolls from her bag and gave them to us. The only one who would not eat was Mr. Blanck, who refused her offer politely. The aunt offered Mr. Blanck an apple, which he accepted. He took out a pocketknife, peeled off the entire apple peel in one piece, and threw out the spiraled peel into the garbage. He cut the apple into tiny pieces, placed them on a napkin that Rachel had handed to him, and with the tip of the knife, ate one piece at a time, chewing it slowly and deliberately. Before and

after he ate, he looked at me with his big gray eyes and whispered something. I averted my eyes to the floor.

We heard a loud and long horn, which was followed by a loud noise. The aunt said that the train was entering the platform. She stood up and we did as well. Mr. Blanck told us that we were not to board the train before him, and that we would not push our way in. Everyone began to run and push, and we stood by, waiting for a signal from Mr. Blanck. After the platform had nearly emptied, Mr. Blanck boarded the train, and we followed. I climbed up last. The conductor asked for our tickets, and Mr. Blanck handed them to him along with a note of money. The conductor looked at it, smiled, and told us to wait for him in the passageway between two cars. After everyone else had taken their seats, the conductor returned and signaled for us to follow him. He took a key from his pocket, opened a door in the middle of the third car, and told Mr. Blanck that this would be our cabin, and if we needed anything, we were to ask him.

The cabin had a large curtained window, with a shelf hanging beneath it. On either side were benches covered in brown leather, and above them was a space with a pillow and blanket, which we could climb up on to rest or sleep. I don't know whether all of the cabins had this space. Adash climbed up over his parents and lay down. Felusha did the same over the aunt. They looked at each other and giggled. The aunt and Rachel smiled, and began to talk, as they had at every opportunity prior. I sat by the window and looked out. Mr. Blanck leaned back in his seat, closed his eyes, and fell asleep. His mouth was open, and on occasion he would let out a snore. Felusha and Adash calmed down and stopped giggling. They must have fallen asleep. I stayed up long enough to hear Rachel tell Mr. Blanck that it was time to eat something, and then fell asleep.

When I woke up I saw Mr. Blanck's bewildered large eyes. I looked out and saw that the sun was in the middle of the sky. We were traveling alongside a dense forest of pine trees and a long narrow river. Suddenly, with no warning, the forest disappeared and was replaced by sprawling fields, scattered small homes and a church steeple that stood high above the rest. Rachel asked her husband to go and get us something to eat. Mr. Blanck mumbled something, but did not move. Rachel kissed him on the cheek, and he caressed her hand, brought it near his mustache, and kissed it loudly a few times. The aunt was sitting next to them, and pretended to be sleeping... Mr. Blanck came to himself, rubbed his face, and stood up. He stretched his arms upwards and to the sides, bent down, kissed his wife again, and left the cabin.

Mr. Blanck returned, followed by a man wearing a white apron, who was carrying several full bags. Mr. Blanck gave the man a note of money, and the man put the bags down in the cabin, bowed a deep bow, and left with a smile. Rachel opened the bags, which were filled with rolls, butter, cheese, apples, cherries and pears. Rachel and the aunt spread the rolls with butter

and cheese. Rachel woke Adash and Felusha, and we all ate a roll and cherries. Mr. Blanck peeled an apple with the pocketknife, cut it into small pieces, and ate them with the tip of the pocketknife. After we finished eating, we went to the bathroom with the aunt. When we returned, I climbed the upper seat, and Felusha and Adash sat below, facing each other, and played with the ball. I heard the aunt asking Mr. Blanck why it was that we didn't travel directly from Poland to Germany. He told her that the bombs of the Allies had destroyed most of the train tracks leading to Berlin, and that the Allies and the Russians now controlled the area, which made traveling through it very dangerous.

Towards nightfall, we arrived in Krakow. Before the train came to a stop, the escort came into our cabin and told us not to rush off the train, to make sure we left nothing behind, and to watch out for each other. The escort also gave us instructions on what to do once we disembarked from the train. He asked us to enter the train station, stay close together, and wait for the group, and we did as he instructed us. When we got to the station, the escort was already waiting there with some of the group members. He took a page from his pocket, read names, and checked that everyone was present. Before we left the station, the escort asked a young couple to bring up the rear, while he leads the group. We reached a large building and entered a spacious hall. It had sofas and tables and chairs. The escort led us to one of the corners of the hall and told us that we would eat our dinner here. We had a long truck journey to Vienna ahead of us, which would last all night. The escort suggested that we buy some food for the road. He asked one representative from each family to come with him to buy provisions. The aunt turned to go, and Rachel joined her. Mr. Blanck sat in an armchair and smoked. His large eyes followed Adash, who was walking around the hall with Felusha.

At night, the escort led the group to a separate room. We sat around tables covered with white cloths, and were served a meal of hot soup, potatoes and meat. The escort told us that the food was kosher, but Mr. Blanck would not eat the meat, and I could not understand why. After dinner, we returned to the large hall with the sofas and waited. Meanwhile, we went to the bathroom often, because the aunt warned us that there would be no bathrooms on the road. The escort came over and told us to get ready, as we would be leaving soon. He asked us to be quiet and to exit one behind the other.

At some distance from the building stood a tarp-covered truck. The back part of the tarp was raised and a small ladder with a railing was leaning on it, in order to make the climb easier. We climbed the truck, which had benches with back supports along its sides, and sat down. It was not crowded. The escort asked us to sit quietly. Initially, the ride was comfortable, but after a while people began to tire and it became difficult to sit. There were some people who said it reminded them of their truck journey

to the concentration camps. The others became angry and answered that it was very crowded then, and they had traveled on their feet, and on an empty stomach. Every so often the escort would tell us to be quiet, as we were approaching the border. After a long and tiring journey, the truck came to a stop, the tarp was raised, and the bright sunshine blinded us. "We've arrived safely in Vienna," said the escort. "We'll make a stop, eat something at a restaurant, and towards evening will board a train for Salzburg". We alighted from the truck slowly. The escort helped everyone with their suitcases and packages.

It was the first time I had seen such pretty houses. Everyone stood in awe of the beautiful houses, the wide boulevards, the trees, statues, and tall church steeples. We walked behind the escort, and after a few minutes, walked through a gate into a yard. We climbed a few stairs and reached the entrance of the home, and the escort knocked on the door. A man opened the door and said in Hebrew: "Shalom, welcome". We entered and found ourselves in the middle of a large room. At its center stood a table, surrounded by chairs, and along the walls were three sofas. Everyone sat down, and the man, whose name was Nachum, served us tea and cookies. He explained to us that the journey from Krakow to Vienna had to be made by truck, as there was trouble at the borders, and thus the difficult trip. The next leg of the journey would be much more comfortable, as we would be riding a train to Salzburg. Nachum told us that we could walk around the streets of Vienna for a short while, but we must first register with him and take down the house address. Mr. Blanck was the first to raise his hand to say he wanted to go for a walk. Rachel tried to convince him to stay in the house and rest, but to no avail. Rachel told the aunt that her husband was very stubborn, but had a heart of gold.

Almost everyone registered for a walk. Nachum said they would have to return by half past four, as that was when the lunch he had ordered would arrive. We left our suitcases and packages and went outside to the street. We walked by clothing stores, shoe stores, and jewelry stores. When we became tired, we went into a large park. The older people sat on benches and the younger ones sat on the grass. After we sat down, Mr. Blanck told Rachel that he was going to walk around and would return in about an hour. Rachel told the aunt that she could not understand where her husband got his strength, as he never slept and always wanted to walk around. Adash asked Felusha to come walk with him for a little while. She agreed and they began to walk, but suddenly she stopped, turned around, and told me to come with them. I refused at first, but the aunt intervened and told me to join them, because I had already sat for a long time on the truck and we would be back to sitting on the train that night, and also, it was best that I watched over them.

We walked around the park. We saw many birds, and reached a small fenced lake in which some ducks were paddling. Women and children stood

Carmit

Comment [1]: הזה המונח את מכירה אינני.

nearby, threw the ducks food, and watched us. We must have looked different, especially in the way we were dressed. We continued to walk, and saw some unleashed dogs chasing one another, and a few older people walking dogs on leashes. Adash was curious, interested in everything, and walking up to everything. No one could be angry with him, because he always had a smile across his face. At the end of our explorations we returned to the bench on which the aunt had been sitting. We forgot to bring the ball with us and had nothing to play with, and soon became bored. Mr. Blanck returned, and as usual, had with him a bag of fruit. He sat down, peeled an apple, cut it into slices, and shared it with everyone.

At half past four, Nachum took all of us to a restaurant. We entered a small room, where the tables were covered with white cloths. Everyone was served soup, potatoes, and meat. Those who did not eat meat were given fish. Towards evening our escort arrived, cleanly shaven and with a smile across his face. He asked how we were and said he had our train tickets. We would have to switch trains, because this one did not travel as far as Salzburg. We bid farewell to Nachum, took our suitcases and packages, and went downstairs, where the bus that would take us to the train station was already waiting. The station was large and beautiful, and was filled with people. We went to the platform with the escort and waited. The train entered the station, and many people alighted from it. We boarded the train after Mr. Blanck again, entered an empty cabin, and arranged our packages.

Outside night had already fallen, and a light came on in the cabin. The train sounded a long horn and began to move. The aunt took out a package of buttered rolls and offered them to everyone. Mr. Blanck received a pear instead of a roll, peeled it and ate. Afterwards, Mr. Blanck took out a flat cardboard box from his suitcase, which contained a board with black and white squares. He also took out round black and white wooden pieces. Adash told us this was a checkers game. Mr. Blanck and Adash played the game, and every so often Adash called out gleefully: "I beat you!" He asked Felusha if she'd like to play a game with her, but she was napping on the aunt's shoulder and did not answer. I pretended to be asleep, because I did not want to play with him. I knew he'd keep beating me, and his laughter irritated me.

In the middle of the night, the aunt woke us and said that soon the train would be stopping and we would have to board another train. When the train stopped we alighted, the escort verified that we were all accounted for, and led us to another platform. This station was smaller than the previous one, and a train was already waiting in it. The conductor directed us to empty cabins. We shared a cabin with the Blanck family, which was not as nice as on the previous train. The aunt sat in the middle of the bench, I sat near the window, and Felusha sat on the other side, leaned her head on the aunt's shoulder and immediately fell asleep. Facing us, Adash was lying on

the bench with his head on his mother's knees. Mr. Blanck sat by the window with his eyes closed, leaning back. He inhaled through his nose and exhaled through his open mouth. Every time I looked over at him, he opened one eye and looked back at me. I would become scared and would immediately turn my head to look out the window. To this day I don't know if he did it intentionally, or out of habit.

I also fell asleep. When I opened my eyes, I saw Mr. Blanck standing with his body covered in a white cloth with blue stripes. From the corners of the cloth hung long white threads. On his forehead was a small black cube, and a similar cube was on his left hand. A black strap was wrapped around his arm and his fingers. His lips were moving and his body swung back and forth. I woke the aunt, and asked her fearfully what happened to Mr. Blanck. She leaned down towards me and said that Mr. Blanck was praying, as the Jews did every morning. The cloth that he was wrapped in was called a Tallit - a prayer shawl - and the black cubes are called Tefillin. Every Jewish boy who reaches the age of thirteen begins to wear the Tefillin. I remembered what the goy had told me about the Jews. Mr. Blanck stopped swinging, took two small steps backwards, swung once to the right and once to the left, opened his eyes, and continued moving his lips. Afterwards he removed the cube from his forehead, folded it gently, kissed it, covered it, and placed it inside a small bag that had a Star of David embroidered on it in gold thread. He did the same with the cube that was on his hand.

The escort entered the cabin and told us that we would arrive in Salzburg in half an hour. He asked us to arrange all of our belongings and to meet him on the platform, so that everyone could enter the station together. The train stopped and people disembarked. We alighted and waited for the escort. He collected us, checked according to his list that everyone was present, and again asked the young couple to bring up the rear while he lead the group. We arrived at a truck, and climbed into it with a small ladder. Mr. Blanck stood below until he finished smoking his cigarette. The escort said that we would be at the "Bialik" camp in half an hour, where we could rest for a few days.

We reached the "bialik" camp, which was fenced and surrounded by tall trees. It had rows of long low cabins. Next to them were a few smaller cabins as well. In the middle of a camp was a two-story building, and in the center of the second floor hung a picture of a bald man. The aunt said that this was the picture of Haim Nachman Bialik, who was a Jewish poet. We stood in line with our packages, and waited to be registered. Each of us had to show the card with the picture that we had received in Warsaw. After we were registered, we were led to a cabin with the number "3" marked over the door. All along the length of the cabin, on either side, were many bunk beds. Most of the beds were already occupied. We looked for a place with adjoining beds, so we could stay near the Blanck family. On the left side of

the cabin, in the middle of the row, we found four empty bunk beds. On the beds were mattresses and pillows. We dragged the beds next to each other, so that a larger space was created between the Blanck family and us. Felusha and the aunt slept below, I slept over them, and the bed next to mine remained empty. Mr. Blanck and Rachel slept together, with Adash sleeping above them, also with an empty bed next to him. We placed the suitcases on the floor under one of the beds, and the packages on the empty bed.

Later, we went to the storeroom to request some sheets and blankets. Mr. Blanck remained in the cabin, to guard our possessions. In the storeroom they checked our papers and gave each of us two sheets, an army blanket, and a pillow sham. The pillow sham could be replaced once a week. When we returned, we found Mr. Blanck lying on the bed in his shoes and clothes, snoring. The aunt and Rachel began to laugh and made the beds. Adash removed his shoes and climbed up to the upper bunk. Blankets surrounded some of the lower beds. The aunt explained that young couples were sleeping in them, and wanted some privacy. Bells began to ring, and people hurried out of the cabin. It turned out that the bells were a sign to go eat. It was decided again that Mr. Blanck would stay behind to guard our things and would eat after us.

We went to the dining hall and waited in line. At the entrance, everyone received a plate of potatoes and cabbage. Women stood by large pots and asked what we would like for our main course, meat or fish. We sat with our plates by a table, which had a deep empty plate and cutlery. In the middle of the table was a soup tureen with a ladle, salt, and a basket of bread. We ate and returned to the cabin. We found Mr. Blanck sleeping and snoring in the bed again, and Rachel woke him up so he could go and eat.

Adash suggested that we play with the ball, so I took it and we went outside. From afar we saw some children playing and joined them. The girls were playing separately from the boys. It was the first time I had enjoyed a game, because I didn't have to play with the spoiled Adash. Among the playing children was a boy who kept passing the ball to me, and I kept returning it to him. He was my height, a little fatter, and his head was covered with curly hair. He wore a hat with a large visor. We introduced ourselves, and he was called Mareck. He said, that in the mornings he studied Yiddish and Hebrew with a few other children in a special cabin, and in the afternoon, some of the children studied in a "heder". He didn't study in the afternoons, and came to play with the ball.

In the evening we went to eat dinner and then walked around the camp. I told the aunt that I wanted to study in the morning, like Mareck. She was pleased and told Mr. Blanck, and also said that I should learn some Yiddishkeit in the afternoon "heder", but I protested and said I would not go.

The following morning after breakfast, the aunt, Adash, Felusha and I went to a small cabin, which stood between two large cabins. We entered a



small room where a woman sat, surrounded by papers. The aunt said that she had brought the children so they could begin to study. The woman asked if the children already knew to read Yiddish or Hebrew. The aunt said we knew nothing, and Adash jumped up and said that he knew how to read from the Siddur. The woman recorded our names, and told the aunt she could go and we would stay until the afternoon.

The woman led us into a hall with low tables and chairs. This was the classroom. Children were sitting on some of the benches and a black board was hanging on the wall in front of them. A short, older man with a shiny bald spot in the middle of his head and wavy white hair surrounding it, stood there holding a thin long stick, and occasionally hit his other hand with it lightly. He pointed at what was written on the board and said in Polish: "This is called Aleph, this is called Bet... and who can tell me what this is called?"

I looked around and saw Mareck signaling me to come and sit next to him. I left Felusha and Adash, and quietly walked over and sat next to Mareck. The teacher looked at me but said nothing. He continued to write letters and words, and we repeated out loud after him. A bell rang and everyone ran to the door, and I did too, with Mareck. At the exit, every child received half an apple. We played outside with the ball, and I did not see Felusha and Adash at all. In the middle of the game, the bell rang again, everyone returned to the classroom, and the teacher continued to teach. At the end of the school day, Mareck told me to come after lunch to the same place where we had played yesterday.

We returned to our cabin and went to eat lunch. After the meal, the aunt said we could rest for half an hour, and afterwards we would go to the "heder". I told the aunt that I would not go, and she explained that every Jew had to study the bible, because it was the history of the Jewish people. I answered that I didn't want to be a Jew. I was afraid of the Jews, and would not go to study in the afternoon. The aunt looked at me with tears in her eyes and said she could not drag me by the ears to study in the "heder". However, she would not allow me to leave the cabin in the afternoon. Tears choked my throat. I looked at her and said in a shaky voice: "I wish you hadn't taken me from the farmer!" I turned around and cried quietly. In the evening, I didn't go to dinner, and stayed in bed until the following day.

In the morning I was very hungry, and got up and went to eat with everyone. After breakfast, I went to study Hebrew and sat with Mareck. I didn't even want to speak or play with Felusha and Adash. On Friday afternoon, everyone polished their shoes, showered, and dressed nicely. Mr. Blanck shaved, wore a black suit, and carried a book in his hand. Adash wore a skullcap on his head, went to his father, and they prepared to go to the synagogue. The aunt instructed me to dress nicely and to go with Mr. Blanck and Adash. I asked where they were going, and she explained that every Jew who believed in God went to synagogue on Friday evening. Saturday for the

Jews is like Sunday to the Poles. I understood from the aunt that I should go, because it was a beautiful place, where people prayed and sang. Mr. Blanck looked at me with his big eyes and said nothing. Adash looked at me with his stupid smile. I told him I would not go, because Saturday was not my Sabbath. I celebrated on Sunday. I climbed on the bed and lay down.

They returned about an hour later. Mr. Blanck said: "Gutt Shabbes!" and kissed Rachel. Adash also went to her and she hugged and kissed him. Mr. Blanck removed a shiny silver chalice from their suitcase and took it to dinner. We did not stand in line like usual. The dining hall was organized nicely, and every table had a bottle of wine, and challas in place of the bread. We sat around a table. When the hall filled, Mr. Blanck filled the chalice with wine and everyone else did the same. He stood up and made the Kiddush, and everyone said "Amen" loudly. Then, Mr. Blanck blessed the challas, lifted them, cut them into slices, and passed them around. Some women began to serve food to the table, which was special food for Friday night. After the meal, Mr. Blanck began to sing. Many people knew the songs and joined him. Even between courses there were people singing songs, so the meal lasted a very long time. Before going back into the cabin, we walked around the camp with the Blanck family.

The following morning, Saturday morning, the aunt woke me and told me to get dress and go to synagogue with Mr. Blanck. I told her again, that for me, only Sunday was a holiday, and turned to the other side. On Sunday morning, we awoke as usual and after breakfast we went to class. Mareck asked me why I didn't come to play in the afternoons, and I told him what the aunt had said to me. He shrugged his shoulders and said I should tell the aunt that many children play in the afternoon and do not go to the "heder".

A week passed. I did not go to synagogue or to the "heder". One day, in the afternoon, Felusha and I joined the aunt for a trip outside of the camp. We saw the tall buildings of the city, the church steeples, and the snowy peaks of the mountains. The aunt asked if we would like to one day go to the zoo and to the amusement park that had dancing and singing dolls. We both jumped up gleefully and said that we wanted to, very much. The following day, I asked the aunt to buy me a casquette hat. We entered a long cabin, and came to a small table that was covered with combs, matches, cigarettes, shaving blades, necklaces, and more. Near the table sat a man and behind him was a rope from which a few hats were hanging. I chose a hat that was very similar to the one Mareck wore, but in a different color. I tried it on, and it was very big and covered my eyes. The aunt chose another hat for me, but I only wanted the hat I chose. We returned to our cabin, and the aunt took out a thread and needle, stitched a few stitches into the hat, and it fit me perfectly. She looked at me and said, that if we behaved, we would go to the zoo and to the park with the dolls the following week.

The next afternoon, I went with the aunt to the “heder”, to learn some Yiddishkeit. We entered a small room with open curtains. In the middle of the room stood a table around which several boys were seated, wearing either a hat or a skullcap on their heads. At the head of the table sat a bespectacled man with a short beard and a skullcap on his head. An open book rested on the table in front of him. The man rose, came near us, and the children turned their eyes towards us. The aunt told the man that my name was Avramek, and that two months earlier she had taken me from a Polish goy, and that I had not studied at all. She asked the man to teach me some Yiddishkeit. He looked at me and said he was very happy to have me studying with him, and that he hoped I would enjoy learning. The aunt said goodbye and left. The man put his hand on my shoulder, and I was frightened and trembling. He led me to the table and sat me next to him. When he sat, he continued to read from the book and to explain the story. He looked at me and asked whether there were children who didn't understand Yiddish. A few children, including me, said that we did not understand, and then he explained in Polish with a little bit of Yiddish. I enjoyed learning in the mornings much more, because there were girls, and we spent our breaks laughing and having fun, but I continued to attend the afternoon lessons.

The aunt was true to her word. On Sunday morning we left the camp, joined by Rachel and Adash. Several small cars were parked outside. The aunt and Rachel approached the drivers and spoke to them in German. The aunt came back after a short while and signaled us to get into a car. She sat by the driver and we sat in the back seat. It was a nice day, the sky was a bright blue, scattered with a few white clouds. Along the roadside were tall, dark-green trees, and every so often, we saw small pretty houses with flower planters on their porches. When we neared the city center, the road filled with small and large cars, the houses were big, smoke rose up from tall chimneys, and occasionally, roads were joined together by bridges. The sight was so incredible, that I could not stop from being amazed. Everything was so new, big, and beautiful to me. The driver stopped and we got out of the car. Rachel paid and told the aunt she could repay her when she had the money.

We had arrived too early, and the zoo was still closed. We went for a walk in the area, and the street was quiet and clean. The stores had not yet opened, either. When we returned, we saw a man in a hat sitting by the entrance to the zoo and next to him was a small window, through which tickets were sold. Rachel bought tickets for all of us and we entered. A few families with children had already entered the zoo, and the children were excited and spoke loudly. We were silent. The first animals we encountered, had a long tail, eyes like humans, and they were jumping around quickly from place to place. The aunt said they were called ‘monkeys’. The monkeys offered their front legs to people, but the aunt said that we mustn't touch

them, because they might bite us. We continued walking, and the aunt told us the names of the animals we saw. We passed tigers, lions, elephants, zebras, birds, and small horses. Rachel said she was too tired to continue walking, and sat down on a bench. The aunt continued walking. Felusha and Adash ran up ahead, and I stayed close to the aunt. She asked me if I was enjoying myself, and I told her that I never knew such a thing existed in the world, and asked if every country had a zoo. We returned to Rachel, and asked when we would go to the park with the dolls. The aunt and Rachel looked at each other and said that we had seen enough for today. We left the zoo and walked along the street. We saw a place that had some tables and chairs and sat down. Rachel ordered us cake and lemonade, and for herself the aunt she ordered coffee and cake. We returned to the camp in a car, and Rachel paid again. We went straight to the dining hall, which was already empty, but we still received a meal.

The following Sunday, we went to the park with the dolls. We saw a large tree with many branches, which had many types of dolls on them. Suddenly, At the sides of the tree water flowed and a pleasant tune played in the background. There were dolls that did different crafts, such as carpentry, shoemaking, cooking, etc. Many people watched the show with their children.

On Friday evening, the aunt dressed me in nice clothes, placed a skullcap on my head, and I joined Adash and Mr. Blanck on their way to synagogue. I sat next to them, and saw a man wrapped in a Tallit standing by a wall that was covered with a white curtain, embroidered with gold. The man prayed loudly and sang in a beautiful, loud voice. On occasion, the congregants would stand up on their feet and swing. Adash swung as well, looked to his sides, and smiled. I did not look at Adash, and enjoyed the singing. At the end of the prayer, everyone sang together. The following morning I went to the synagogue again, and was not bored.

We stayed at the "Bialik" camp for about three months, learned to speak Yiddish and read Hebrew, but did not understand everything. The aunt insisted on speaking with us only in Yiddish. Adash spoke with his parents and with Felusha only in Polish. Mr. Blanck and Rachel had helped us immensely. When Rachel brought us fruit and bottles of lemonade, she would never agree to accept any payment, and the aunt's eyes would fill with tears.

The aunt made every effort to return us to Feldafing as soon as she could, so that we could live normal lives, and not share a cabin with fifty other people. One day Mr. Blanck came to the aunt and told her that on the following Sunday, she, Felusha and I would travel by train to Munich and from there continue to Feldafing. The aunt cried, hugged him and Rachel, and told them to come with us and we could all live together, because we were already like family. Rachel cried also. Mr. Blanck's eyes reddened, and

he took out a handkerchief and wiped them, and said that he dealt in commerce, and could not live in a small place. He needed a large city with many people, which also had a large Jewish community and a Minyan for the synagogue. Perhaps they would leave the camp and move to Vienna, or to America. The following day, Mr. Blanck went with the aunt to the camp office. They entered the manager's office, and he stood up to shake their hands. He invited them to sit down at his desk, and turned to the aunt and explained, that up until recently there was a problem with entering Germany, as most train tracks had been bombed. However, it was now possible, and she would be the first to leave the "Bialik" camp for Germany. The train ride to Munich would last three to four hours, and from there she would have to hire a car or a horse-drawn cart to reach Feldafing. We had to be prepared on Sunday morning and he would send us an escort with a car to take us to the train station. On the recommendation of Mr. Blanck, he would give her a letter to present at the kitchen in order to obtain food for the entire day, and as well, three hundred marks for expenses on the journey.

When the aunt returned from the office, she wrote a letter to her daughters and to Bernard, to announce that if everything went according to plan, they would arrive in Munich before noon on Sunday. She asked that they not meet us at the station, as the train schedule was unreliable. From the moment we found out that we were leaving, we stopped attending lessons and only played with the ball. Adash told Felusha that he already missed her and that he would surely come to visit her. Rachel bought us gifts. The aunt had also bought Rachel a kerchief for her head, a tie for Mr. Blanck, and to Adash, she left our ball. The aunt had promised us that she would get us a new ball in Feldafing. I looked at Adash with an emotional gaze; A gaze that would return only after tens of years, when I would meet him again when he arrived in Israel from America for a visit.

On Saturday night after dinner, we stayed in the dining hall and spoke with the head cook. He took the letter that the aunt had received from the manager, and came back with a large box. The box contained sliced and wrapped breads, many tins, a few packets of chocolate, gum, apples and cherries. The aunt said she would divide the contents of the box into three smaller packages, so that we could each carry a package. We barely slept that night, and Felusha and I could hardly wait to see Phela and Sarah, the aunt's daughters. The aunt spoke with Rachel and they decided that they would write to each other and would meet again some time in the future. Mr. Blanck slept and snored, and Adash slept calmly, quiet and serene. Early in the morning, the aunt woke us. Everything was packed and ready, and it appeared as though she hadn't slept at all. We took our packages, and Mr. Blanck and Rachel helped us carry them to the gate of the camp. After a few minutes a young man arrived in a car with a driver, and they loaded the

packages. We kissed Rachel and shook hands with Mr. Blanck. We bid farewell to the “Bialik” camp, entered the car, and drove away.

## 9

We arrived at the train station, where the man who was escorting us bought our train tickets and helped us carry the packages from the car to the station platform. There were only a few people waiting on the platform. The aunt asked the man whether he was sure that the train for Munich was supposed to depart from the platform on which we were waiting. He smiled and said that the train would not be arriving for another half hour, and that the platform was almost empty because not many people traveled on Sundays. We placed the packages on a bench, and Felusha and I sat next to them. The aunt and the man paced back and forth. Every so often more people would arrive on the platform. Felusha asked me if I would miss Adash, and I told her that I would not. She looked at me through teary eyes, blew her nose, and said she would miss him very much, because he was a nice and funny boy. The train pulled into the platform and people crowded by the doors. The man took our suitcase, and we took our packages and followed him. He climbed onto the first car and handed the conductor our tickets, along with a note of money. The conductor whispered something to the man, and then continued walking, with us in tow. We entered an empty cabin where the man placed our suitcase and packages on the upper shelf, with only the aunt's purse remaining in her hand. He told us that there would not be many passengers, and we would have the cabin to ourselves until we reached Munich. He asked that we not walk around outside of the cabin, and that we always leave someone in the cabin to watch our belongings if we went to the restroom. He also asked us not to open the cabin door to anyone. The conductor had a key and he could enter if necessary. He updated us that the journey would last about five hours, and there was no need to get off the train when it changed tracks. The man offered his hand to the aunt, wished us a good journey, and left.

For the first time we were alone on a train. The aunt was worried and solemn, Felusha was sad, and I was tense. It took a long while before the train finally began to move, and this time I did not enjoy the rumble of the wheels as I had on our previous trips, and did not enjoy the journey in general. Since the aunt's meeting with Rabbi Kahan, the Joint representative in Warsaw, we had been waiting for the journey that would take us to Munich and to Feldafing, but now, when we were finally on our way there, we were worried, solemn, and sad, and had no idea of what would await us there.

We passed the border into Germany without any difficulties or inspections. The aunt gave us sandwiches with halva, but Felusha said she was not hungry, so the aunt gave her a peeled apple. I looked outside, and the view was similar to Austria. The aunt accompanied us to the bathroom, in turns. Suddenly the conductor opened the cabin door, and said with a

smile that we would arrive in Munich in an hour and a half. He asked if we needed anything, and the aunt asked him to bring down the suitcase and packages from the upper shelf. When the train stopped, we took the packages, and the conductor carried the suitcase for us and placed it on the platform. He called a porter to help us with our suitcase, and we followed him to the exit gate. We heard screams: "Mama! Mama!" and looked up to see the aunt's daughters, Phela and Sarah, standing in front of us on the other side of the gate, waiving and yelling.

When we drew near, the girls and the aunt hugged, kissed, and began to laugh and cry. The people who were in the station stopped to look, and we did too. One tall man, who was not too young, stood to the side and looked at us. He came near, approached Felusha and me and told us that he was Bernard, our cousin. He remembered us from when we were little children, before the war. He said that our father, Mosha, had died in his arms in the concentration camp, a few days before the liberation. His strength had abandoned him. His last words were: "If you ever see one of my children, or my wife Hava, tell them that I always thought of them, always loved them the most, and will love them forever." Felusha and I began to cry, and Bernard hugged us. The girls disengaged from their hugs with their mother and turned to us. Sarah said that she would not have recognized us had we passed in the street. Phela, however, said that she would have recognized Felusha, who remained just as she was, except having grown a little taller. I appeared a little neglected to her. Bernard hugged and kissed the aunt, and she asked after his wife, whom he told her was pregnant. The aunt thanked him for watching her girls, and said they looked well, which was a sign that he had taken good care of them. Bernard said that a train to Feldafing would be leaving soon and we should probably board it. The ride should last about fifteen minutes.

We boarded the train, and on the way the aunt told Bernard that there was a time where she had despaired because she thought that she would not be able to return with the children. She was lucky, however, and met very good people who helped her overcome her difficulties. There must be a God in the sky who heard her cries and prayers. Phela and Sarah sat on either side of the aunt and hugged her the whole way. We alighted at the Feldafing station, and Bernard found a man with a horse and buggy, on which we loaded all of our packages. We all sat in the back, and the aunt told the story of how she was helped to free us from the goyim. We were traveling up a road, the mountains around us were covered in green trees, and between the tops of the trees, beautiful large castles could be seen every so often. When we reached the top of the incline, we saw a few buildings scattered below, two and three stories high, behind which was a row of wooden cabins and a flowing river. Bernard said that this was Feldafing. One of the cabins in Feldafing was home to Bernard and his wife, and the aunt and her daughters.



This was where the aunt had left her daughters when she went to Poland to liberate Felusha and the Jewish boy, who turned out to be me.

Bernard told the aunt that he had made room for the children in the back part of the cabin. There would be a thin partition between her room and the children's, and they could cut open a door so that they would not have to go all the way around. We arrived at Bernard's cabin, and his wife Hava opened the door for us and hugged with the aunt. Afterwards, she looked at us and said that the girl was very nice and the boy... she hoped he would grow. Bernard told Hava that silence would have become her. She retorted that he always complained. Hava invited us to their cabin for lunch. She laughed and said she hoped there would be enough food, depending on how hungry we were. The aunt calmed her and told her that she had a few tins of food. Hava told her she had no problem with tinned food, as Bernard worked for UNRWA.

In order to enter the aunt's and the girls' room, we had to pass through Hava and Bernard's kitchen. We all entered the room, which had three small beds, a closet, and a mirror hanging on the wall. After we left the cabin, we walked around to see the room that was to be Felusha's and mine. The aunt and Felusha bent down and entered the room, which had a low doorway. I stayed outside because there was no room to get in. It was a tiny room with two beds and two crates for clothes. We returned to the front of the cabin. Hava asked if we would like some tea and cookies to tide us over until lunch was ready, in about an hour's time. We preferred to wait for the meal and went outside for a walk in the vicinity.

The aunt stayed behind to speak with her daughters and asked us not to get too far away, and to be back within an hour. We walked towards the river. It was a sunny day, pleasant and warm, with everything green. There were trees growing everywhere and a lone rabbit hopped around between the trees. Felusha asked me: "Isn't it dangerous to walk around here?" I reminded her that we spent an entire night sitting in piles of pine needles in the middle of the forest, and said that nothing could be more frightening than that. She laughed and we continued to walk.

We crossed a tree grove and reached a patch of grass, and suddenly saw the water right in front of us. The river water was a dark green, and flowed slowly, leaving tiny waves in its wake. Occasionally, we saw a fish jump above the water. We neared the edge and saw tiny white stones in the water. A small boat floated in the middle of the river, and in it was a man with a hat. He rowed slowly with oars, and we looked at him in wonderment, never having seen such a sight. The man looked at us, raised his hand, and waved right and left, and we returned his wave. We returned to the cabin, and found that the meal was not yet ready. We entered the aunt's and girls' room, where Phela and Sarah were lying in their beds and the aunt was sitting near a desk, writing letters. Hava entered, invited us to

eat, and asked the girls to help her with setting the table. Hava and Bernard's room was large. In its center stood a large round table, surrounded by many chairs. At the edge of the room stood two adjoining beds, and to one side stood a large wooden closet, on which two large suitcases were laid. Near the entrance stood a stove, above which were hanging shelves. This was the kitchen. A curtain made of a military blanket separated the two parts of the room. The toilets were outside the cabin. The room in which the aunt and the girls were now living belonged to Bernard, and previously served as a storage room.

Hava and the girls served bowls of soup to the table. In the middle of the table was a basket of bread, and the aunt told us to put pieces of the bread in the soup. Felusha didn't want to, but I did and it was delicious. There was a bottle of beer by Bernard, and he asked whether anyone wanted some, and was answered in unison with a "No, thank you". After the soup, potatoes with pickled cabbage and a piece of meat were served, followed by cups of tea. Bernard brought a package of chocolate out from under the bed, and everyone received two pieces. The aunt said we should hold the chocolate in our mouths and drink the tea with a teaspoon. It was delicious.

After the meal, the aunt told Hava and Bernard to go rest, and sent Felusha and me to our room, while she and the girls stayed behind to wash the dishes. Felusha and I entered the room. I took off my shoes and lay on my bed, and Felusha sat down on hers. I asked her why she wasn't lying down, and she said she missed Adash, Rachel, and Mr. Blanck. "Is it true that you miss Adash the most?!" I asked. "Is it true that you're jealous?! I just like his silly laughter," she retorted.

The aunt entered our room and asked how we were feeling. She told us that she had written letters to the Blanck family, Sakovitz, Czunko, and Rabbi Kahan in Warsaw. The aunt announced that the next day we would go to school with Phela and Sarah, and they would speak to the principal to make sure he put us into a suitable class. In the meantime, she would sew us cloth bags, so that we had where to put our notebooks and books.

At dinner three men joined us. One named Monyek, who was about eighteen, nice, sympathetic, and smiley, and had a head full of curly hairs and protruding teeth. He was Phela's boyfriend. Monyek was a clerk in the Feldafing camp office, and arranged for us to have identity cards. The next man was much older, he was Hava's brother, and was named Menashe. The third was Yirmi, a friend of Menashe's. Menashe and Yirmi worked as tailors in Munich, at the American military base. They lived in a room on the other end of the cabin, and occasionally returned from work with "shikshas". Sometimes they brought Felusha small pretty gifts. One time Yirmi brought me a small flute, on which eight different notes could be played. Once the aunt and the girls finished washing the dishes, Hava set the table for a card game. Hava, Bernard, Menashe and Yirmi sat down around the table and

played. Phela and Monyek went for a walk, and the aunt sewed Felusha and me schoolbags.

Sarah sat between Bernard and Yirmi and watched the game. Bernard asked how it was that a beautiful girl like her hadn't yet found a boyfriend. Hava said that none of the men in Feldafing were handsome enough for her. "True," said Sarah, and her laughter rang out.

The following morning, the aunt woke us, combed our hair nicely and gave us bags. She had embroidered our names on our bags, and placed a sandwich wrapped in a cloth napkin in each. We left for school, joined by Phela. Sarah stayed in the cabin because she had not had time to comb her hair. Sarah had black hair, thick, long, and wavy. She was always pedantic about her hair, and would comb it several times a day, until she was satisfied. We arrived at the school, which was housed in a two-story building in the middle of an unfenced area. Children played with balls in the fields surrounding the school. There were children of all ages studying at this school, and the division into classes was done according to knowledge, not age. Phela was very sociable, and knew many students and teachers.

We climbed to the second floor and waited by the principal's door. Phela spoke with a woman surrounded by papers. The woman entered the principal's office, and when she came out, she signaled for all of us to enter. We entered with a small bow. Phela spoke with the principal in Polish. He called Felusha, opened a Hebrew book and instructed her to read. Felusha read with a trembling voice, and the principal told her that she was a nice girl, and her reading was good enough to be placed in the third grade. Next he called me and asked me to read from another book. This was my first test, and I was very nervous. I read with long pauses because my mouth was dry. Every so often I felt the need to cough and swallowed. The principal watched me and asked how old I was. I looked at Phela and said that I thought I was eleven and a half. The principal turned to Phela and said that according to my reading, I belonged in a lower grade, but because of my age, he had no choice but to put me in fourth grade. The principal asked Phela that she and Sarah help us at home with our studies, so that we could progress and catch up with the children in our classes. The principal wrote two notes, one for Felusha and one for me, and gave them to Phela. She thanked him, bowed, and we exited the room. Phela went into the third grade classroom with Felusha while I waited outside. After a few minutes she came out and took me to the fourth grade classroom.

An older woman stood by the chalkboard. She was tall, with blonde wavy hair that reached her shoulders. Her face was round and her eyes blue. Phela apologized for interrupting, handed her the principal's note, and told her that I was her cousin and had arrived just yesterday from the "Bialik" camp in Austria, where we had studied a little Hebrew. The teacher read the note, looked me up and down, and told Phela she could go. The teacher sat at

her desk, opened a large notebook, and asked for my name. I answered that my name was Avramek Strikovski. She explained that my name was Avraham, and that only friends or relatives call me Avramek. The teacher walked to a cabinet at the side of the room and removed from it three notebooks, a book, a pencil case, a sharpened pencil and an eraser. She handed them to me and said that I need to read a lot at home. She told me to go sit by Golda, and asked Golda to raise her arm so that I could find her. I walked towards my seat.

The teacher stood, facing the students, and said: "We have a new student in class, named Avraham. I would like you to welcome him nicely and to help him, because he arrived in Feldafing only yesterday." Golda turned to me with a wide smile. I looked at her, embarrassed, and smiled. Golda had big black eyes, a hooked nose, large teeth, and long black hair that flowed to her shoulders on either side of her head.

The teacher wrote a verse from a song on the chalkboard, and asked the students to copy it in their notebook. I began to copy, and after I had finished copying one line, the teacher asked that anyone who hadn't finished copying the verse raise his or her hand. I looked around, and saw no raised hands, so I did not raise mine, either. The teacher took a rag, erased the board and wrote the second verse of the song. Everyone began to copy. I tried very hard and managed to copy two lines. The teacher repeated her question, and when no hands were raised, erased the board and wrote the third verse. The teacher held a book, began to sing, and the students sang with her. I felt embarrassed. I had never in my life sang a song, having only heard singing in church and at the synagogue of the "Bialik" camp. Golda sang very loudly, looked at me, and placed her notebook next to me, pointing with her finger to the line they were singing. I began to sing along with everyone else. At first we sang one line a few times, until we had memorized it. Afterwards we learned another line, and like that, by the end of the lesson we had learned the entire song. The school caretaker would walk through the halls and ring the bell in his hand to mark the start and end of lessons.

Golda and her family came from Russia and spoke Russian and Yiddish. She asked me in Yiddish whether I wanted her to write the entire song in my notebook. I agreed and handed her my notebook. All of the students went outside for the recess, and only Golda and I stayed in the classroom while she wrote the song for me with her pen, in a pretty, small, and clear writing. Occasionally she dipped the tip of the pen in the inkwell placed on the table in front of her.

When the bell rang again, the children burst into the classroom, followed by the teacher, who told us that it was time for our Hebrew lesson. Golda took out a notebook wrapped in green paper, on which the word "Hebrew" was written in large letters. The teacher taught various words, and assigned homework. I did not understand a thing, and did not know what to

write, but Golda wrote out the homework for me. After this lesson came the long lunch break. The teacher would not allow anyone to go out to the yard until everyone had finished eating their sandwiches. During the break, I approached a group of children from my class and they included me in their game.

The next lesson was in math. The math teacher was short; his hair greased and pulled back, his face square, and his eyes large and red. He wore a black suit and a red tie. When he entered the classroom he stood and stared at the students. Everyone became quiet. He went to the board and wrote a few exercises in addition, subtraction, multiplication and division. At the "Bialik" camp they had taught us some arithmetic, but mostly addition and subtraction, and so I did not know about multiplication and division. Golda sat in deep concentration, working on the exercises, which were written on a page that was laid on her notebook. The teacher approached me and asked if I could solve the problems. "No," I answered. He said: "What will become of you?..." "I will teach him," said Golda, raising her eyes.

The teacher stood by the board and asked that anyone who had not solved the problems raise his hand. I was the only one to raise his hand. The teacher called one of the children, and asked him to solve the problems on the board. The child approached slowly, looked sideways, took the chalk in his hand, and remained standing. The teacher raised his voice and asked him why he was not solving. The child tried, but teacher stopped him and said that the next time, he should raise his hand if he didn't know how. The teacher called one of the girls and she correctly solved all of the problems on the board. The classroom was completely silent. Later, the teacher called on other students to come and solve more problems on the board. Some of them did not know how, and the teacher explained it again. At the end of the lesson we were assigned homework.

The last lesson was Torah. The teacher was a thin, bespectacled woman with no makeup and a kerchief on her head. She asked each student to read a few verses, repeated them and explained them. I was very interested, and understood most of the lesson.

At the end of the school day, when we left the classroom, Golda asked me where I lived. She said she would be willing to come to my house to help me with the homework. I said that I had two cousins studying at the school who could help me. She nodded her head, turned around and left. I climbed down the stairs, and someone from behind asked me if I wanted to come watch a ping-pong game at the Maccabi club. I turned my head and recognized Aharon, one of the students in my class. "What is ping-pong?" I asked. "Come and see." I went with Aharon, and we entered a large hall with a high ceiling. On one side were a few green tables, across the centers of which a low green nets were strung, with a white line drawn at its edges. Two men played by one of the tables. They held small rackets and were

hitting a small white ball, which was quickly passed from one side to the other. One of the men stood close to the table and hit the ball very hard. Across from him was a tall thin man, standing at a large distance from the table and returning the ball to the other side. Aharon whispered that the man holding the ball was the best player at the camp. Aharon went to the edge of the hall, brought two rackets and a ball, and we approached one of the tables. We stood on either side and began to play. I would miss the ball, or hit it towards the ceiling, and Aharon cheered and guided me. I was pleased. After a while Aharon said we should stop playing, because he needed to go eat. After lunch he studied at the Talmud-Torah, and later, he might come back to play ping-pong. We walked on the main road, until we reached the road that led to my cabin. Aharon lived in the buildings on the other side. When we parted, he said I should come study at the Talmud-Torah, and later we could go play ping-pong.

I ran happily towards our cabin. I passed through Bernard's room because I wanted to go to the aunt's room, and when Hava saw me, she yelled: "Rivkah, deer parshoin is shoin du." (His Honorable is here.)

I entered the aunt's room, where Felusha sat at the table with tears in her eyes, while the aunt was in the corner of the kitchen. She came out, looked at me and asked: "Where were you? School ended two hours ago and we looked for you at the school and no one knew where you were. At the end of the school day Felusha went to your classroom and no one was in it. When she came home and saw that you were not there, she began to cry and would not eat until you arrived, so we went to look for you. This is no way to behave. You had us worried. You must return home directly after school. Now, come eat and tell us what happened and where you were, so we can find you the next time."

I told the aunt what had happened. I said that in the afternoon I would go with Aharon to the Talmud-Torah, and she was pleased. After the meal, the aunt sent us to our room to rest and to prepare our homework. I placed my bag on the floor and lay in the bed. Felusha took out her notebooks, sat by one of the crates, and did her homework. I fell asleep. When she finished writing, she woke me so I could do my homework. I told her that I would do mine in the evening, with Phela or Sarah's help. She smiled and turned towards her bed.

In the afternoon I went out early to go to the Talmud-Torah. Surprisingly, I ran into Aharon at the intersection and we walked together. Along the way were stalls with all sorts of children's toys, combs, little mirrors, toothbrushes, soaps, cigarettes, and the like. Aharon told me that the vendors at the stalls were called "the Grecks". We arrived at the synagogue, where scripture studies were taught in the afternoons. This was the Talmud-Torah. The building was isolated, two stories high, and surrounding it was an empty field with a few tall trees. On the first floor was a small hall, filled

with long tables, benches, and a cabinet with the Holy Scriptures. In the mornings adults studied here. On the second floor was a large hall, which served as the synagogue. On one of the walls, in a slightly elevated space, stood a cabinet with the Torah books. The cabinet was covered in a blue curtain, which was embroidered with golden letters. On either sides of the cabinet were stairs, and in front of it was a wooden pulpit, surrounded by a wooden railing. At its center stood a table, whose one end was higher than the other. On this table they would place the Torah book and read from it. Around the stage were tables and benches for the worshippers. At the side of the hall stood a long narrow table, with benches. At the head of the table was a chair with a pillow laid on it, facing the entrance. This was the instructor's chair.

After Aharon showed me the synagogue, we went outside to the back of the building, where a few children were playing with a ball. After a short while a boy came and told everyone to enter the Talmud-Torah, as the rabbi had arrived. The children donned their hats and went inside. The rabbi was a young man, short and shaved, with a pale face, large eyes, a short nose, and a slightly agape mouth. He wore a black suit, and on his head was a black hat with a narrow rim. The rabbi stood at the head of the table, a ruler in his hand, and watched the entering children. Each child took his place quietly. Aharon sat at the front, to the right of the Rabbi. I remained standing and waited to be told where to sit. The rabbi sat down and asked me in Yiddish for my name. I said my name was Avram, and he correct me and said "Avraham". He asked if I had studied the Torah before, and I answered that I studied at the "Bialik" camp in Austria, but only managed to study for a very short time.

The rabbi told me to sit to his left, in the last chair. There was one book for every two children, and I shared one with the boy sitting next to me. The rabbi had the children read from the book, one after the other, in turn. I also read when my turn arrived. After we finished reading, the rabbi asked the children to explain what we read. The children explained, and the rabbi nodded his head. Afterwards, the rabbi also read the Rashi interpretation, and asked the children to read it. When my turn came, I said that I did not know how to read the Rashi script, and the rabbi asked Aharon to teach me. The rabbi looked at his watch, sent the children out for a recess, and asked me to stay in my room. After asking a few questions about my family and me, he let me go for recess as well.

After the lesson had ended, Aharon invited me to go to Maccabi to play ping-pong. All of the tables were already occupied, so we went to see the men who were playing with a ball and trying to throw it through a hoop. When one of the tables became available, we played ping-pong. Over time, I progressed and learned to return the ball thrown at me. I remembered that I had still not done my homework, and told Aharon that I had to go, as the

aunt would worry about me. When I arrived, it was already dark outside. I entered the cabin and saw Hava, Bernard, Menashe and Yirmi sitting around the table in Bernard's room and playing cards. The aunt sat in her room and wrote a letter. Felusha was lying in one of the beds and reading a book. The aunt prepared some food for me and asked if Talmud-Torah always ended this late. I told her, that after the lesson I had played some ping-pong with Aharon. I told her that I had some math homework and that I needed Phela or Sarah's help. She told me that they had gone out with their girlfriends and would return very late. She would wake me early in the morning and they would help me with my homework then.

The next day I went to school with my homework undone. I knew there would be a lesson with mandolins, so I took the little flute that Yirmi had given me. When I entered the classroom, Golda was sitting and writing something in a notebook. I sat down and said hello, but she did not answer. Golda continued to write as though she could not hear or see me. I understood that she was angry with me, and asked for her forgiveness. She straightened, put down her pen, turned towards me and looked in my eyes for a long time. I continued to look at her, and finally she smiled and said she forgave me. The first lesson was in Hebrew and the second in Torah. In math class, after reading our names, the teacher asked who had not completed their homework. A few children raised their hands, with me included. The teacher turned to me and said that if I did not find someone to help me I would be in trouble. Golda whispered in my ear that she would help me. Her nose lightly touched my ear, and I felt a tickle throughout my body. She asked that I not run off at the end of school.

The next lesson was the mandolin-playing lesson. We sat in a circle around the teacher, who was also the teacher that taught us math. He explained to us how to hold a piece of bone that resembled a fingernail, and to strum it on the string of the mandolin, in order to get sounds. It was an excellent lesson, and there was no homework. I took out my flute and put it to my mouth, and when the teacher saw the flute, his eyes opened wide, and he asked to see it. I gave the flute to the teacher, and he wiped the mouthpiece well and began to play, emitting wonderful sounds. The teacher smiled at me and asked if he could borrow the flute. I agreed, but told no one that I had given the flute to the teacher.

The last lesson was in drawing. The teacher was thin, with a round head that had a bald spot surrounded by long, curly white hair. His eyes were blue, large, and smiling. He gave one of the students a package of papers, and asked him to give each student a page. Afterwards, he drew on the board the head of the student who sat in front of him, and everyone laughed. The teacher asked us to draw the head on the board on our page. Over the course of the lesson the teacher also drew a horse and a dog on the board, and asked us to draw a tree, a house, and mountains around it. The



drawing lesson was wonderful, as was the teacher. He awakened in me a love of drawing that would never end.

Golda gathered her notebooks and told me that she would wait for me at the school entrance. I took my bag and as I was getting ready to leave the classroom, I ran into Aharon again. These surprise meetings with Aharon would not end in Feldafing. They would continue in Israel, where I would meet him unexpectedly through a friend of mine, who would also know him. Aharon said we should go to Maccabi to play ping-pong together. I told him that I was going to study math with Golda, and would meet him at Maccabi after studying at the Talmud-Torah. Aharon left the room, laughed and said: "You're going with that ugly girl."

I went with Golda. I told her that in the afternoon I studied at the Talmud-Torah and played ping-pong with Aharon. She said that Aharon was a big braggart, and that she could not stand him, but the girls in the class were mad for him because of his blue eyes. We reached the intersection, and Golda said she would wait for me by one of the stalls until I finished my lunch, and then we could go to her house to do our homework. I went to the aunt's room. Felusha had already finished eating. I told the aunt that after the meal I would go with a girl from my class to do my homework, and then to the Talmud-Torah and the Maccabi club. The aunt asked me not to come home too late. I ate a thick soup with a piece of meat and bread, drank hot tea with a biscuit, and went to the intersection. Golda showed me a thin ring that she had bought from one of the stalls. We climbed a hill, where Golda lived in one of the long buildings. From the hill you could see our cabin and the river.

We climbed up to the second floor and entered a long hallway lined with doors on either side. Golda used a key to open one of the doors, and we entered a dark room whose window was covered with a dark curtain. We passed through it into a small room with a narrow bed, a small desk and a chair. The room had no window, and had an electric lamp for lighting. This was her room. Golda told me that she had a brother that disappeared in the war, and she and her mother had stayed with goyim. Now her mother took the train to Munich every morning, where she had found work. Golda stayed at home alone, until her mother returned.

We took out our Hebrew notebooks, and Golda was very serious. She gave me the answers, which I wrote down, and then she corrected my mistakes. She told me to read from the book, and corrected my pronunciation. Afterwards she read the same passage and it sounded much prettier and clearer.

We took a small break, and Golda left the room, returning with a small jar filled with candies of all shapes and sizes. She handed me the jar and I took a cherry-flavored candy, which was both sweet and tart. Golda took a candy for herself, and told me to take out my math notebook. She explained the division problems that the teacher had assigned. On the other side of the

notebook she wrote out some multiplication problems and told me to study them, because the next day the teacher would ask them in class. I felt much more tired than I did after a soccer or ping-pong game. I wanted to go home already. Golda looked at me with her big eyes, and I looked right into hers. She brought her face to mine, and her lips touched mine. I closed my eyes and felt a pleasant feeling flow through my body. Although my eyes were closed, I saw a blinding light, and stopped thinking. Suddenly I heard a voice: "Hey, you fell asleep!" I opened my eyes and saw Golda smiling. The room, which was dark, suddenly seemed much brighter. She asked if I wanted to do it again, and I said that I did. She told me that now I would have to approach her, and I leaned in and kissed her.

Golda said that I had better go to the Talmud-Torah, so that the teacher would not be angry. She stood from her chair and I followed. I left her house and was happy. I touched my hand to my lips, smiled, and began to run so that I would not be late. While running, I felt like I could fly. I entered the Talmud-Torah, where everyone was already sitting. The rabbi asked why I was late, and I answered that I had been doing my homework. Aharon giggled, and added "with Golda..." The rabbi told him to be silent and told me to sit. During recess, after everyone had gone outside, the rabbi told me to stay behind. He explained that being late was forbidden, and that I had to be there in plenty of time before class. I was silent, and did not answer. Next he said that children and adults who were Jewish had to shave their heads, leaving only side-locks on either side of their head. He promised to give me one hundred marks if I would shave my head. I raised my head and looked at him skeptically. He nodded and said that he meant it. I told him that I would ask the aunt, and he asked that I give him an answer the following day, and sent me to recess.

After school, we went to play. The tall kids played basketball, there were children who were learning boxing, and Aharon played ping-pong because he wanted to be the best player. I played with him, and did not try anything else. We began to play, and I felt that I was playing very well. "I see that Golda also taught you to play ping-pong..." said Aharon. "When I'm with her, all we do is play ping-pong," I replied. At dinner I told the aunt what the rabbi had said about shaving my hair. She said that I should already be accustomed to being bald, from the time that I spent with the goy, and that the money would really help us. The following day at Talmud-Torah, before the lesson started, the rabbi sat me in a chair, wrapped my body in a white sheet, removed a manual shaving machine from his pocket, and shaved my hair. The students stood around and said nothing. Some of them were already bald. When he was done shaving me, the rabbi cleaned off the remaining hairs with a brush. Next, he told one of the children to sweep the floor, collect the hairs and burn them. While we were studying, my entire body itched, and I kept waiting for the rabbi to give me the money. At the

end of school, when everyone had already left, I went to the rabbi and said that the aunt said we could really use the money. He looked at me with big eyes and his mouth open wide, and said that he forgot to give me the money. He removed his wallet from his pocket and gave me a hundred-mark note.

When I left, Aharon was waiting for me outside. He wanted us to go play ping-pong together, but the rabbi said he would accompany me home. Aharon looked at me with pitying eyes, and I shrugged my shoulders. On the way the rabbi asked me many questions about my family, and I answered:

-“Do your cousins date men?”

-“Phela has a boyfriend named Monyek, and Sarah is still looking.”

-“Does the aunt light candles on the eve of the Shabbat? What does she do the remaining evenings?”

-She lights candles for Shabbat. On weeknights she mends clothes, cooks, and writes many letters, and sometimes plays cards with Bernard.”

-“And what does the aunt do during her days?”

-“Sometimes she goes to the village, sells the products we receive from UNRWA to the Germans, buys fabric and sews the girls dresses. She sewed me a coat for Shabbat.”

-“And what does Bernard do?”

-“In the evenings he plays cards, and during the day – I don’t know.”

The rabbi said that I should tell the aunt that if she shaved her hair, she would receive two hundred marks. Before we parted, the rabbi looked me in the eye, and said that a young man who studies at the Talum-Torah does not go with girls. He wished me a good night and I ran home, because my entire body was itching. The aunt looked at me with surprise, since I was all red. I removed my hat, showed her my shaved head, and told her that I was itchy all over. Felusha began to laugh and could not stop. The aunt began to laugh as well. Hava came running in and when she saw me began to laugh as well, and yelled: “Bernard, kim aher, schnell!” (come here, fast!). Bernard entered, looked at me and smiled. I felt the tears flooding my eyes, and was on the verge of tears, but held my tears with all my might. Bernard approached me and told everyone to stop laughing. He turned to me, and said that he would fix what the rabbi had done, and that everything would be all right. It turned out that while he was shaving me, the rabbi had left several spots on my hair unshaved, as he was so concerned with leaving me side-locks. Felusha said that I looked like a goat. Bernard brought out a small bag from his room, and removed from it a razor, a leather strap to which a piece of wood was attached, used to sharpen the razor, a comb, a brush, and a manual hair cutting machine. He sat me on the chair, shaved the tufts of hair that the rabbi had left on my head, and also cut off the side-locks.

After dinner, the aunt boiled water in a big pot, took a basin from Hava and filled it with the water. She told me to undress, enter the basin, and wash myself. I did not want to undress in front of Felusha, but the aunt said that

we were brother and sister, and needn't be shy. I told the aunt that Felusha also tells me to leave the room when she washes. I said that from today I would like to shower by myself, without any help from anyone. Felusha stood up and went into Bernard's room. The following day I came to school with a beret on my head, because the aunt had washed my hat and it had not yet dried. Aharon laughed and asked if it was my aunt's beret, and I told him it was Sarah's.

During math class, the teacher entered the classroom, sat down and asked who had not done the homework. He did not look at me. Afterwards he stood up, wrote some problems on the board and asked us to solve them in class. Suddenly he came to me, placed his hand on my shoulder, leaned down and whispered: "The flute you gave me as a gift is wonderful". He patted my shoulder and walked away. Golda looked at me with her big eyes and could not understand what had happened. From that day, the teacher never looked at me in math class, as though I wasn't in the room at all.

At the end of the day, Golda and I left the classroom together. She said we should meet at her house as we had the previous day, and I did not answer her. Aharon was standing outside, and quietly said that it looked as though he'd need to look for another ping-pong partner. I did not answer him. When we reached the intersection, Golda asked me if something was wrong, because I was not acting as I had yesterday and she needed to know whether to wait for me or not. We looked in each other's eyes and I told her to wait for me. I quickly ran home, and the aunt asked whether I'd begin working on my homework after lunch. I told her that I would go to Golda's house to do my homework, would go to the Talmud-Torah from there, and would go to the club after my classes.

I went to Golda's. The apartment had a clean smell as usual. She asked me if I wanted a cup of tea with the cookies that her mother had baked, and I said that I did. Golda brought two cups of tea and a small plate of cookies. I drank half of the tea and ate a cookie, which was delicious. Golda ate a few cookies, as she had not eaten lunch. Then she leaned towards me, took my head in her hands, and put her lips to mine and kissed me. My eyes were closed, and I remember that mother had kissed me that way when she said goodbye to me for the very last time. Golda stopped kissing me and asked if I'd fallen asleep. I told her that I was awake and said nothing more. Golda suggested that we begin with our math homework. I told her that I could not do my homework because my head hurt, perhaps because the rabbi had shaved my head. Golda looked at me with a serious gaze and said that she knew why I did not want to do my homework. It was because the math teacher let me be since I gave him the flute, and also because I wanted to go play ping-pong with Aharon. She took out her notebooks and said that I could go, because she had homework to do. I took my bag and went towards

the door. When I was holding the door handle, she yelled that tomorrow I was not to sit next to her in class anymore.

I felt very badly that day. Aharon looked at me and said that Golda must have sent me away, because she had someone else. I did not respond. Aharon said that he had registered for boxing lessons, so that he could defend himself if someone tried to hit him. I asked him where the registration was and registered as well. At the Talmud-Torah I tried to pay attention to what the rabbi explained, but could not. I thought about Golda the entire time. The rabbi asked me to repeat one of his explanations, and I remained silent. He said that I was looking at him like a turkey. I told him that my head itched from the shaving he had given me. The children began to laugh, and the teacher hit the table hard with his ruler to silence them. Silence prevailed, and the teacher looked at me with his big eyes and his gaping mouth, and said that if he caught me daydreaming in class one more time, he would wake me with a ruler to my fingertips.

When everyone left for recess, the teacher asked me if I had told the aunt what he told me to tell her. I answered that I told her and that she said she would have to think about it for a few days. I returned home in a bad mood. When I entered I told the aunt what the rabbi had told me to tell her. She looked at me as though I was crazy and said that my rabbi apparently had nothing better to do. The aunt explained to me that she could not shave her head now, because of the place we were in now, and also because it wasn't appropriate given the girlfriends and boyfriends her daughters had. She told me to tell the rabbi that she could not shave her head right now. I went to sleep and woke up in the middle of the night, thinking about what had happened between Golda and me. Perhaps I had not behaved properly, or maybe she was too harsh... Who could I tell about what had happened...Felusha? She's young and would not understand. The aunt? ... She was too busy with Phela and Monyek, and especially with Sarah, who kept changing boyfriends because no one was good enough for her, and kept spending the majority of the money that the aunt had saved, to buy clothes. Every so often the aunt and Sarah would fight about this, and the yelling could be heard as far as our room. To Bernard? ... He plays cards all night, tells jokes, and liked to laugh. He wasn't serious enough. It took me a long time to realize that I had misjudged him. I should have told him. He was a good man, wise and sensitive to those around him.

I woke up in the morning feeling sad. Although the aunt had a rule about leaving the house on an empty stomach, and we had to at least have a cookie and some tea, I did not want to eat and only had something to drink. On the way to school, I thought about where I would sit in class. When I arrived, I loitered outside on purpose, near the children that were playing with a ball, because I wanted to be late. I wanted to enter the classroom after

Golda had sat down. I thought that she would call me to sit next to her, and then I could apologize.

I entered the classroom, and when Golda saw me, she immediately turned her head away. I looked for a new seat, and sat next to Pavel, a boy who had arrived from Russia with his parents. He had a long marked face, curly hair, slightly crossed eyes, and was a weak student. The math teacher would call him to the board and explain things to him, but it never did any good. Pavel did play basketball and soccer very well, however. The blonde teacher taught Hebrew and singing. The bespectacled teacher taught Torah, the bad-tempered teacher taught math and mandolin, and the smiley teacher that everyone loved taught drawing. During math class the teacher would ignore Pavel and me, as though we weren't even in the class. He never called us to the board, never asked us to solve problems, did not check our homework, and rarely spoke to us. I made an effort to do as much of my homework as I could. Sarah and Phela did not help me, and they were always busy, and my classmates offered me no assistance.

At the club I played ping-pong and practiced boxing. The coach said that I needed to have my nose broken, but because I was so thin, it was better to wait. At the end of the year when a boxing competition was held, my opponent would break my nose easily. Then I could decide whether to become a boxer or to stay with a broken nose as a memento.

Every Saturday we would gather at the club and hear stories about Israel; about the difficulties that the English had heaped on the Jews wanting to immigrate to Israel, about the gangs of Arabs that conspired against the Jews, and about the kibbutzim that had been built in the country. Towards evening, we marched around the main road in Feldafing a few times, with sticks and torches.

In the fall, the weather had changed. It was very cold and black clouds covered the sky. One morning we woke up and saw that everything had been covered in white. It had snowed all night, and that day we did not go to school. The aunt and Phela went to Munich. Prior to their journey, the aunt measured my head, as well as Felusha's and my feet. She recorded the measurements on a piece of newspaper. In the afternoon the aunt and Phela had returned with packages. They were filled with colorfully knit hats and scarves. I also received a hat with earflaps, gloves, and tall shoes. Yirmi and Menashe sewed me long pants and a thick coat.

One night, when Yirmi and Menashe returned from work, they brought me a small sled. Monyek told Felusha and me to dress warmly and took us to the river with the sled. Phela joined us, and Sarah stayed behind, claiming that she did not have clothes suitable for winter, even though she had been given more warm clothing than any of us. When we left the cabin, the moon shone in the bright sky and the snow glowed on the ground. There was a slight slope on the way to the river, and Monyek sat on the sled, told

Felusha to sit behind him, and directed the sled with his feet. They slid towards the river, while Phela and I walked down on foot. When we arrived, we saw that the river had not frozen over. Monyek told me to carry the sled up and to slide down with Felusha towards the river, just as he had. We climbed up, and I sat in the front. Felusha asked if I was certain that I could direct the sled and stop it with my feet. I answered that I could and that it was not such a difficult task. She began to laugh and would not sit down. I told her not to be scared, and promised that we would slide slowly.

Felusha sat behind me and we began to slide. Suddenly the sled gathered speed and started moving faster and faster. Felusha screamed for me to stop, so she could get off. I pressed down hard into the snow with my left heel, and the sled made a sharp turn from right to left. We both fell onto the snow and the sled flipped over, with us lying in two piles of snow, still in shock. "This reminds me of the piles of pine needles," said Felusha, and began to laugh. I rose and righted the sled, sat on it, and told Felusha to sit behind me so that we could continue sledding. She said that she had slid enough, and began to walk towards the river.

At school, lessons continued as usual. During recess, instead of playing soccer, we threw snowballs at each other. At Talmud-Torah the rabbi forbade us to throw snowballs, but allowed us to stomp in the snow. At the club, I improved quite a lot at ping-pong. When I wasn't playing, I stood and watched the champion, how he stood back from the table and stopped hard shots. Later when I played and my opponent had the ball, I stepped back from the table and also stopped the hard shots. I didn't do quite as well at boxing, and the coach told me that I had to gain some weight.

Year-end events at the school included a big show. The singing teacher told us that the entire class would perform on stage, singing and playing the mandolin. The students in the higher classes would dance and perform a play. I was supposed to perform with the choir, which would open the show. After the speeches, I was supposed to sing a song in Yiddish with one of the girls, a song that told the story of a tall tree that grew in a yard in the spring, summer, fall, and winter. Afterwards, I had to play the mandolin with the students from my class, and finally, there was a boxing competition planned. At the Maccabi club, they said that we would be matched according to weight. I was classed as a featherweight. Preparations for the performances took on a frenzied pace.

The day of the performance arrived, and the hall was filled. All of the students' parents and relatives were invited, and other people as well. Students that did not participate in the show sat in the audience, whistling, yelling and clapping. The evening began with a speech by the principal, followed by the play and the performances. Students from the higher grades participated in a serious play. There were Jewish artists in the camp who performed in Hebrew, but the majority of performances were in Yiddish. The

boxing event closed the evening. I was among the group that performed first, at the lightest weight. There were three pairs with me. Feivel, who was my partner, and I, were supposed to box in the third match. Feivel was fatter than me, and had long but thin arms. When the first match began, hard claps were heard and the children yelled: "Hit him in the teeth! Punch him on the chin! Drop him to the boards!" The coach was also the judge. After two rounds he announced who won and raised the winner's arm. In the second match, the two boys jumped around each other and barely made contact. After the second round, the coach called them, stood them to his sides, raised their hands and ruled a tie.

It was my turn next. My upper body was bare and I wore short pants. The pants belonged to Monyek. The aunt had shortened them and sewn in a new elastic band so that they would stay up. I wore my high winter boots with Sarah's green socks, which the aunt had enforced with elastics to ensure that they did not slide down during the match. I climbed up on stage nervously, and stood on one side, with Feivel facing me. I heard clapping and whistling. Suddenly a bell rang, bringing me back to reality. I approached the center of the stage ready to start. Feivel came towards me, and I jumped around him, while he stood rooted in the same spot, waiting. I moved my right arm towards his face, but did not protect my face with my left hand, allowing him to hit me square on the nose. At that moment I saw stars, lost my balance, and fell backwards. The coach was right. It was not necessary to break my nose before the match. When I opened my eyes, I found myself on a mattress behind the stage. The aunt placed a wet rag on my forehead and my nose. She asked how I was feeling, and I said that I was all right, except that my nose was in the way and I could not see her. She began to laugh and said it would pass in a week. I lay in bed for two days, fearing that I had suffered a concussion. When I returned to school, people pointed at me and said: "Watch out! Here comes the boxer!" At the Talmud-Torah they giggled quietly. They were afraid of the rabbi, who said that only the goyim hit Jews.

Throughout our stay in Feldafing, the aunt never abandoned the thought of leaving Germany to find a permanent place for us and for her daughters. She sent a letter to the Jewish Agency, listing the names of her three sisters and her brother, who had traveled to America before the war. She asked them to try and locate them, as well as her brother Motel, who had escaped to Uruguay. The first to contact her was uncle Motel in Uruguay, who sent us papers so we could join him.

Phela and Monyek saw themselves as a couple, and the aunt asked Monyek to join us in Uruguay, but he wanted to go to America or to Canada, to find a permanent residence and suitable work. Phela wanted to stay with Monyek in Germany, but the aunt would not agree to leave Phela behind on German land.



On the Saturday before we left Feldafing, I had my Bar Mitzvah at the synagogue. The aunt baked cakes and the rabbi brought two bottles of wine. Before the Bar Mitzvah I would stay with the rabbi after class ended at the Talmud-Torah and he taught me to sing the blessings and to say the Haftarah from the Bible.

## 10

We traveled to France by train, and stayed in a fairly lousy hotel in Paris for a few days. Our room was on the sixth floor, and there was no elevator, so we had to climb up six floors on foot. We ate breakfast and dinner either in our room or on the street. The meals usually consisted of a long loaf of bread that the aunt or Phela bought in a bakery, and the tins we brought with us from Germany. When we ran out of tins, we bought food in Paris. We ate lunch outside of the hotel. We would travel on the metro to the Jewish area, the “Pelzel”, where there was a restaurant for the needy. The aunt took Sarah and Phela to the Eiffel Tower. She told Felusha and me to stay in the hotel, because we were still too small. She said that when we were older, we would probably come to Paris as tourists, and we could climb the tower then.

From Paris we traveled to the port city of Le-Havre, where we had to stay for a few days until we boarded a ship. We were instructed to stay on the deck, since our tickets did not include cabins. We lived on the deck for an entire month, and luckily it was summer and was not cold. We were sea-sick for a few days, especially the aunt. She would not eat, and only drank tea. There were other families living on the deck, and it was not boring. We ate our meals with the waiters, after everyone else had finished eating. During the nights we heard music from the dance hall, which was located on the level above the deck on which we stayed. Two fellows who became friendly with Phela and Sarah invited them to go dancing with them. Phela did not want to go with them, because she loved Monyek. The aunt would not allow Sarah to go alone with the fellow, and so Phela was forced to go dancing with one of them. Felusha was also invited to dance. I stayed with the aunt, who did not sleep until they had returned from dancing. Sarah would drive all of the men crazy with her beautiful eyes and her hearty, rolling laughter. The men liked to crowd around her, which put her in a good mood. Thanks to her, the waiters would bring fruit and ice cream out to the deck between meals. The night before our arrival in Uruguay, the aunt raised her arms to the skies, heaved a deep sigh, and said: “Thank God this nightmare will be over by tomorrow”.

In the morning, we reached the port of Montevideo. The sun was shining, and it was very hot. When the ship docked next to the pier, the sailors became busy with pulling ropes. We were among the first to stand by the ship’s rail, in an attempt to sight uncle Motel, who had come to welcome us. Standing on the pier in front of the ship were a few people who waved with their hands and with handkerchiefs. I waved back. I asked the aunt what uncle Motel looked like, and she thought about it and said, that she remembered him as a tall, strong man, with black, curly hair, a short, wide

nose, a black mustache, and blue eyes. I looked down, but none of the people waiting there fit her description. The ship was tied, a rope ladder was lowered, and a few people with bags boarded the ship. The sailors set up a table for them, and a line of people began to form near it. The aunt placed Felusha in the line, and we went to arrange our belongings. Sarah also stayed by the railing. She could not bend down to help us arrange the packages, because she had already fixed her hair... Phela carried the heaviest suitcase, while gritting her teeth in anger. I carried the medium suitcase, while the aunt carried the rest of our packages. We then joined Felusha in the line.

Sarah would occasionally yell that she could see uncle Motel. Everyone standing in line turned their heads towards Sarah. She had a strong voice, and in the past had wanted to be an opera singer and had taken singing lessons. Her teachers had told the aunt that it was a waste of time and money, but Sarah said that they just didn't understand. She insisted, and the aunt had no choice but to let her continue with her lessons. When they had finished checking and registering us, we walked towards the rope ladder. Phela demanded that Sarah take the heavy suitcase. Sarah lifted the suitcase and began to descend. One of the sailors immediately appeared and took the case away from Sarah, carrying it off with a jog. When he climbed back up, he approached Sarah, grabbed her hand, gave it a kiss, and said: "Merci, mademoiselle." Sarah began laughing her rolling laughter, and the aunt, who was walking behind her, stood and said to herself: "Svert mir nicht gitt" ("it looks bad to me"). Phela, who was right behind the aunt, grumbled and mumbled under her breath that "only she could create such displays."

We finally descended to the dock. We looked around, but no one approached us. We looked for a shaded spot, and stood with our cases and packages next to a large crane. Felusha and I stayed to guard our belongings, while the aunt and the daughters went to look for Motel. A few sailors were standing on the deck next to the railing, waving their arms, and we waved back. Felusha said that the sailors liked her, and that was the reason they were waving to her all the time. I looked at her, stopped waving, and thought that if they were waving at her, why did I need to wave back? The place slowly cleared of people. Some left on their own, and others were collected by their relatives.

We continued to wait, and Sarah asked the aunt if she had written to uncle Motel with the correct date of the ship's arrival at the port. The aunt said that she wrote the exact date. Sarah continued to ask, saying maybe the aunt had made a mistake, since she has been known to make mistakes in the past. When the aunt asked her what mistakes she was referring to, exactly, Sarah answered that she could not remember them at the moment. Phela interrupted and told them to stop talking nonsense. The entire exchange was in Yiddish. The aunt laughed, but I think she was angry. After the pier had emptied a little, we saw an adult couple pacing back and forth and looking

around. The man was tall, and stood erect, wearing a bright suit and white shoes, and a straw hat on his head. The woman, who was shorter than him, reached his shoulders. Her hair was curly, in a bluish-white shade, and she wore a blue dress with bright flowers. I asked the aunt if perhaps this was uncle Motel. She looked at him, and said she was not sure if it was him, as Motel never walked so upright. Suddenly, the man approached the aunt and asked her in Yiddish, if she was Rivkah. It turned out that they were the Goldman family, friends of uncle Motel. Motel had asked them to collect us. The Goldmans were close friends of uncle Motel, and he visited them often. The Goldmans had two grown sons and a daughter. Uncle Motel had two daughters from his previous wife, and both were already married. Mr. Goldman had a glass repair shop, where he also sold mirrors and picture frames. He drove us from the port in his big car. The aunt and his wife sat in the cabin, and we sat in the back with the packages. Goldman said that he would take us to his house first, will call Motel from there, and only then will drive us to him.

Leaving the port, we drove through a street with many stores. People were milling in the street, and it was a very lively area. An electric street car was traveling alongside of us. For the first time, I saw people jumping off from a streetcar while it was still moving. After a short while, we arrived in a quiet area with old houses. Mr. Goldman stopped, opened a wooden gate, and drove the car into a yard. He got out of his car and told us that we had arrived at his house. There was a table standing in the yard, surrounded by chairs. The place was shaded and pleasant, and there were some bushes and planters. The woman invited us to sit and brought us a cold refreshing drink. The aunt helped her with the serving. We heard the woman call out loudly: "Minka, come downstairs, we have guests." The aunt brought two large bottles with drinks, and the woman followed behind her with a tray filled with cakes, small plates, knives and forks.

A baby's cry was heard. A pretty woman with a baby in her arms came out to the yard. This was Minka, the Goldmans' daughter. She handed the baby to her mother, and began to kiss everyone. When she came to me, she looked at me, then hugged and kissed me warmly. When Minka was eighteen, she met a young man and they fell in love. She became pregnant and then the man left her. The baby in her arms was the daughter of that man. After a few years, she would marry another man and have two sons. These children, whom she so lovingly raised, would stay in the Diaspora, and would not be at her side when she would live in Jerusalem, old and sick with a harsh muscular atrophy disease.

Mr. Goldman came out to the yard, and said he had spoken with Motel and told him that we had arrived safely. The uncle asked that we come to him for lunch. The aunt asked Mr. Goldman what uncle Motel's occupation was. He told her that in the past, he was a successful businessman, with a

large furniture store on a main street in town. Since he married his current wife, however, his situation was not as good. The woman had an adult son, and her condition prior to the wedding was that Motel would make him a partner in his store. The son took over the store, and Motel was forced to leave and opened another furniture store. Since then Motel forbade the son to enter his house if he was in it.

We stayed a little while longer. Phela and Minka would not stop chatting, Sarah looked very bored, and Felusha played with the baby. Mr. Goldman said that we had to go to uncle Motel's, since the food his wife was preparing would turn cold. The aunt and Mrs. Goldman parted with hugs and kisses. Mrs. Goldman asked the aunt to come and visit them, since they lived only a twenty minute walk from uncle Motel's house. Minka also asked Phela to come and visit.

We drove to uncle Motel's. He lived in a quiet area with very few stores. Most of the houses were small, private homes, surrounded by fences. Trees grew in a few of the yards. Every so often, dogs could be heard barking. The car stopped next to one of the houses. A grown, corpulent man, with white hair and a thick gray mustache, came towards us with a big smile on his face and his arms outstretched. The aunt came out of the car, approached the man, and they hugged and cried. They stayed in this embrace, until Mr. Goldman approached them, and said: "Motel, there are a few other people you need to hug." But Motel would not stop hugging and crying... Motel was a very sensitive and kind-hearted man, but he did not have much luck in life. After he had hugged and kissed all of us, he went to the car, took the suitcase in one arm and the two packages in the other. He was a strong man, with thick arms, muscular legs, and the full body of a wrestler. His walk was steady, and he always walked with his legs spread a little apart, his feet facing forward, and his steps large, unlike Mr. Goldman, who took small steps and whose feet faced sideways.

Inside the house, a small, very thin woman with thin white hair that flowed to her shoulders welcomed us. Her watery eyes were large and bewildered, and her lips pale. She wore a long blue housecoat and wore red slippers. This was uncle Motel's wife. The aunt went to her and hugged her, but the woman stood apathetically. Uncle Motel called everyone loudly to sit around the table, eat and talk. Mr. Goldman thanked him, and said he had to go open his store, and so would not be able to join us for the meal.

The dining room ceiling was made of glass, and the sky was visible through it. At the center of the room stood a large round table, and around it were about ten chairs. It was not crowded. Uncle Motel brought a large serving dish with baked meat and potatoes, a large bowl of lettuce, and drinking bottles. The aunt asked Motel about the sisters and the brother in America. He said that there had been no contact between them over the past ten years. Uncle Motel's wife hardly touched her food. Occasionally, she

would sip from a white tin cup that rested near her on the table. After a few minutes she said that she was going to rest and left the table.

Uncle Motel told us, that his wife was diabetic, and was depressed. She did not speak much and would occasionally have angry outbursts, but never hurt anyone. He wanted to prepare us, in case such an outburst occurred. The aunt asked how quickly Felusha and I could begin to study. Uncle Motel, who was an inherent optimist, said that it would not be a problem. Tomorrow they would register us at the state school, and in the afternoon I could attend a yeshiva and Felusha could study at Beit-Yaakov. When we had finished eating, uncle Motel brought out a bowl of fruit. Later he brought out a thermos of boiling water and a mug. At the bottom of the mug he placed a few dark green berries, which he had removed from a bag, and over them he poured the boiling water. This was how he prepared a drink called "Germa Matte". Uncle Motel placed a short, silver tube in the mug, with a sieve at its bottom and an opening at its top. He drank the drink with the tube, and would occasionally add boiling water to it, until the thermos was empty. Uncle Motel let the aunt taste the drink, and she said that it was very bitter. He told her that some people added sugar to the drink, mostly the "gringos" who were the newer residents in the country.

Uncle Motel was an energetic man who never put things off. He would immediately carry out any decision that was made. The following day after breakfast he took Felusha and me to the state school. At first he spoke with the principal, and we understood nothing. Next we went to speak with the secretary, and uncle Motel gave her all of our particulars. They registered me to the fourth grade. They could not place me in a lower class, due to my age and my height. As it was, I would be taller than all the students. We did not enter our classrooms that day, because in the Uruguayan public schools, the students wore a uniform. Everyone wore a buttoned white robe, a blue belt, and a dark blue bow-tie.

We left the school and went to find the store in which the school uniform could be purchased. It was early, and the clothing stores were still closed. We entered a pizzeria, and the uncle ordered a pizza and malts for us, and a beer for himself. I asked uncle Motel, why it was that all of his siblings went to America, and he was the only one to go to Uruguay. He told me a very touching story; His father, Avraham, whom I had been named after, had a farm in the country. Motel would occasionally help him in the field. One summer, when Motel arrived at the field, he found his parents sitting and crying. They told him that the hooligan son of the Polish neighbor had set on fire all of the wheat bales which had been dried and ready for collection. As a result, a whole year's worth of work was lost. They became destitute and deeply in debt. After Motel had heard of the horrifying incident from his parents, he went to the neighboring farm. On the way, he picked up a long stone with a sharp edge. When he entered the yard, he met the neighbor's

son, who was standing by the stable and placing a saddle on a horse. Motel approached him and hit him on his head with the stone, between his eye and his ear. The wound began to bleed furiously and the goy fell to the ground. Motel mounted the horse and escaped to the city. The next day, he found out that the goy had died and that the police were looking for him. He understood that he had to escape as quickly as possible and boarded the first ship to depart on which he could find work. Motel worked on the ship for a few months, until he tired of being on the seas, and when the ship docked in Uruguay he disembarked and remained there.

Uncle Motel finished his beer, stood up from his chair and we followed him. We went outside, and found that the stores had already opened. The weather was nice, and we walked along the street, looking for a clothing store. The uncle found a store in which the uniform robes were sold. My robe was too long and wide, but uncle Motel said that I would grow, and that the robe might also shrink in the laundry. At the same store, uncle Motel also bought us bags, notebooks and pencils.

When we returned the aunt and her daughters were sitting outside. The aunt was in a foul mood, and told us that when she asked uncle Motel's wife what to make for lunch, she would not reply, went into her room and slammed the door. Uncle Motel explained again that his wife was a sickly woman, and would occasionally become depressed and would not care to see anyone. The aunt told him that she, her daughters and the children could not continue to live there in that kind of atmosphere. Uncle Motel took us all out for lunch. Before the meal he ordered a glass of cognac and drank it in one shot. When the aunt saw the meat roasting on the fire, she said she would not eat it, and ate only pasta with a tomato sauce. The rest of us ate the pasta as well as the meat, and drank malts. Uncle Motel drank beer. After the meal, Motel had to go to work in his store. The aunt asked him to take her to Mr. Goldman, because she wanted to talk to him about work for her and for her daughters. The uncle spoke with Mr. Goldman on the telephone and he said that we could come see him now. We got up and followed Motel. Phela and Sarah argued the whole way. Felusha and I trailed behind everyone. Felusha told me, that she was very nervous about going to school tomorrow. I calmed her and told her not to worry, because we would learn the language at school. Until we know the language, no one would speak to us.

We arrived at Mr. Goldman's house. Uncle Motel said that he was going to the store and would come to collect us in the evening. The aunt knocked on the door with an iron knob which was attached to it. I turned back, and approached uncle Motel, and asked him if I could come with him. He looked at me with surprise and agreed. The aunt heard, looked, and said nothing.

Uncle Motel and I exited to a central street and rode in a taxi. I looked out and saw that there were fewer houses. We left the city, arrived in an

industrial area, and got out in a place that had many stores and factories, which were all closed. The uncle explained that during lunch everyone took a “siesta”, everything was closed, and people rested in their homes. We walked for a little while, and the uncle stopped in front of two large doors. He removed a bunch of keys from his pocket, opened the lock, and slid the doors to either side. We went inside, where it was dark, and the strong scent of wood and old furniture welcomed us. The uncle lit the electricity and I saw that we were in a large and long warehouse. It had many types of furniture: cabinets, tables, chairs, beds, sofas and armchairs.

“Did you always have this store?” I asked. Uncle Motel told me that when he first arrived in Uruguay, he went around with two suitcases filled with fabrics, dresses, strings, needles, knitting needles, and the like, mostly things for women. He would go from door to door and sell on credit. Later he opened a store where his first wife worked while he continued to roam with the suitcases. When he stopped working with the suitcases, he opened a store for new furniture. He made a very nice living, until he was forced to leave it, because of his current wife’s son. When he finished his story, he sat at a desk, took out a thick notebook, looked through it, and told himself that he should not leave his employee alone in the store for so many hours.

An older man walked into the store, and the uncle asked him in Yiddish if he had sold anything. The man answered that he had not sold anything, and that no one had walked into the store. An old car stopped in front of the store, and a young couple got out of it and entered the store. The couple walked between the beds and cabinets, talked with the uncle for a long time, whispered to each other, and eventually gave the uncle a little money. After the uncle gave them a note, they shook hands and left the store. The uncle took a bottle out of a cabinet, poured from it into two glasses, and he and the older man drank from them.

The phone rang, and the man answered it, and handed it over to uncle Motel, telling him that Mr. Goldman wished to speak with him. I heard the uncle ask Mr. Goldman: “What happened to Rivkah, is she mad? Does she have no patience? Does she have no food? Why is she in such a rush to go to work?” The uncle’s face reddened, he slammed the phone down, took out the bottle and had another drink. Afterwards he looked at me and said: “Your aunt is going to live with the Goldmans.” Suddenly he raised his arms, slammed the desk hard, looked at the man, and said: “And what can I do if my wife is depressed? Should I kill her because she is a sick woman? I suffer from her, too.” Silence prevailed in the store.

I stayed with uncle Motel in the store until a very late hour. Other stores were also still open. Throughout the day, a few people entered the store, looked at the furniture, inquired about the prices and left. At night, the uncle called a taxi and we left. I looked outside, and in the dark everything looked different. When the taxi stopped, I realized that we had arrived at Mr.



Goldman's house. The uncle hugged me and tears moistened his eyes. He told me to get out, because the aunt was already at Mr. Goldman's.

I knocked on the door with the "iron hand" that was affixed to it. Phela opened the door and said: "Finally, you've arrived!" I came inside without answering. The aunt asked me if I had eaten anything and I nodded my head to indicate that I had not. She brought me two slices of bread spread with butter and jam, and poured me a cup of tea. The building in which the Goldmans lived had a yard, and all of our belongings were already in it. The Goldman family lived on the second floor. The ground floor had three rooms. The big room had a bed, table, and a few chairs. It was intended for the aunt and for Phela. The middle-sized room was for Sarah and Felusha, because Sarah could not stay in the same room as her sister, Phela, since they fought constantly. The small room had a bed, a small table, a chair and a dresser with drawers. It had a separate entrance and was to be mine. The door in the small room had to be kept open at all times; otherwise there was no air, as there was no window. I was tired, so the aunt made my bed and I went to sleep.

In the morning the aunt woke Felusha and me, so that we could get ready for school. I washed my face in the sink that was in the yard, and the aunt called us in to eat breakfast. There were fresh rolls on the table, which Mr. Goldman had brought in earlier. The aunt spread two of them for me, and two for Felusha. We ate one roll, and placed the other in our bags, to eat at school. The aunt brought us the uniform robes, and when I wore mine everyone began to laugh. The robe was very long and reached my ankles. The aunt told me to take it off and she would shorten it quickly. Felusha's robe fit her perfectly. Minka and Phela walked us to school, with the two of them walking in the lead and us following behind. Minka was tall, pretty, and voluptuous. She wore tight clothes which showed off her figure. Anyone passing her turned his head to get a second look at her.

The students at the school were organized in groups around the yard, with a teacher standing in front of each group. Minka showed the note to the man standing at the entrance to the yard, and he gave the note to Felusha and showed us which groups to join. When I neared my group, the teacher told me to stand at the back, behind all the students, and pointed to the spot with his hand. When I stood, I looked at all the students in front of me and saw that they were all shorter than me. At the center of the yard was a pole, to which a white flag with blue stripes and an illustration of a sun was attached. Pictures and statues of Artigas, the national liberator of Uruguay, were placed throughout the school. A few children with flutes stood near the flag. When they began to play, everyone stood still and sang the Uruguayan anthem, whose chorus was: "To live in my free land, or die." After singing the anthem, the students began to walk to the classrooms in an orderly fashion.

We entered the class, and all the students stood by their desks. I remained by the door, and the teacher placed his hand on my shoulder and led me to a bench at the back, which was empty. Two students stood on either side of every bench. There was no one standing near my bench. The teacher told the students to sit, and everyone sat down, as did I. The students took out books, and I took out a notebook. The teacher approached me with a book. The class became noisy, and the teacher hit his desk with a ruler. Everyone became silent and sat with their arms crossed. I also crossed my arms. The teacher wrote something on the board, and a few children raised their arm, while I continued to sit with my arms crossed. Some of the children turned their heads back, looked at me and giggled. The teacher said something and they became quiet.

The teacher was a tall man, with short black hair. His face was reddish and his eyes were large and black. His lips were full and were a dark shade of red, his nose was short and his nostrils large, and his black mustache hairs stuck out. He wore a faded blue suit, a light blue shirt, and a black tie. I watched the teacher and very much wanted to draw him. I began to draw, but stopped immediately. I was afraid that I would not succeed, the children would mock me, and the teacher would become angry. I turned the page in my notebook and began to draw the fort that was photographed in the book. I had seen this fort in reality, when the ship had docked in the port. The students were busy with their writing, and the teacher approached me and placed two pieces of red paper on the table. He looked at the drawing, patted my shoulder, and smiled. A bell sounded, and the students left the classroom and burst outside. Only the teacher and I remained in the class. He went to the door and signaled for me to follow him, and we both descended the stairs. The teacher spoke to me, but I understood nothing, in spite of the fact that he used hand gestures.

We went out to the yard, and he called one of the students from the class and said something to him. The child looked at me and signaled with his hand for me to come with him. We went behind the school buildings, where there were some small playgrounds. Each playground had a goal. They stood me at the goal so that I could stop the balls that the students were kicking. I took off my robe, like the other children had. I was very tense, and did not mind falling and taking risks while stopping the balls. When a child with a ball came near me, I jumped on him and would not let the ball enter the net. Every time I stopped a ball, the children clapped their hands for me. I felt better, and the children took noticed of me and looked at me differently.

The bell rang, and everyone started to run to class. The child who had brought me to the court waited for me, and we ran in together. During lessons I would sit quietly and draw. At the end of each class I would receive two pieces of red paper from the teacher, for behaving well.

The distance between the school and Mr. Goldman's house was shorter than the distance to uncle Motel's house. When I had returned home at the end of the school day, the aunt asked me how school was and what I had done there. I took out my notebook and showed her my drawings. She asked if this was what the teacher had taught, and I told her that I did not understand anything, but had received red pieces of paper for behaving well. She told me to ask Minka to teach me how to read a little Spanish. The aunt placed a bowl filled with soup and pieces of meat on the table, as well as two slices of bread. I finished all of the food and the aunt told me to go and rest, because Mr. Goldman would be taking me to register for the yeshiva after the "siesta".

Following the "siesta", I left the house with Mr. Goldman and the aunt. We arrived in an area that had few houses. A tall hexagonal building stood in an empty field, surrounded by a wall that was the height of a human. Its windows were colorful, narrow and long. A small Star of David was affixed in the upper part of the building. This was the synagogue.

We entered through the gate and climbed the marble steps to the entrance. We rang the bell and a child about my age opened the door. Mr. Goldman entered first, with me behind him, and the aunt, whose head was covered with a kerchief, entering last.

The interior was beautiful. The ceiling was high, and the Holy Ark was made of marble and covered with a white curtain embroidered in golden letters. In the center, just like every other synagogue, was a stage that could be mounted from either side. There were padded seats on either side of the stage, and there was a prayer stand in front of each of them. In the back part of the synagogue, was an upper balcony with a concrete railing, across which a thin curtain was drawn. This was the women's gallery. There was a long table near the back wall, around which sat seven children who wore either a skullcap or a peaked hat. At the head of the table sat a middle-aged man, who wore gold-rimmed glasses. His eyes were blue and one of them crossed sideways. He was cleanly shaven and his red hair was very closely shorn. The man wore a light blue suit, a white shirt, a black tie, and on his head was a black skullcap. The man was one of the two rabbis in Montevideo. When he saw Mr. Goldman he rose, approached him, and shook his hand. After exchanging some pleasantries, Mr. Goldman briefly explained to the rabbi who we were, where we came from, and what our situation was. He told him that we were living with him now. The rabbi greeted the aunt without shaking her hand, looked at me, and assured Mr. Goldman and the aunt that everything would be all right.

The aunt and Mr. Goldman left, and the rabbi told me to sit at the table and read the Talmud with the child sitting next to me. We were reading the "Baba Metziah" tractate. Every so often, while a child read aloud from the Talmud, the rabbi would raise his head to check that everyone was reading

from their own Talmud. When he explained something, he would close one eye, usually the crossed one, and would scratch his head through his skullcap. Sometimes, he would hold his chin between his thumb and finger; look up at the ceiling, and talk. During the lesson he would ask one student to read and explain, or he would ask one to read and another to explain. All of the children had to be attentive and always be prepared. All of the children were calm and well behaved. The rabbi inspired a good atmosphere, and never raised his voice. The lessons lasted about three hours, with one break. During the break we played with a ball in the synagogue yard.

On Friday evening, I went to pray with Mr. Goldman. Many people, mostly men, attended the synagogue. The rabbi had a pretty voice. When we returned home, the smell of the gefilte fish filled the house. We went up to the second floor, since Mrs. Goldman had invited us for Shabbat dinner. Mr. Goldman made the Kiddush and following the meal, sang the Shabbat songs. He asked the aunt to wake me early the next day, so that I could say the “Hagomel” blessing, for having safely endured our ocean voyage. After we had cake and tea, Phela helped Minka to wash the dishes, and we went down to our floor.

The following day, Saturday morning, the aunt woke me early and gave me a slice of cake and a cup of tea. Mr. Goldman came down the stairs, and I was already waiting to join him. At the synagogue, Mr. Goldman had a much respected seat. He sat in the front row, in front of the Holy Ark, by the cantor. I sat far away from him. I had a Siddur and knew how to pray, and was able to follow the cantor’s prayer. The worshippers enjoyed the cantor, and almost everyone participated in the prayer and did not go outside to talk. When they began to sell the calls to read from the Torah, Mr. Goldman arranged for me to be called along with him. I made the “Hagomel” blessing and received the blessing from the congregants. I asked them to bless the aunt as well.

Following the Mussaf prayer, a fellow who was a little older than me approached me. He was a leader at Bnei-Akiva, named Leon. Leon invited my sister and me to the Bnei-Akiva branch that was situated not far from Mr. Goldman’s store. He said that every Saturday at five o’clock, there was a meeting at the branch, where they sang and danced folk dances, and he would give a lecture about something relating to Israel. He explained to me where exactly the branch was located, saying that the group members would be very happy if we came. He added that it was recommended for a boy who attended synagogue to also belong to a youth movement like Bnei-Akiva. We shook hands and Leon returned to his seat.

When I returned home, I told the aunt that Leon had invited us to Bnei-Akiva. The aunt was very happy, because she did not want us to belong to the Shomer Hatzair or the Gordons. Bnei-Akiva at least had some Yiddishkeit. Felusha hesitated, unsure that she wanted to go to Bnei-Akiva.

She said that she did not know anyone there. The aunt told her to go once, and if she did not like it, not to go back. Besides, she knew me, so she would not be alone.

We ate lunch at Mrs. Goldman's. Minka whispered to me, that after the meal, once her daughter fell asleep, she would come downstairs and teach us some Spanish. Felusha and I remained in our Shabbat clothes. Minka came with a Spanish book and read us a short story, which she then explained in Yiddish. Later, she let us read a little as well. She said that every afternoon, after her daughter fell asleep, she would come down and help us with our homework. We waited in the yard until ten minutes to five, and then went to the Bnei-Akiva branch.

The branch was on the second floor of an old building, at a fair distance from the center of town, in an area called "Goas". There were many stores there, mostly belonging to Jews. There were delicatessens, bakeries, clothing stores, house wares stores, and the like. There was also a fabric store belonging to Leon's family and the glazing business belonging to Mr. Goldman. You could travel from "Goas" to the port using the number 7 streetcar. It crossed most of the city in about half an hour. Before we left for Bnei-Akiva I looked in the mirror, placed the beret on my head in a way that best showed off my forelock, and placed my skullcap in my pocket.

When we reached the building, shouts and loud voices emanated from the second floor. We climbed the stairs and entered a large room that had a ping-pong table in the back. There were a few boys and girls sitting on benches and talking. A few couples stood off to the side and looked at the sitting children. I noticed that all of the boys and girls were taller than us. Leon sat on a chair by one of the tables. When he saw us he stood up, called everyone and asked them to gather around him. Felusha and I remained standing. Leon began to speak in a faltering Yiddish, pointed to us, and said he was happy that two new members were joining the Bnei-Akiva branch today. Leon explained: "They are brother and sister, who survived the war and recently arrived in Montevideo." Next, he opened the Pentateuch, spoke about the portion of the week and explained it, alternating between Spanish and Yiddish, so that we could also understand it. Most of the members knew a little Yiddish, from their parents. The language that they spoke in their homes was Spanish.

After Leon's speech, they sang Hebrew songs. Leon asked us which songs we could sing, and we told him that we knew some songs in Yiddish and in Hebrew. He asked us to sing something, so we sang the song in Yiddish about the tree growing in the yard, and a few Hebrew songs that we had learned in Feldafing. Everyone clapped and was very friendly. We danced the hora, and afterwards ate cookies and drank juice. We did not feel like strangers, as we were received very warmly, as if we had known them for a long time. When everyone began to disperse, Leon said that we could come

to the branch on Sunday mornings, as well, to talk and to play ping-pong, and in the afternoon to go eat pizza together, or to see a film. We returned home and told the aunt that we had enjoyed ourselves. The aunt was pleased that we had found Jewish friends, and wouldn't have to associate with the "shkotzim". After dinner, Minka came down and asked Felusha and me to take out the book that our teacher had given us. We recognized the Latin letters, and continued to read, even though we did not understand the meaning of the words. We sat by the table in the big room, and Minka read line after line and explained it. The aunt sat to the side and listened. Sarah entered the room and asked Minka when they would be going for a walk and for some fresh air. The aunt asked her not to interrupt and told her that she was also welcome to sit and listen, as it could do her no harm, but Sarah left the room. After reading a few pages, Minka told us to go to our rooms and to read on our own. She went to get dressed for her walk with Phela and Sarah.

The following afternoon, we went to the Bnei-Akiva branch. There were a few boys and girls there, and the girls called Felusha over, so I went to watch two boys who were playing ping-pong. Whomever lost relinquished his place to another player. There were already a few boys waiting. When my turn arrived, after a short practice, we began to play. I began to earn more and more points, and the boys watching the game were amazed. They talked and laughed amongst themselves. From their hand gestures I gathered that they were surprised by the fact that a short skinny boy, a "gringo", was winning the game. They called over the boys and girls in the hall to come and watch the match. The girls looked at me admiringly and smiled. I was embarrassed and made every effort to win. After three wins, I said that I was tired. I put the racket down and gave my place to another player. After all the players became tired and the girls finished chatting, we went to eat lunch. We arranged to meet by the branch at five in the afternoon.

A little before five o'clock, I got dressed, combed my hair, and wore my beret off to the side, so that my forelock stood out on my forehead, and left with Felusha for the branch. When we arrived, most of the members were already outside. None of the boys wore a head cover, and I was the only one with a hat. We began to walk, with the boys walking in one group and the girls in another. A few couples walked separately from the groups. After an hour, we arrived at a very well-lit area. It had stalls selling pizzas and beverages. Everyone took out money and bought pizza and drinks. When they noticed that we didn't have money, they treated us with their money. We entered a movie theater nearby, and watched a film about a gaucho who fights and defeats cattle bandits. Although Felusha and I did not understand anything, it was interesting. When we left the hall it was already dark outside. The members dispersed, and we walked back with the few members who lived near the branch. When we returned home, the aunt was sitting by the table and writing letters. She asked what we had done and we told her.

Felusha told her that I had beaten the children at ping-pong and that everyone was amazed that I could play so well.

I asked the aunt whom she was writing to, and she said it was a letter to the Jewish Agency, asking for their help with finding the addresses for my grandfather – my father's father, and my uncle Baruch – my father's brother, and Hanna and Michaela – my father's sisters. The aunt remembered that they had gone to Israel before the war and she wanted to let them know that we were alive. Lately, the aunt had written many letters; to Bernard, to the Blanck family, to Sakovitz and Czunku, to her uncle Favish, and to her three sisters in America. The aunt never broke off contact with any of the people, who had helped us during our wandering, or with the family members who had remained alive.

My studies at the state school plodded along. I progressed nicely with the language, due to Minka's help. Felusha was a good, diligent student, and never strayed from her studies. I was the oldest in my class, and did not associate with anyone. I continued to sit with my arms crossed during most lessons, and continued to earn the red pieces of paper. My friends at Bnei-Akiva were two or three years older than me. I had heard that many of them were already working, and told the aunt that I also wanted to work. Two of the fellows that I had met at the synagogue had told me that they went out every morning with two large suitcases and sold things on credit, mostly women's products. The initial payments that they collected when delivering the product covered all of their costs, and the remaining payments, if made, were their profit. For the most part, people made no more than two or three payments, but the sellers had already made a profit.

The aunt said that she wanted me to study. "Only those who study get anywhere in life," she said. The aunt told us, that she already found a job not far from where we lived, with a family who had a son and daughter of our ages. The man had a tailoring business, and the woman worked in textiles. The man's blind mother lived in their house, and they wanted the aunt to care for her, since she stayed home alone all day. When they discovered that the aunt could sew, they would also give her occasional hand-sewing work, for additional pay. Phela had also found work not far from Mr. Goldman's store, in a Jewish delicatessen. They sold pickles, sardines, cheeses, special breads, sausages, and beverages. Phela was quick and responsible, and earned well. The buyers loved her very much and came to shop at the delicatessen because of her. Phela continued to write to Monyek throughout this period.

Sarah had found work in a cosmetic store. They sold creams, perfumes, and makeup there. In the evenings, when she would return from work, a strong scent of perfume would radiate from her. Her cheeks and lips were red, and she wore her hair differently every time. Every so often she would go to the movie theater with a young man, in whom she would inevitably find a flaw. She mostly complained that the fellows were short and

boring, even though they were taller than her. Sarah found a few friends who behaved very similarly to her. They did not have a steady boyfriend, either. Every month, after receiving her pay, she would go out with her friends and they would buy themselves something. The aunt was displeased with this habit, as our financial situation was quite poor at the time and the aunt did not wish for us to be dependent on other people.

One day, a bespectacled man with a long black beard came to visit us at the yeshiva. Although it was not a cold day, he wore a long black coat and a black hat. The rabbi introduced him as the rabbi of the Borough Park yeshiva in Brooklyn, America. Our rabbi asked us questions, and the guest listened. The rabbi asked me easy questions, and I was able to answer all of them. I felt confident and saw that the guest was watching me and nodding his approval.

After the recess, the rabbi said that the guest wished to speak with me. We exited the yeshiva and walked around the yard. The rabbi from America asked me about my parents, about what had happened to me in the war, about my return to Judaism, and whether there were other men in my family besides me. I answered all of his questions. He said that he wished to meet the aunt, and asked her to come with me to the yeshiva the following day. In the evening I told the aunt about the meeting, and she was very excited. The aunt asked Mrs. Goldman to take her place with the elderly woman she cared for, and the following afternoon, went with me to the yeshiva.

The rabbi and the guest were already at the yeshiva, and greeted the aunt without a handshake. The rabbi came in to teach us while the aunt spoke with the rabbi from America. In the evening, the aunt told us that the rabbi suggested that he could take me to his yeshiva in Brooklyn. I would spend half the day in holy studies, and the other half on general studies, and in addition, would acquire a profession according to my skills. When I heard this, I was thrilled, and immediately agreed. Felusha began to cry and told me not to leave her alone, because she would not go to Bnei-Akiva. Sarah was supportive and asked the aunt if she could go with me. The aunt told her that we would have to ask the rabbi. The atmosphere became tense. Phela told the aunt, that I was already old enough and that she should consider the proposal of sending me to America. The next day, the tension was cut when a letter had arrived from my grandfather, Daniel, who was living in Israel. The grandfather wrote that he had received the letter advising that we were still alive, and that he could not stop crying and thinking about us. He was thrilled to have the two orphans of his son Moshe, z"l, to remind him of his son, and was yearning for all of us to arrive in Israel quickly. The grandfather wrote that he would prepare a place for us to live and would arrange for schooling for the children. The aunt went to the yeshiva and showed the two rabbis the letter from the grandfather. The aunt said that she could not be



responsible for sending the boy to America, and that she had to take us to Israel, to end our wandering and to be rid of the suitcases once and for all.

One Sunday, uncle Motel came by with his old car and asked whether any of us wanted to join him for a trip. He preferred for all of us to come, so that we could have a picnic out in nature. The aunt said that she had to do some sewing for the woman she worked for, and Phela said she was going to the delicatessen because many Jewish customers came there on Sundays. Everyone had a valid excuse, and in the end, I was the only one free, so I joined him. He looked at me and said that at least he would not be bored. After a short ride, uncle Motel stopped at a delicatessen and bought some rolls with sausage, two bottles of beer, two bottles of malt, a small bottle of cognac, and two packets of cigarettes. We continued driving. The streets were almost empty, and a few people walked around, holding bottles and singing loudly. Every so often an empty streetcar rolled by, ringing its bells to try and rouse some people to ride in it. A few of the Jews, mostly the religious ones, did not work from Friday afternoon until Monday morning. The rest of the population, including many Jews, did not stop working until Saturday afternoon.

We reached a large, nearly empty parking lot. Uncle Motel parked his car, took out a big old blanket and let me hold it. He took out a folding wooden chair and a wicker basket containing a large thermos, a wooden mug, a silver straw for drinking mate, and some apples. We carried everything and began to walk. "What is this place to which we're going?" I asked, and the uncle told me it was one of the largest and prettiest parks in Montevideo.

We entered the park through a gate, which was flanked by animal statues. Further down, we saw a small square surrounded by benches, which had a green statue of the national liberator, Artigas, at its center. We continued to walk through the boulevard, which had tall trees growing on either side, interspersed with statues of men, women, and children with wings. Beneath the trees we saw families sitting on blankets and children playing with a ball. We found a tree with many branches, spread our blanket beneath it, arranged our things on one of the corners of the blanket, and sat down. The uncle took out two sandwiches, and we began to eat. The uncle poured me a malt beer and poured himself a beer. Uncle Motel said that there was a time when he went on many picnics in nature. This was with his previous wife, when his daughters were little. Uncle Motel loved open fields, as they reminded him of the fields he worked on near his parents' home. He remembered the burning grain in their field, and how the work of an entire year was ruined. He could not restrain himself, did what he did, and paid the price. Since his escape he had no contact with his parents, and did not even know when they had passed away. Tears filled his eyes. The uncle took out the cognac bottle, took a long sip, and returned the bottle to its place.

Afterwards he stretched his arms over his head, sighed deeply, lay down on the blanket, and began to snore.

I lay down on my stomach and looked around me. Many families with children continued to arrive and settled under the trees. I rested my head on my arm and fell asleep. Uncle Motel woke me and said that we had both fallen into a light sleep, due to the fresh air. He took two apples out of the basket, gave one to me, and began to eat the other. He asked me about my studies, at school and at the yeshiva. He inquired if I still wore the white robe. I told him everything, and also about the rabbi who wanted to take me to America. He asked if I remembered my parents, when I had parted from my father, and what happened to mother and to my younger brother. I told him everything in detail, and throughout my story he sighed and wiped his tears.

After he sipped from the cognac bottle some more, he suggested that we get up and walk a little, but that we not get too far from our belongings. We walked among the trees, and the uncle greeted every family we passed, and was invited to sit with them for a drink. He politely refused, saying that his family was waiting for him. The park filled with people and children. Some played the guitar, and sang or danced, and it was pretty and pleasant. We returned to our place, and the uncle took out sandwiches for us to eat. Afterwards he gave me a bottle of malt, and took out the thermos for himself, drank matte and smoked a cigarette. When the sun began to set, we packed our belongings and walked along the boulevard towards a lake. There were many boats floating in the lake, and along the pier were rowboats for rent.

The uncle asked me if I wanted to row a boat, and I told him that I had never been in a rowboat. He approached the man on the pier, spoke with him, paid him, and the man led us to a boat painted white. The man held the boat to prevent it from moving, and I climbed in first, walked towards the bow, and sat down. The uncle climbed in after me with the chair and the basket, placed them at the bottom of the boat, and sat in the center. He took the oars in his arms and began to row. At first I was a little frightened, but then I began to enjoy myself.

The water was a clear shade of blue, a light wind blew, and white birds flew very close to the water, occasionally coming to a rest on the bow of the boat. The uncle steered with the oars, to make sure we did not collide with the other boats. He asked me to come and sit with him in the center of the boat, and I approached him with hesitant steps and sat next to him. He gave me one of the oars and we rowed together. After an hour, the uncle said we had to go back. I hardly felt the time go by.

We rowed back towards the pier, left the boat, and walked towards the car. The uncle dropped me off by Mr. Goldman's house. Before he drove off, I thanked him, bent down and kissed his cheek. He became very emotional, and said that we should go on such picnics often. Only Felusha and Sarah

were home when I came in. I went to my room; feeling tired, and lay down on my bed.

At school I had not progressed much, and had not gotten to know the other students. They were younger than me, and I could not behave like one of the natives. I had gone through much in my short life, and my way of thinking was different and more mature. I was already thinking of work, money, a profession, and even about having my own family. During lessons I would draw or read simple books. I continued to earn red papers for good behavior. On Saturdays I would attend synagogue with Mr. Goldman. Activities at the Bnei-Akiva branch continued as usual, always starting with Leon's lecture about the portion of the week, continuing with dancing and ending with the members going out for group walks in the streets.

One night while we were walking, a pretty, shapely girl with dirty blonde curls began to walk near me. When she smiled, her eyes crinkled, two dimples appeared in her cheeks, and her bright white teeth were exposed. She was taller than me, and her name was Rosie. She told me about her family; Her father had a furniture store, and her brother, who was ten years older than her, worked with him in the store. She was still a high school student and had not decided what she wanted to do when she grew up. She said that she really liked the Yiddish song that Felusha and I had sung, and asked me to write down the lyrics because she wanted to sing it at home as a surprise for her mother. We arranged for her to come see me the next day, on Sunday evening. I knew that there would be no one at home and I could teach her the song.

Suddenly, Rosie stood facing me, hugged me, and kissed me on the lips. I enjoyed it and a warmth spread through my entire body. She smiled and told me to kiss her back. I stood on the tips of my toes, she bent down a little, and I kissed her. We continued walking until we reached the streetcar station. Rosie said that she would return home by streetcar, and when the streetcar arrived, she climbed on it with a smile, and I remained rooted in my spot until the streetcar disappeared from view. I began to walk home, and along the way thought about what had happened, and realized that it had not been a dream. I wondered whether it was a one-time occurrence, or whether it would continue, but was pleased nonetheless.

From the moment I entered my little room, I kept waiting for the following afternoon to arrive. The following morning I awoke early, stood by the mirror, and combed my forelock upwards. I wanted my hair to stand up, to make me look taller, but the hair fell. The aunt came out and asked whether I was going somewhere, and I said that I wanted to stop studying and to start selling things from door to door with suitcases. The aunt was very angry and told me to get that idea out of my head, because I was not suited to it, and someone could rob or stab me. I told her that I would do some other kind of work.

The aunt raised her voice, which was very unlike her, and said that without schooling I would amount to nothing in life, and that I had to continue studying, as I had missed the first few years of school. “Phela and I work. That is more than enough for our rent and expenses. You and Felusha must continue to study to make up what you missed during the war.” I lowered my head and told the aunt that you couldn’t study when you kept moving from country to country and had to keep starting over. The students in my class were two or three years younger than me and would laugh at me. I was also embarrassed to wear the white robe, in case I ran into my friends from Bnei-Akiva. The aunt did not respond. I returned to my room and lay in my bed.

In the afternoon, when the aunt and Phela returned, I was sent to the bakery to collect the potato pie that the aunt had taken there in a pan that morning. We all ate and I took a plate of pie up to Mrs. Goldman. The aunt said that she was going to take care of her employer’s mother. Phela and Minka decided to go out for a walk, and maybe go to a movie later. Sarah was meeting a friend, and Felusha had arranged to meet her friend Ruthie. I quickly walked to my room before they found something for me to do. I lay in my bed, but could not relax. After a while I got up, combed my hair, and picked up the book I was reading in class. I looked at the letters, but kept seeing Rosie’s image smiling at me. I closed the book, lay down, and began to count. When I reached one thousand, I heard a door slam. I started counting again, and this time I reached seven hundred when I heard another door slam. I quietly went to Sarah’s closet, and took some brilliantine to put in my hair, to make it stand up and make me look taller. I quietly entered the aunt’s room, and nearly passed out. I was sure that there was no one there, and to my surprise, found Felusha sitting by the table and reading a book. Felusha raised her eyes in puzzlement, and asked why I was tiptoeing. I answered that walking on your tiptoes made you taller faster. She said it was because I wanted to be as tall as Rosie, and I told her that I wanted to be taller than her.

“Why aren’t you going to meet Ruthie? It’s not nice to keep her waiting.” Felusha answered that the book was much more interesting. I sat next to her and disturbed her concentration. After she read a few more pages, she left the book and decided to go meet Ruthie in her house. She looked at me and said that lately I had become a pest, but Ruthie thought I was a nice boy. When she went to her room, I put the brilliantine in my hair, combed it upward, and it remained standing like a sheaf of straw. I looked in the mirror again and barely recognized myself. My hair and forehead shone, just like shoes after a shining. I sat down on the bed, afraid to lie down in case the hair style would be ruined. I heard a door slam and understood that Felusha had left. I took another look in the mirror, went to my room, and waited for a knock on the door. Suddenly, I thought I heard a knock, and went to the

door, but no one was there. I paced across the room, drank some water, closed my eyes and counted to one thousand.

When I opened my eyes, it was already dark, and suddenly I heard a knock at the door. My heart beat wildly, and I looked in the mirror again and walked towards the door with a beaming smile and a gleeful heart. I opened the door, and found Pinchas, a friend from school that everyone called Poncho, standing in front of me. Poncho visited me often. For a while he tried to convince me to come sell things from a suitcase with him, and even offered me a partnership. He stood at the doorway, his head upright and his red hair greased and pulled back. "Will we continue to stand here and face each other for much longer?" he asked with a smile. I led him into the room. I could not stop thinking about Rosie, and why she did not come even though she had promised she would. "Why are you so quiet today?" he asked. "You're silent, too," I answered. He asked if I had asked the aunt about working as a salesman with suitcases. I told him that the aunt would not agree under any circumstance, because she was afraid I would be robbed or stabbed. Poncho said that they rob sometimes, but never stab.

We left the house and took the number 7 streetcar to the center of town, where we alighted and began to walk. Poncho said that he had been successful that week, and earned a lot of money. He still hoped that I could join him as his partner. I told him that I did not want to upset the aunt, because she had many troubles without my adding to them. We had reached "De Julio" street, the main street in Montevideo. The street was very well-lit, the sidewalks wide, and nicely dressed people of all ages milled around it. Groups of youths talked loudly and laughed. Stores with large window displays were lit on either side of the street. You could hardly tell it was nighttime. We walked on one side of the street for over an hour. Poncho said that he was tired and hungry already so we crossed the street and began to walk back. We sat down at a pizzeria, and Poncho ordered a pizza and drinks for both of us. For me he ordered a malt beer, and for himself a regular beer in a large glass. I arrived home very late, and it was dark and quiet. I went to bed, felt the fatigue envelope me, and fell asleep.

## 11

The school year ended. In the afternoon, the students gathered in the school yard. A stage was erected in a shaded area, and on the wall facing it was a national flag, painted white with light blue stripes and a sun with yellow rays at its left corner. A large children's choir sang the national anthem and a few other songs. Following the choir were a few other performances by students from the various grades. Everyone received certificates, and in addition to my certificate, I received a Spanish-Spanish dictionary, as a reward for good behavior. After the performances ended, the teacher approached me along with a tall, pretty woman. She held out her hand with a smile and we shook hands. The teacher told her that I was the child he had told her about, who had survived the war and whose parents were killed by the Nazis.

The following day, I told the aunt that I want to start working. The aunt said she would inquire with her employer, and also with Mr. Goldman. Mr. Goldman needed assistance at the store. He told me to sit by the phone, answer the calls when he was not there, and record the names and phone numbers of the callers. Because of my relationship to the aunt, I received three peso coins at the end of each day. I kept one for myself and gave two to the aunt.

In the meantime, the aunt had spoken about me to her employer, Mr. Pshichtzki. After a few days, he said that he had a friend who was a tanner, who had agreed to teach me how to sew furs. For two weeks I would apprentice and work for him with no pay, and afterwards he would decide whether I could stay on, or whether I would need to find other work. On the first day, Mr. Pshichtzki came with me. The tanner was a fat, tall man with a bald head. He looked at me, extended his hand, and told me that his name was Juan and that he would be willing to try to teach me for a day or two. If I mastered the work well enough, I could continue, and if not, he would tell me not to return. Mr. Pshichtzki nodded his head with approval and left. The tanner exited and left me alone for a few minutes.

I looked around, and saw three sewing machines in the room. In the center was a large table, on which furs, sewing tools, a measuring tape, scissors, and a piece of gray chalk were strewn. On either side were closed cabinets secured by locks. I approached one of the two windows and look out. The street was quiet and clean. It was a neighborhood of small homes, mostly two-stories high, with red roofs. The houses were well-kept and surrounded by gardens. A few of the homes had cars parked next to them.

I approached a sewing machine, looked at it, and understood nothing. I neared the second window, from which a similar view appeared, however, a few cars drove by as well. Juan walked back into the room and said that it

was about time we did something. He opened one of the cabinets. Inside hung several sleeveless fur coats and on the side lay many pieces of black and brown fur. Juan took out a large pile of fur pieces, placed it on the table, selected a few pieces, arranged them according to the appropriate color, and went to one of the sewing machines. I sat next to him while he explained how to operate the machine, how to move the legs, and how to stop. He also showed me the process of threading the needle. I had a bit of a hard time, but eventually I succeeded. Afterwards he told me how to remove the “tzifka”, another spool which was smaller and hidden, and how to twist the twine around it; you attached it to the spinning machine wheel, and once it filled, you returned it to its place.

We took a break, and Juan told me to eat something. Because I had forgotten to bring food, I told him that I was not hungry. He looked at me, left the room and told me not to open the door to anyone, because he had a key. Juan came back and handed me a paper bag and a bottle of cola. After he opened the bottle with an opener, he told me to take my time with my meal, because there was not that much work to do in any event. I ate one of the two rolls that were in the bag and drank half of the bottle of cola. I went to the table, and watched how Juan matched pieces of fur to paper cutouts. Then he took two pieces of fur, went to the machine, and sewed them on while they were backwards, with the fur facing in and the skin facing out. In order to fit all of the hairs on the inside, he used long tweezers. When he finished sewing, he turned the pieces over to reveal one piece on which no signs of a seam were evident. Juan explained to me that when sewing furs, the seams could never be seen between the pieces, and the colors had to match exactly. The final outcome had to look like one piece. On that day he did not let me sew. I only stood and watched.

In the early afternoon he sent me home and told me to return the following day at nine. It was not until the third day that Juan had let me sew with the sewing machine. I connected two old pieces of fur. He checked my work and said that it was not bad, and gave me two more pieces. Juan told me not to rush and to make sure that all of the hairs faced in, so that the sewing was accurate and there were no bare patches. At the end of the month, Juan gave me thirty pesos.

One day, Juan wrapped a fur coat in a large piece of paper, folded it in half, and let me hold it. I followed him to his car, where he sat behind the wheel and I took the back seat. We arrived at a street with beautiful tall houses, parked next to one of the houses and got out of the car. Juan rang the bell, the door opened, and we climbed many stairs. A woman stood at the entrance, and said that she was very pleased to see the gentleman. He opened the wrapping paper and spread out the fur coat in front of her. She wore it and they entered a room which had a large mirror. I sat and waited on the sofa. When they returned, she was still wearing the fur, and handed me five

pesos. I accepted them and thanked her. When we left, Juan smiled at me. I handed him the money, and he told me that it was mine, that I had earned it for holding the coat the whole way. I placed the money in my pocket. When I returned home, I told the aunt about the woman who had bought the fur coat, took out the money, and placed it on the table. The aunt told me to keep the money for myself.

I learned how to sew furs very quickly, and the tanner was pleased. In the second month I earned sixty pesos. I stopped studying at school and at the yeshiva. On Saturdays I continued to attend synagogue with Mr. Goldman in the morning and Bnei-Akiva in the afternoon. Rosie would look at me, but I would avert my head, in complete contrast with the feeling in my heart.

Leon, our leader, said that a month from then on Sunday, a ping-pong competition would be held between us and the center branch. In order to win we would have to practice diligently every Sunday, and we could also practice on weekday evenings. Some of the fellows on the team were assigned names like El Indio, El Pozito, El Corte, and the like. They called me El Polko, because they knew that I was Polish.

I befriended a fellow at the club named Moshe Malter. He was thin, tall, and bespectacled. Every Saturday, before we went to the club he would come to my house wearing a dark blue suit, a white shirt and a tie. The aunt would serve us home made cookies and tea. The aunt asked Moshe if all of the boys at the club wore a suit. Moshe explained that every boy received a suit for his bar mitzvah, and he wore it only on Saturdays and holidays, when attending synagogue and going to the club. Sometimes he also wore a hat. The aunt looked at me. I was wearing my work pants, a white shirt, a sweater, and a beret on my head. The following day she sent me to her employer, to sew me a suit for Saturdays and holidays. We selected a gray fabric with a thin red stripe. The tailor took my measurements and the following week the suit was ready. On Saturday when I went to synagogue, I wore the suit. It was very beautiful, and everyone that saw it said that the tailor had done an excellent job. I felt like a scarecrow because I was very thin and the tailor had given the suit very wide shoulders, to make sure it fit me for many years to come.

On the day of the competition I awoke early and went to the club. There were two fellows there playing ping-pong, so I waited for one to lose, entered the game and won. Afterwards more fellows arrived, and I let them play. I was very nervous, and could not relax, especially once the girls had begun to arrive. Rosie arrived with a fellow from the center branch. They smiled at each other. This fellow was one of the participants in the competition.

The games began, and the spectators cheered and clapped their hands. Leon asked them to be quiet and to stand further back from the table. It was



very tense. The competitors from the center branch were much taller than us and had long arms.

I was the shortest on our team. When my turn came, I failed to stop the first five passed, but so did my counterpart. Later on, I stopped all of my opponent's blows and won. The final game was between me and the fellow with whom Rosie had arrived. Our game lasted a very long time, and finally, I won by one point. There was a great ruckus and my friends lifted me up and yelled "El Pol-ko!, El Pol-ko!" rhythmically. The opposing team said that the game was unfair, because I only blocked shots, which annoyed my opponent. They wanted a rematch, but Leon would not agree. They were angry and left the place, and Rosie went with them. We stayed in the club, singing, dancing, and sweating profusely. I arrived at home but was not very happy. Felusha returned home and told the aunt that I was the Bnei-Akiva ping-pong champion. In the evening I went for a walk with Poncho.

After sewing furs for a few months, Juan said that the situation was not good. Women were not buying furs, and he had no more orders. He would pay me at the end of the month, but I could not continue to work for him. I returned home in a bad mood and told Phela. She told me not to worry, because every Thursday the delicatessen filled with Jews who had all sorts of factories, and she would ask them if they needed anyone who could sew furs. One Thursday, when Phela returned home in the evening, she called me and told me that she had found work for me with a Mr. Bazanos. He had a sewing workshop and a large store for selling leather goods, not far from the port. Mr. Bazanos was a short, energetic man, whose eyes shifted constantly from side to side. Whenever he entered the delicatessen, he would drink a glass of pickle juice. Then he would buy herring, cheese, sardines, crackers, and pickles. Mr. Bazanos told Phela that he was willing to employ me starting the following Monday.

On Monday I took the number 7 streetcar to Mr. Bazanos's store, which was situated close to the streetcar's final stop. The store was near the port, on the first floor of a building on Aduana Street. On the fourth floor of the building was the workshop, where coats and linings were cut and sewn from sheep's fur.

I entered the store, which was a large, high-ceilinged hall. Many types of leather coats hung all around me; long, short, with or without fur, brown and black. A strong smell of leather filled the hall. An older lady wearing thick glasses sat behind a large desk. Her lips were painted a bright red, her hair was dyed in black, and only the ends showed gray hairs.

By the cash register sat a young blonde woman with gold-framed glasses. Her lips were painted a dark shade of red, and she had pimples on her face. Mr. Bazanos was running around the store, wearing an old gray suit. His forehead was furrowed with wrinkles, his hair was graying and thin, his eyes were darting, small and watery. Plodding behind him was a

young fellow, tall, thin and pale, with an elongated face, a permanent stupid grin, and a high forehead. His hair was blond and curly, like the fur of a sheep, and his light blue eyes were large and bewildered. The fellow was wearing a gray robe that reached his knees, and which was open at the front. Aside from them, there was no one else in the store.

Mr. Bazanos approached me, followed by the young fellow. He asked what I wanted to buy. I told him that Phela from the delicatessen had sent me, and he scratched his head, squinted his eyes, and recalled Phela from "Goas", who sold pickles. He asked whether I really knew how to sew leather. I told him that I had sewn furs for many months. He scratched his head again with his other hand and told the fellow, whose name was Jaime, to take me upstairs and give me something to sew so they could see if I knew how to work. If I didn't, they would send me home immediately. Jaime looked at my pityingly and told me to follow him. We exited the store into a dark room and climbed stairs. Jaime took the stairs two at a time and I ran behind him. We reached upstairs huffing and puffing. We entered a large hall, which had about twenty sewing machines. Next to them sat young and old women, who were sewing together parts to make leather coats. Linings made of sheep's skin were made for some of the coats. To the side stood a large table, on which packages of hides were laid, and on top of which lay templates made of stiff paper. A dark fellow, named Morris, stood by the table and used a white chalk to mark where the cutting was to be performed. Jaime approached him and told him to test me on the sewing of a coat lining made of sheep's fur. Morris said that he was busy with preparation work for the seamstresses. Jaime suggested taking his place by the table, until the "madman" from downstairs called him, while he checked whether I could sew.

Morris and I climbed one more floor and entered a small room, which had two sewing machines, a table, and crates filled with parts of sheep's fur. The parts had to be sewn together to create linings of an appropriate size. Morris was a calm and quiet man. He told me not to be nervous, to relax, and he would show me how to match the parts and how to sew them together. He put on a gray robe, removed a few pieces of fur from each crate, and placed them on the table. When he found suitable pieces, he began sewing, and let me continue his work. I sewed without any problems, as the machine was the same as the one I had used before. When I had finished, I cut the extra threads and handed my work for Morris to examine.

Morris placed what I had sewn next to the part that he had sewn and saw no difference. He was pleased and told me to continue matching pieces and sewing them together. He said that if I had any problems, I was to come downstairs and ask for his assistance. He told me not to rush, and to take a rest if I became tired, but not on the window ledge, because the "madman" had seen the fellow who worked there before me sitting on the ledge and had

fired him. If I wanted to drink I could come downstairs to the hall, where they had a samovar. When I finished sewing a complete lining, I went downstairs to show it to Morris. He checked the matching of the parts and the sewing and said everything was well done.

Morris called over Angela, one of the seamstresses. She approached us and stood at the other side of the table with her arms at her sides. She was a little older than me and taller. Her face was pale, her eyes a bright green, her nose short, her lips full and painted a light red, and her dirty blonde hair pulled back in a braid. He told her that I was hired today to work on sewing sheep's fur, in place of the fellow who was dismissed. He asked her to show me how to make a cup of tea. Angela looked at me with a smile and told me to follow her. Morris winked at me and smiled.

Outside the hall was a small room. On the table in it stood a large kettle and next to it was a smaller kettle with a tea concentrate. The girl placed some of the concentrate in her own cup and poured hot water into it from the large kettle. "Do you like very sweet tea?" she asked. "No," I answered. "Should I put in two teaspoons of sugar?" she asked. "Yes," I answered. The girl asked if I always spoke so little. I nodded in the affirmative. She asked how long I had been in Uruguay, and whether I had any friends. I told her that I had arrived a year and a half prior and had a few friends from Bnei-Akiva. One of the other seamstresses entered the room. The girl handed me my tea. I returned to my room, took out the sandwich that the aunt had prepared for me, ate it with my tea, and continued to sew. Angela entered the room. She held a cup of tea and came near me. She asked me how I liked the tea that she had prepared, and asked what Bnei-Akiva was. I told her that the tea was excellent, and told her that Bnei-Akiva was a club for Jews, in which young girls and boys met. At Bnei-Akiva you could hear lectures on the bible and on Jewish history, you sang, danced, and occasionally went out together to eat pizza or see a film. She asked if I had a girlfriend and I said that I did not. She told me that she did not have a boyfriend, took her cup, and went downstairs.

Before the end of the work day, Morris came upstairs and saw that I had sewn eleven linings. He said that this was enough for one day, because if I continued to sew, Bazanos would take advantage of me and would expect me to sew more and more every day. Morris inquired with whom I had come to Uruguay. I told him about my aunt, her two daughters, and my sister. He inquired whether the aunt's daughters already had boyfriends. I told him that Phela had a boyfriend in Germany and that Sarah had not yet found a boyfriend. Morris said that none of the seamstresses in the hall were Jewish, and that he was the only Jew. Then he asked how old Sarah was and whether she was pretty. I answered that she was about twenty, but looked much older and that she thought she was pretty. He said that his looks were also deceiving, and that he was younger than he appeared. Morris asked me to

introduce Sarah to him, if the opportunity arose. Jaime came up to the room, gave me a notebook and a pencil, asking me to record the number of linings I had sewn in it at the end of each day, and to then bring them down to Morris.

On Thursday evening when Phela returned from the delicatessen she said that Bazanos had asked for better groceries because he had accepted me for work. The aunt said that she had received a letter from her brother Favish, who was living in America. He wrote and asked that we come to America, and was willing to arrange the papers for us. Sarah asked, "What are we waiting for? The Messiah?" The aunt said that she could not decide. On the one hand, the grandfather from Israel wrote and said that we had to come to him, because the grandchildren were the only memory he had left of his son Moshe. He promised to take care of housing, work, and study for all of us. On the other side, Mr. Goldman had told her, and she had also read in the Yiddish newspaper, that there was a war in Israel. A Jew from "Goas" who had recently returned from Israel had said that the situation was very bad. There was nothing to eat and people lined up to buy basic food products. Phela told the aunt that she would not go anywhere with us, as she was waiting for Monyek to arrive in Canada, where she would join him. Every one of his letters to her asked that she wait for him and promised that as soon as he arrived in Canada, he would send her papers. At my workplace everything continued as usual. One day Morris came up to the room I worked in and told me that at the end of the day he would take me to his apartment, to show me where he lived. He looked at my notebook and said that I could sew three more linings. Maybe the "madman" from downstairs would add a little to my pay. After Morris went downstairs, Angela came up with two cups of tea, sat in the chair by the second machine, and asked whether I was bored working alone in that room. I told her that I needed to work because of the pay. Afterwards, she said that I didn't make my own tea because I wanted her to come see me upstairs. I looked at her and smiled. She said that she was not Jewish and was older than me. Morris told her that my parents had been killed in the war and that I had a younger sister. She lowered her head, sipped her tea, and said that she was an orphan, just like me. Five years earlier, her parents had been killed in a car accident, and she had been living with her grandmother since then. She began to cry. I told her not to cry, because it couldn't help her parents, and they would probably want her to be happy and cheerful. I had heard that sentence being said to someone who was crying over his dead parents. I drew near her with my chair and hugged her. She hugged me too, and placed her cheek next to mine, and we sat like that for a few minutes, until she got up and went downstairs to the workshop.

At the end of the workday, I went downstairs to the hall. All of the women had already left, and Morris checked that the windows were closed, locked the door leading to the machines upstairs, closed the small room with

a lock, and lowered a few electrical switches. Then he put on a skin-hugging leather coat and we left through a back door, which he locked as well.

Outside, near a wall, stood a motorcycle, which was tied with a chain to a tall pole. Morris approached it, unlocked the chain, sat down, and told me to sit behind him. We traveled on the main street for about ten minutes. At this hour there were many cars on the street and the sidewalks were filled with many people. After Morris turned and traveled along some side roads, he stopped, raised the motorcycle onto the sidewalk and tied it with the chain to an iron hook that was attached to the wall of one of the houses.

We entered the building and climbed upstairs. Morris opened the door to his apartment and invited me to enter. We entered a large foyer, and from there into a kitchen, at the center of which stood a table with six chairs. Next he led me into the bedroom, which contained a large bed with a blue cover. The cover matched the blue curtains that were hanging on the windows. To the side was a large wooden cabinet, the same color as the bed. This was the first time I had seen such a pretty bedroom. Morris said that the bedroom belonged to his sister and her husband.

The apartment was very impressive and clean. We entered Morris's room, which contained a bed, a bookstand with a radio on it, a desk, a chair, and a cabinet. On the window hung a curtain made of a shiny brown fabric. Morris sat on the bed and told me to sit in the chair. He told me that his sister and her husband owned a sewing workshop for children's clothes and they earned well. They asked him to work for them, but he refused, because he did not want to get into any quarrels with his sister and her husband. In the meantime, he was living with them and saving money, hoping to save enough money to live in a similar apartment once he got married. Morris said he would escort me home and asked me to tell the aunt everything that I had seen at his home. He asked to be invited to our house, so that he could meet Sarah. If they wanted to, they could ask Bazanos about him. He had been working for him for five years already, and Bazanos knew him very well. That evening, while we sat around the table and ate, I recounted everything that I had seen and everything that Morris had told me to say. Sarah said that she was willing to meet him, and the aunt asked Phela to ask Bazanos about him, and if he turned out to be alright, we would invite him over.

Every Saturday morning I would go to the synagogue with Mr. Goldman, but would end up spending most of the time outside with Poncho. He would recount his adventures with the women he met while selling from door to door. Poncho was waiting for me to be old enough to join him in his work with the suitcase. He promised me that I would not regret it. During the Saturday talks at Bnei-Akiva, our leader, Leon, would tell us about the battles between the Jews and the Arabs in Israel. Afterwards we would sing and dance, and would always wait for the conclusion of the Sabbath so that we could go out for pizza. On Sundays we would meet before noon, play

ping-pong, and then ride in the streetcar. Whenever it reached a wide empty road, we would jump out while the streetcar was still moving. At first I was afraid to jump, but one of the fellows approached the driver, handed him a bill of money, and asked him to slow down, and then I jumped out. They taught me that I needed to stand by the door facing the direction of travel, extend one leg out, jump off and continue running forward. During the day we jumped out of the streetcar several times, and then went to eat pizza, drink malt, and watch four films for the price of one, which were projected in succession. When we exited the theater, it would already be late at night. Sometimes I would treat everyone for a beer, because I had my own money. Occasionally, the friends would treat me for a pizza with their own money.

On Thursday, Phela waited for Mr. Bazanos to arrive at the delicatessen, and inquired about Morris. He said that Morris was a Jew of Greek descent, who had arrived in Uruguay with his sister five years earlier. At work Bazanos hardly spoke with him, because Jaime was in charge of the workers in the sewing hall. Jaime never complained about Morris, which was a good sign. The aunt asked Sarah if she would be willing to date Morris, when he asked her. Sarah said that if on first sight, Morris was not to her liking, she would not go out with him. The aunt asked me what Morris looked like, and I told her that he was about a head taller than me, to which Sarah immediately replied that he was too short. The aunt asked me to continue describing him. I said that he had black hair smeared with brilliantine, combed back... Sarah interrupted again and said he was just like all the other men there. I continued to describe his wide shoulders and narrow waist. "That's good," Sarah said. He had black eyes. "That's also good," she announced. I described his white teeth and long thin lips. "That shows that he is a cheap and nervous man," declared Sarah. Phela asked her where she had acquired her knowledge in psychology, and Sarah replied that it was "from experience".

The aunt looked at me and said: "Tell Morris that I would like to invite him for lunch on Saturday, at one o'clock." She then turned to Sarah and said: "If he asks you to a movie in the evening, go with him, and if you don't like him, you don't need to see him again."

Saturday arrived. When I returned from synagogue the aunt spread a slice of challah with some jam for me, and made me a cup of tea. When I had finished eating, I went to the bakery and collected the pan with the potato pie, half of which I took upstairs to Mr. Goldman. Morris arrived ten minutes before one o'clock, and brought with him a bottle of wine and a bouquet of flowers. The aunt opened the door and after thanking him for the gifts, invited him into the room. Phela, Felusha and I were already seated at the table. Sarah was not ready yet, and finally appeared after ten minutes, dressed and made up as if for a wedding. Everyone was surprised at her elegance, as she looked like a film star or one of the women who were

photographed in magazines. The aunt introduced Sarah, and Morris stood up, extended his arm, and introduced himself. Sarah wore high-heeled shoes, and her hair was styled about seven centimeters high. They were almost identical in height. We could not see if Morris had blushed, because of his dark skin. Morris sat between Sarah and the aunt, and it was very quiet. Phela asked him how I was getting along at work, and whether I could sew. Morris shifted in his chair and began to talk.

In the meantime, the aunt had sent Felusha upstairs to ask Mr. Goldman for six wine glasses. She asked Morris to open the bottle of wine that he had brought and to pour it into the glasses. We raised our glasses, and toasted to life, health, and seeing each other in Israel. Phela and the aunt served noodle soup. After the soup we ate meat, potato pie, tsimmiss, and compote. Sarah was solemn and asked Morris all sorts of questions, which he answered with a smile. On the table was a large bottle of water, and at the end of the meal, tea was served. On a tray were slices of a torte cake that the aunt had baked.

After the meal, I combed my hair and went to Bnei-Akiva with Felusha. When we returned that night, we found the aunt sitting and writing a letter. She told us, that she had decided it was time to go to Israel, because there was no future for us here, especially not for Felusha and me. The following day she would go with Mr. Goldman to the consul or to the Jewish Agency, to obtain help in immigrating to Israel, where our grandfather was already waiting. The following morning, when the aunt woke me for work, I asked her how Morris and Sarah's date had gone. The aunt said that Sarah would not be seeing him again, because she said that he was not a gentleman and was not tall enough for her. Sarah claimed that the gentile fellows were much more gentlemanly from the Jewish ones. "That is one of the reasons we have to hurry and leave here, before Sarah finds herself some handsome goy," mumbled the aunt.

I did not see Morris for a few days, as he did not come up to the room and I did not go down to the hall. One day he came upstairs with a smile on his face, asked how I was, and inquired after the family. I answered that we were all well. He handed me an envelope and asked that I give it to Sarah. I placed the envelope in the pocket of my coat, which was hanging on the door. In the evening I handed the envelope to my aunt, to give to Sarah. The aunt said that we should never have introduced Morris to Sarah, since we already knew that there was no man walking the earth that would please her. After a few days Morris came to me with a serious expression and asked whether I had given the envelope to Sarah. I replied that I had given it to the aunt. When I returned home that evening I told the aunt that Morris had inquired about the envelope. The following morning, the aunt gave me an envelope for Morris, and from the time I handed it to him, he and Angela rarely spoke to me or came upstairs to see me. There was only one exception, when one of

the older women came upstairs with a cup of tea and said that Angela had sent it, and that she missed me. I said that I missed her as well.

On Friday evening, while we were sitting around the table and eating, the aunt told us that she and Mr. Goldman had visited the Israeli consul in the Montevideo embassy and had told him that we wanted to immigrate to Israel. Only Phela would remain in Montevideo until she traveled to Canada to marry Monyek. Sarah said that she would also stay in Uruguay, as it was out of the question for her to leave now that she had finally started enjoying life. She decided to stay behind with Phela. "Why were you in such a rush to go to the embassy?" she bluntly accused the aunt. Everyone was silent, and tears appeared in the aunts eyes. She told Sarah that we had to go to Israel and that we would not leave her behind. Felusha and I had no future in Uruguay, and she had to bring us to the grandfather in Israel, who kept asking in each of his letters to meet his grandchildren, while he was still alive. Sarah lowered her head and silence prevailed.

We received a letter from the consul, saying that in one month we would sail to the city of Naples in Italy, and from there we would sail straight to Israel. Felusha and I informed Leon, our Bnei-Akiva leader, of our impending departure. I told Morris, who inquired whether Sarah would be leaving with us, and wished us good luck. That same day, Angela came upstairs with a cup of tea and hugged and kissed me. She began to cry, and said that she had thought that in a few years, when I was older, we would be close friends and may even get married. I did not replay because I did not understand how a Jew could marry a gentile.

On Saturday afternoon during the activities at Bnei-Akiva, Leon announced to everyone that at the conclusion of the Sabbath in two weeks, they would hold a farewell evening for us at a hall in the center of town. The evening would be attended by important dignitaries, and the aunt and her daughters would also be invited. When we told the aunt about the farewell evening, she said that she would write short farewell speeches for Felusha and me. We would memorize them and recite them following the speeches given by the older people. We memorized the speeches and rehearsed constantly to make sure we would not forget them. On Saturday evening we arrived at the hall. There were many tables there, covered with white tablecloths and surrounded by chairs. Each table had a small vase of colorful flowers and next to it was a tray with different kinds of cookies, two bottles with cold beverages, and cups and saucers matching the number of chairs. Next to the wall was a long table, for the dignitaries. The hall filled with young and old people. I did not know, and had never seen, most of the people sitting at the dignitaries' table. Leon approached the microphone and said that he was very proud that two of the members from his "Goas" branch, a brother and sister, were going to Israel, and that he hoped that more of the members from his branch as well as from the center branch would follow suit.



He handed Felusha and me a token of remembrance, a small bible, with the signatures of all of our group members. After him, the head of Bnei-Akiva in Montevideo approached the microphone. He spoke about the difficult war that had taken place in Israel, between the seven Arab states and the handful of Jews. He stressed that the situation was still very dangerous, because the Arabs were unwilling to accept the declaration of an independent Jewish state in Israel. The Jews had to be encouraged and supported through immigration to Israel by whole families, but particularly by youths. After him, the rabbi of the yeshiva spoke. He recounted that when the rabbi of the "Borough Park" yeshiva visited with him, he had wanted to take me to study in Brooklyn, but the aunt had forcefully insisted that we not be separated and travel together to Israel. For that he respects the aunt, and blesses us with a safe journey to Israel where, God willing, we would build our future along with the entire nation of Israel. The aunt thanked the well-wishers and expressed a wish, that we arrive in Israel safely, and put an end to our wandering.

Felusha approached the microphone with tears in her eyes. She said in a trembling voice that it was difficult for her to say goodbye to her friends, asked them to stay in contact, and broke into tears. Everyone clapped for her. My turn came last. I approached the microphone and said that I had very much enjoyed my time at Bnei-Akiva, where everyone had received me so nicely, and that I hoped to see them in Israel.

Following the speeches, a fellow from the center branch approached us with an accordion and began to sing and play. The entire audience joined him in singing and clapping. Afterwards the tables were moved to the sides of the hall, and girls, boys, and adults formed circles and began to dance. The dancing lasted well into the night.

When we returned home, the aunt said that she had been surprised by the affection the group had shown towards us, and said that it was a wonderful evening. She hoped that we would cope successfully with the future facing us. We began to prepare for the journey. The aunt bought bedding, towels, kitchen tools and clothes. She also bought me a new beret hat.

At work they had a surprise for me. One day before the end of the workday, Morris came up to me and said that Mr. Bazanos wanted me to come see him downstairs. I wanted to finish recording the number of pieces that I had sewn in my notebook, but Morris said that we had to go downstairs immediately, so as not to annoy Mr. Bazanos, who was very quick to get annoyed. I took my coat and we went downstairs. We did not hear Mr. Bazanos's regular screaming, and it was quiet. When we entered the hall, all of the workers, who were mostly Christian, stood around, rhythmically clapping and singing: "Avram, Avram, a pleasant lad, we will love you for all times." I stood in shock, not knowing what to do or say. Mr. Bazanos sat by

the table so that he appeared taller. He kept looking at the clock. Jaime clapped and asked for silence. He began to speak in Spanish: "Avram is our youngest employee, and we love him very much, but he is leaving us because he is going to be traveling to Israel. We all wish him success in the future, and we have a surprise... Mr. Bazanos is giving him as a gift a leather coat with sheep's fur. The fur was sewn by Avram himself." Everyone clapped and sang the song in my honor again.

An older woman asked for silence, and told me with teary eyes, that all of the seamstresses were sorry to see me leave, and that they wished me all the luck in life. They had bought me a gift and hoped that I would remember them whenever I looked at it. Angela was chosen to give me the gift. She wiped the tears from her red eyes, approached me, and gave me a small box. The box was open, and inside of it was a gold ring. Engraved on the ring were the Hebrew letters for A.S., my initials. Angela hugged me, kissed me on the mouth, broke out in tears, and returned to her place. Everyone clapped and repeated the song.

I was sad when I returned home. The aunt asked what had happened, and I told her everything and said that maybe I could stay there with Phela and not go to Israel with them, because I had a good job and would earn handsomely when I grew up. The aunt looked at me unbelievably. Her forehead was furrowed with wrinkles, and her eyes closed, and she asked me when I would finally understand that I had to study. I would have plenty of time for work, but without an education I would always be a simple laborer and would never advance. Besides, she did not remove me from the goy so that I could continue to live among the gentiles. We had wandered enough, and it was time for us to find a permanent place and to be rid of the suitcases. I ate silently, went to my room, cried, and fell asleep.

Uncle Motel invited us out to a restaurant, where we ate pizza and drank beer. He cried and said that when he had sent us our papers, he never thought that we would leave so quickly. He was sorry that this was the way things had turned out, and hoped that we would meet again. When we left the restaurant, he hugged everyone and gave the aunt some bills of American money. We could only tell him fifteen years later how much he had helped us, when he immigrated to Israel and settled in Rishon Le'Tzion.

Mr. Goldman brought us to the airport in his big car. Phela accompanied us and cried along with the aunt the entire time. Near the ship, a few sailors stood on the planks, painting. We had three large suitcases, a few packages, and a small, folding wooden desk. Mr. Goldman helped us carry them to the ship stairs. The aunt hugged Mr. Goldman and his wife and cried. Sarah yelled at her and told her not to cry, because it would ruin her eyes. The farewell from Phela was the hardest. The aunt and Phela embraced and cried loudly. Sarah, Felusha and Mrs. Goldman also cried. Mr. Goldman

stood next to them with tears in his eyes and did not utter a word. I turned my back to them, because I did not want them to see my tears flowing.

## 12

A horn sounded from the ship. Two sailors descended and carried our suitcases back up. We wiped our eyes and blew our noses. On the deck, they checked our papers, looked us over, and instructed the sailors who were carrying our cases where to take us. We descended behind them and walked down a long and narrow hallway, which was hot and stuffy. The sailors opened one of the doors, placed the suitcases inside the cabin, and hurried out. We entered the cabin, and found it hot and stuffy as well. It was a small cabin, flanked with bunk beds on either side. There was only one window, and it could not be opened since the ocean water nearly reached it. We could look outside through it, and during daytime it let a little light into the room. On the ceiling was a bulb wrapped in metal wires. The aunt decided that Felusha and I would sleep on the upper bunks, while she and Sarah took the lower ones. In the corner, behind one of the beds, was a small sink. The bathrooms were outside the cabin and were shared by other passengers. Sarah said that had she known in advance that these would be the conditions on the ship, no amount of money would have gotten her to go on board. The aunt reminded her that we had lived under far worse conditions. We would have no choice but to spend most of our time on the deck, where it would be more pleasant. Felusha asked if we could climb up to the deck, and the aunt agreed. "Don't get too far from the ship," she said, and laughed with teary eyes. It was one of the few times that the aunt had laughed heartily. Her laughter reminded me of Bernard, whose cabin we had lived in at the Feldafing camp; He had a retort for everything.

We climb up to the deck and stood by the railing that faced the port. There were no children our own age there, only young adults and older people. A few people stood on the pier and waved. The sailors raised the stairs, a horn sounded, the ship began to move slowly, and we saw that we were moving away from the pier. We stood on the deck until the ship had left the port. The ship that escorted us blew its horn and returned towards the shore, while we sailed towards the open sea. Felusha said that it seemed as though we had only arrived a month ago, and already we were sailing in the other direction. The fellows standing next to us on the deck were joking and laughing. Every so often they threw looks at Felusha. I told her we should go down to our cabin, but she asked to stay a little longer, looked back at the fellows and laughed. I told her I was hungry and began to walk towards the cabin. She looked at me with a sour expression, said that I was jealous, and followed me. Sarah was lying on one of the lower bunks, covering her eyes with her hands. The aunt opened the small folding table that Mr. Goldman had given us, spread a white tablecloth over it, and placed a plate of rolls in the center, buttered and filled with yellow cheese. Next to the plate were a tea

thermos and four small tin cups. We sat with the aunt on her bed and had a roll and a cup of tea each. Sarah turned her back to us and said that she was not hungry, in spite of the aunt's pleas. After the first bite, the aunt could not continue eating and placed her roll and Sarah's in a brown paper bag. After eating, I climbed up to my bed. The cabin was very hot. I lay down, looked out through the round window, watched the ocean and fell asleep. The aunt woke me and said that a bell was sounding, which must be a sign that dinner is being served. Sarah and Felusha had already dressed nicely and fixed their hair, and we went to look for the dining hall.

We climbed to the upper deck and found the entrance to the restaurant. Inside, nicely dressed people were already seated around set tables. A stylishly dressed man stood near the entrance. He bowed and asked the aunt for her tickets. The aunt opened her bag, took out a cluster of papers, and began to look for the tickets. In the meantime, a long line of people formed behind us. The man checked the tickets, pointed his thumb down, and said "Abajo, abajo." We went down to the lower deck and entered the dining hall, which served the people assigned rooms at the bottom of the ship. In this room, the tables and benches were attached to the floor. A few sailors sat and ate, and among them were the three fellows who stood on the deck when the ship left the port the previous day. To the side, on low tables, were a few pots of varying sizes, pans filled with meat, and piles of dinner plates and soup bowls. Everyone chose what they wanted to eat, placed the food on a tray, and sat at a table. I took pasta with meat and a bowl of soup, sat down and began to eat. The aunt only took a little soup. The fellows kept staring and smiling at Felusha.

At the conclusion of the meal, we went out to the deck, sat down on a bench that was attached to the floor, and watched the ocean waves. There was a pleasant breeze, and a few small bulbs lit the deck. Next to us sat a few other families that had exited the same dining hall, who had also come to enjoy the fresh air on the deck. The three fellows also climbed up to the deck after they had finished eating and stood facing Sarah and Felusha, with their backs to the railing. One of the fellows held a guitar. He was the tallest of the three, wide-shouldered, handsome and muscular. He began to strum the cords. His friend, curly-haired with small shiny eyes and full long lips, began to accompany him with Italian songs by the famed Italian tenor, Mario Lanza. The third fellow was much younger than his friends, and was skinny and ugly. He did not sing, and kept staring at Felusha. She looked at him and smiled, and leaned down to me and quietly said: "Isn't he a nice fellow?" I shrugged my shoulders and did not answer. The two fellows looked at Sarah, and kept playing and singing to her. She laughed and cheered them on by clapping. When they finished singing they approached Sarah and began to talk with her, while the skinny fellow spoke with Felusha.

The aunt looked worried and wanted to know what they were discussing. The fellows said that they boarded the ship in Argentina and after having worked there for a year, were returning to their families in Italy. We stayed on the deck until late at night, because the aunt did not want to leave Sarah and Felusha alone with those fellows. In the morning we awoke with headaches and nausea, and did not feel like eating. The aunt suggested that we go out to the fresh air on the deck, which would help us feel better. We went up to the deck and breathed in the fresh air. Tall waves shook the boat up and down, and we held onto the railing tightly. Every so often when the ship's bow descended, a wave of water washed the deck. We decided to climb up to the upper deck, because the waves could not reach so high. We sat on the loungers intended for the use of the first class passengers. They had not yet woken so the seats were still available. That day we felt ill and could not eat. We could only stomach a little of the tea that the aunt had made in the thermos. Towards evening the ocean calmed, but we did not go to eat.

The relationship between Sarah and the fellow with the guitar was good. The aunt sat next to them most of the time. Felusha's friendship with the skinny fellow was also progressing nicely, which meant that Sarah and Felusha were in a good mood most of the time. One evening they asked the aunt for permission to go dancing in the first class dance hall. The aunt agreed reluctantly, but asked me to go up there every so often to have a peak through the dance hall window and to report back to her whether they were inside. At midnight the aunt's patience expired and she sent me to call them back to the cabin.

After three weeks of sailing, we arrived in the city of Naples, in Italy. A large portion of the passengers began to disembark, and we sat on a bench on the deck and watched them descend. Suddenly, a man with a captain's hat came to us and told us in Spanish that our tickets were only good for travel to Italy, and we had to disembark. We were shocked, but had no other choice. We left the ship having no idea where to turn. The aunt thought that the tickets procured in Uruguay were good for travel all the way to Israel, but it turned out that they would only get us as far as Naples. One of the port clerks told the aunt that if she couldn't settle the matter, we could spend the night in the port.

Sarah spoke with the clerk in Spanish and asked him to call us a taxi, so we could go to the Israeli consul in Naples or to a Jewish area. The taxi driver took us to a Jewish restaurant. While they looked for someone who spoke Yiddish they invited us to sit and fed us. Two older people arrived at the restaurant, one of whom spoke a little Yiddish. The aunt explained our situation to him. They looked at us and said they would help us get to Israel. Two taxis led us with our luggage to a very low-class hotel. They placed us in one room. The aunt, Sarah, and Felusha slept in a double bed, and they added a mattress for me on the floor. The room was much better than the

cabin on the ship. The two people gave the aunt some Italian money as the hotel did not provide meals. In the morning and evening we ate a buttered roll with a cup of milk, and in the afternoon we ate pasta and tomato soup. After three days, the two people arrived at the hotel and told us that we would be setting sail for Israel the following morning, and they would come to take us to the port. We wandered the street next to the port and the aunt bought a few tins of food and some rolls. We returned to the hotel to pack our belongings, so that we were ready for the journey.

In the morning, the people arrived with two taxis. They helped us carry our luggage and we drove to the port. After some inquiries, the people found the ship on which we would continue our voyage. It was low and had no high decks. We looked at it with bewilderment and Sarah told the aunt rather loudly that it looked like a cargo ship. The aunt did not know how to reply to her. She turned to the person who spoke Yiddish and asked if there was a cabin on the ship for us to sleep in. The man looked at his friend, and they signaled with their hands, looked up to the sky, and said they were sure we would receive some food. They said that the journey only lasted four nights, and since it was summer, we could sleep on the deck, because this was all they could arrange for us with the money raised by the community.

Sarah told the aunt that she would not board this ship. The people looked at each other and the aunt looked at them. Then the aunt approached Sarah and whispered to her that if we didn't board this ship, we would have to sleep in the street and would not be able to arrive in Israel, because we had no money left. She asked Sarah what she would suggest we do, and Sarah remained silent while her eyes filled with tears. One of the men boarded the ship and we waited down below. He returned and said we could board. They helped us carry our belongings up and the aunt thanked them before we parted ways.

On the ship, we were received by a man with a white hat, wearing a white, short-sleeved shirt with a few black stripes on the shoulder. He led us to the front of the deck, where two benches were attached to the floor and a pile of packages was covered with tarps. The man told us to place our belongings on the tarps and said that in the evening they would bring us mattresses, sheets, and blankets for sleeping. We would eat our meals in the sailors' dining hall below deck. The man saw that we were upset, smiled, and said that we would arrive at the port of Haifa within five days. We sat on the bench and waited for someone to come so we could chat a little.

In the afternoon we descended to the dining hall, where the sailors treated us very nicely. We had soup, pasta with meat, water, and half a glass of wine. Our mood improved, and it was very warm so we climbed back up to the deck. The aunt gave me four towels and instructed me to wet them and wrap them around our heads. We sat on the bench with the wet towels on our head. It was very boring and unpleasant. During the day it was

unbearably hot, and during the night it was cold and damp. We lost our appetites, and on the second day ate only a little soup. The sailors brought us some dominos and checkers and the aunt taught Felusha and me how to play. Sarah asked to be left alone, did not go down to eat, and just sat on a lounging chair staring out at the ocean all day. The aunt was very worried and begged her to eat, fearing she would not have the strength to disembark in Isarel.

A day before our arrival at the port of Haifa, we were told we would arrive in Israel early the next morning. An uncontrollable excitement overtook us. We assumed that all of the adult males in Israel had a beard, and asked the aunt how we would know the grandfather, how we would recognize him among all the other old people. The aunt thought about it and said that she remembered the grandfather as a short, thin man, with smiling blue eyes. He had a beard that was beginning to gray and on his head he wore a small hat. She looked at me and said that I resembled him a little, in the shape of my nose.

Later we discussed what we should wear when we disembarked. I asked to stay in the clothes I had worn on the ship, but Sarah said we had to dress nicely, so as not to be mistaken for beggars. The aunt said it would be very hot, so we were better off to wear light, comfortable clothes. Sarah said that we should take her advice, since she was always right, and wear our nicest clothes; otherwise no one will acknowledge us. The aunt smiled and told Sarah that we would follow her advice and wear our nicest clothes, so long as it made her happy.

The following morning we were awakened by a loud noise. The ship was still and the sailors were lowering the anchor into the water. We looked towards the shore and saw Haifa, which was built along the side of a mountain. Sarah asked one of the sailors when we would arrive in the port and disembark. He explained that in a few hours, officials would arrive to perform an inspection of the ship, at which point we could disembark. The aunt went down to the kitchen with Felusha and they made enough sandwiches to last us the entire day, and filled the thermos with tea. There was some question of where we would get dresses, as we did not have a room or any privacy. Eventually, we raised the tarp, held it up high, and dressed behind it in turn. I wore my beret and the only winter suit I owned. The pants fell down because I had lost weight during the voyage. I asked the aunt what I should do, and she gave me a piece of rope that she had been keeping to tie together the suitcases. I tied the rope around my waist and wore the jacket. The weather was warm and humid. After a few minutes I felt the shirt sticking to my back, and was sweating profusely. We placed our cases near the railing and waited to enter to port and to recognize the grandfather.

Two men boarded the ship on a rope ladder that the sailors had lowered. The men passed by us, looked and smiled. The aunt asked them if they were Jews, and one of them asked her if we were disembarking in Haifa.



The aunt answered that we were getting off here and that the children's grandfather was waiting for us on the dock. The man said we would be very hot, because it was summer in Israel now.

## 13

Half an hour later the ship moved into the port and was tied to the dock. We began to search for the grandfather, but there were no adults there who fit the grandfather's description. The only people on the dock were a few young men, some of whom wore a skullcap. Two cranes neared the ship, and the sailors removed the tarps from the crates on the deck. They told us to go to the stairs, as we had to disembark before the cranes began to unload the large crates. One of the sailors helped us carry our cases to the dock. We stood on the dock next to the ship and waited for the grandfather. The aunt instructed Felusha and me to guard the suitcases while she and Sarah went to look for the grandfather.

One of the skullcap-wearing men approached us and told us that he was from Kibbutz Tirat Tzvi, and they were willing to accept us on the kibbutz. The aunt said that we were waiting for the grandfather to come and collect us, and that he had already prepared an apartment for us. The afternoon came and the heat intensified. We ate our sandwiches and drank our tea. The dock emptied of people, and only the laborers on the cranes were still working while we sat and waited. In the afternoon, a man approached us who wore a blue, short-sleeved shirt, short pants, socks that reached his knees, and a strange hat. The man told the aunt that they would be closing the port soon and that we could not remain on the dock. The aunt did not know what to do, and told the man that we were waiting for the grandfather, whom she had written to from Italy with the details of the ship on which we were to sail. She had given the letter to decent people to send. The grandfather would surely have found out when the ship would dock in the port of Haifa and would have come to collect us, but for some reason, he never arrived. The man offered to hire a car at his expense to take us to the "Immigration Gate". This was a place near Haifa which took care of new immigrants arriving in Israel. We had already missed the bus that could take us there. The aunt spoke with Sarah, who no longer had the energy to argue, and we agreed to go wherever they would take us. We tied our suitcases to the top of the car and held the packages in our laps, and thus traveled to "Immigration Gate".

They led us to a small cabin and sprayed us with an odd smelling white powder. After they registered us, they led us to a tent with folding beds. We put down our belongings and went to collect mattresses, blankets, and cutlery. In the evening, under candlelight, the aunt wrote letters to the grandfather and to her niece, Rosa. She had obtained Rosa's address from the Jewish Agency.

On Friday afternoon, after a week at "Immigration Gate", people came to tell the aunt that someone was waiting for her by the gate. The aunt told us

that the grandfather must have arrived, and began to run towards the gate, with us in tow.

We arrived at the gate and saw a middle-aged, beardless man, wearing thick glasses and a hat on his head. The aunt stopped and stood before the man. She did not know who he was, but was certain that it was not the grandfather. The man asked her in Yiddish if she was Rivkah, and told her that he was Moshe Tzioni, Rosa's husband. Moshe Tzioni had come to take us to their home. He asked us to prepare quickly, because it was Friday and we needed to travel as far as Jaffa, where they lived. Moshe Tzioni went to the office with the aunt, where the aunt signed a document in which she willingly relinquishes all of the assistance to which we were entitled as new immigrants. Moshe Tzioni also signed the document.

A truck entered through the gate and parked in front of our tent, and we began to load our belongings. Many people, mostly children, stood and looked with envy at the "rich uncle" who had come to remove us from the maabarah, the transit camp. The aunt sat by the driver and Moshe Tzioni sat with us in the back of the truck, along with the packages. There was a very strong wind during the journey, and Moshe Tzioni was forced to hold his hat in his hand to prevent it from flying away. Beneath the hat he wore a skullcap, held in place with a pin, which he also had to remove due to the wind.

After being jolted about for three hours, we arrived at the Tzioni house in Jaffa. It was an old stone house, connected at the front to the neighboring houses. We entered an inner yard that was shared by a few apartments. The yard was cool and a nice breeze was blowing in it. A long hallway led us into the apartment, where we were welcomed by Rosa, a good-looking blonde woman, with big blue eyes and a kerchief on her head. She looked very similar to her sister, who had been at the ghetto with us. Rosa held a fussy little girl in her arms. The girl constantly moved from side to side, and her eyes shifted in all directions. Next to Rosa stood a tall, pretty girl of about my age, with large brown-green eyes. On the other side was a bespectacled girl, about Felusha's age. The aunt approached Rosa and they embraced, alternately laughing and crying.

We went out to the yard. A row of pine trees separated the houses, growing from a covering of pine needles that had been shed. Felusha and I looked at each other. We sat by the table and the older daughter brought out a soda maker, the middle one brought out a red syrup, and we drank sweet and delicious soda water. Moshe Tzioni came out to the yard and said he would be taking a shower and then going to synagogue. The aunt told me to shower after him and go to synagogue with him, and that on Saturday I should read from the Torah and bless "Hagomel". I went with Moshe to the synagogue. We did not speak at all on the way there, as he was deep in thought. At the synagogue Moshe was treated with much respect and was

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Comment [2]:

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Comment [3]:

Carmit

מאור משהו בניסוח העברי: לא הסתדר לי פה, אז אלתרתי קצת. תוכל לבדוק אם המשפט הזה בסדר? פשוט יש לי הרגשה שחסרה מילה או שתיים במקור.

welcomed very nicely. He sat in the first row by the Holy Ark, and I sat on one of the benches in the back. We barely spoke on the way back, either, as he was deep in thought again.

When we arrived home, Moshe made the Kiddush. Rosa served fishcakes, because it was impossible to find Karp for traditional “gefilte fish”. The aunt said that the fishcakes were excellent. Afterwards we had noodle soup and drank tea with cookies. In the middle of the room where we ate was a table surrounded with chairs. On either side of it, against the walls, were shelves filled with books, reaching as high as the ceiling. In the corner was an armchair which opened into a bed. This room was used by Moshe during the week. In the other room was a baby’s crib in which the baby, Shula, slept and next to it was Rosa’s bed. Most of the time, Shula was ill, crying, and would not eat. Rosa told us that the baby had been born with a defect in her heart. The two other girls, Dina and Rachel, slept in the third room. Now that we had arrived, they had borrowed mattresses from the neighbors and moved the girls into Rosa’s room.

Moshe finished singing a few prayers and blessed over the food. Dina and Rachel came out to the yard with Felusha and me. We sat around the table and looked at each other, but did not speak. They knew only Hebrew, and we spoke only Yiddish and Spanish, and understood a little Hebrew. Every so often they would burst out in laughter, and we would join them. The aunt came out to the yard and told us that on Sunday, Moshe would check whether a place could be found for us in one of the religious children’s institutions. Sarah joined us at the table and the aunt entered the kitchen to help Rosa. Occasionally we would hear the baby cry. Moshe rarely left his room. If he wanted something, he would go to Rosa and quietly speak with her.

On Saturday morning I went to synagogue with Moshe Tzioni. At the end of the Morning Prayer, I was called up to read from the Torah, and made the “Hagomel” blessing. When we returned from synagogue, Moshe made the Kiddush. After the meal, Felusha and I went for a walk with Rachel and Dina, back and forth along the treed boulevard that was Jaffa’s main street. As we walked, we began to understand some of what Dina and Rachel were saying in Hebrew, and they could also understand us. We returned after a few hours, sat in the yard, and drank soda water.

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On Sunday afternoon, a young fellow arrived and delivered a letter that Rosa's husband had written to her. They did not have a telephone and the matter was urgent. The letter provided the name of the person in the Ministry of the Interior who should be contact in order to find an educational institution for Felusha. Rosa and Felusha immediately left for the Ministry of the Interior. The aunt and Sarah took care of the baby, Dina and Rachel were in school, and I was in Moshe's room, perusing through his books. When Rosa returned with Felusha, she said that she had managed to arrange a place for her in a religious institution belonging to "Aliyat Hano'ar" - Youth Immigration - near Petach Tikvah. The institution was called "Mossad Aliyah" - Immigration Institute - and God-willing, she would take her there tomorrow. Felusha's mood soured and she clung to the aunt with teary eyes, saying that we would be parting again. The aunt embraced her and told her not to cry, as there was no reason for tears. The institution would have girls of her own age, and she would learn to speak Hebrew. We mustn't forget that we were in Israel and needed to master Hebrew. Besides, it was crowded at the Tzioni house, little Shula was ill, and Rosa needed to be at her side day and night. Felusha calmed down and went to lie down in her room.

The following day, Rosa and Felusha traveled to the institution, and in the afternoon, Rosa returned alone. The aunt had tears in her eyes, and asked Rosa in a quiet, hoarse voice, how Felusha felt about being left there on her own. Rosa spoke with a smile, and said that they were very well received, and that from herein, Felusha's would be known as Tzipora. A few girls had given them a tour of the institution and had brought them to the room where Tzipora would live with her friends. The room was quite large, and had a table with four chairs at its center, and along the walls four beds and dressers, to hold the girls' clothes and school supplies. The girls were very nice, and Tzipora had gone with them to the clothing storeroom and returned with the clothes that she would wear in the institution, to make her look like all the other girls.

The aunt asked Rosa what would become of Avram. Rosa answered that her husband, Moshe, was trying to arrange for him to be accepted at "Mossad Aliyah" as well, but there was a problem, since they only accepted children no older than fifteen, and he was already at that age. The aunt looked at me and said with disappointment that in Uruguay I had always been the shortest of my classmates, and during our sea voyage I had gotten thinner, but also taller. The aunt looked at Rosa. Rosa looked at me with her kind smile and burst out in a contagious laughter, which soon enveloped the aunt and me as well. Once we had regained our composure, Rosa said that

they should dress me in clothes that would make me appear younger than my real age. I must not be seen in the clothes I was wearing now. Rosa began to laugh again, covered her mouth to stifle the laugh, and said that I should wear Dina's gymnastics clothes, and then I would look like a twelve-year-old boy. The aunt agreed. I was not amused at all.

Towards evening, when Moshe returned from his work, he removed his hat and jacket, entered the kitchen, and ate his meal. The aunt, Sarah and I were sitting in the yard. The aunt held little Shula in her arms, as she seemed to be calmest there. After Rosa finished serving her husband his meal, she came outside and said that there was a good chance that I would be accepted at the institution. Moshe had spoken with Rabbi Bachrach, the institution's principal, and had told him about us. He told him that I was "a Yiddisher kind". I did not understand the meaning, exactly. After Rosa left, I asked the aunt what Moshe Tzioni had meant, and she said that Moshe had told the principal that I knew how to pray and to lay tfillin, and that I had been educated at the Talmud Torah.

The following morning, after Dina and Rachel had left for school, Rosa brought me very short light blue pants, with a rubber band around the thighs. She also gave me a small, short-sleeved white shirt and a pair of socks that belonged to her husband. I took the clothes and got dresses. The pants were short and puffy because of the rubber band; the shirt reached my navel with the sleeves reaching just short of my elbows, and the socks reaching well above my knees. On my head I wore my beret. Sarah stood on the other side of the door and inquired whether I had finished dressing, because she wanted to enter the room. I opened the door, and after one look at me she yelled: "mama, kim schnell, a maelfe (monkey)!" The aunt entered and did not utter a word. She called Rosa to ask her whether this was how she had intended for me to look. Rosa entered, looked, and said: "this is good, but it's a shame he has so much hair on his legs and arms".

Shula began to cry. Rosa told the aunt that there was a bottle heating on the stove and asked her to feed the baby. Any leftovers were to be placed in the refrigerator on ice. If the baby wanted to eat again, the aunt would need to reheat the bottle in the kettle and feed her. Rosa folded my to reach just beneath my knees, and we left to see the clerk at the Ministry of the Interior. We climbed on the bus and sat down. Everyone looked at me, and I lowered my head and looked at the floor. We arrived at the Ministry of the Interior building, which was located on Allenby Street, not far from "Kikar Hamoshavot". Rosa instructed me to sit and wait outside while she went inside to speak with the clerk. She returned after a few minutes with tears in her eyes. "Are we going home?" I asked. Rosa answered that the clerk had irritated her and was now taking his lunch break. We had to wait until he summoned us. The clerk exited his room. He was a tall, thin man, with a gray-black beard, narrow eyes and thick eyebrows. Across his forehead were

deep wrinkles, his hair was short, and on his head was a black skullcap. With a cold and gruff face he signaled for us to enter. He had already managed to sit down behind his small desk. We stood facing him; he raised his eyes, looked me up and down, turned to Rosa and asked: "This is the child? A yana yeled..." Rosa told him in a voice strangled by tears that their situation was very difficult; they had a sick little child. They had to register me at the institution in order to help ease their situation and so that I could study.

The clerk deliberated for a while, and said that he would write a letter to the institution, which would in turn have to decide whether or not to accept me. When we left, Rosa heaved a sigh of relief and wiped her tears. We went to the central bus station and rode a bus to Petach Tikvah. From there we walked to Kfar Avraham, until we reached "Mossad Aliyah". We entered through the gate and saw to our right a white, two-story building with the sign "Office" on it. Rosa asked for Rabbi Bachrach and she was directed to the second floor. We climbed the stairs and stood by the rabbi's open door.

Behind a large desk sat a bespectacled man with a round face and a long beard, wearing a large black skullcap on his head. He was perusing the papers on his desk. Rosa asked whether we had found rabbi Bachrach, and he raised his head and offered: "please come in". We entered and Rosa explained who we were. The rabbi looked at me and said he was familiar with the problem, and added: "I am willing to accept him. He must go to the clothing storeroom and get clothes. One could not walk around the institution in the clothes he is wearing". He wrote something on a note and handed it to Rosa, instructing her to go downstairs, present it to the secretary, and travel home safely. We left the principal's office and Rosa wiped her tears. We descended to the office, Rosa handed the note over to the secretary, who looked at me, shrugged his shoulders, and told Rosa she was free to return home, as everything would be alright and he would take care of me. Rosa remained in her spot and told the secretary that she would wait until I dressed in the clothes from the storeroom, so that she could take the clothing I was wearing home with her. The secretary said that after recording my particulars, we would go to the clothing storeroom with the matron and I would change my clothes.

The matron was an older woman, wearing a bright blue robe and a blue kerchief on her head. She looked at me with pity in her eyes. We followed her to the storeroom, where I was given two "tembel" hats, one blue and one khaki, two pairs of khaki shorts, a belt, two shirts - one khaki and one white for the holidays and the Sabbath, three pairs of socks, two undershirts, two pairs of underwear and a shirt and pants for work. The matron wrote a number on all of my clothes, and said that I would have the clothes returned to me from the laundry according to the number. All of the clothes were placed in a small sack that was also marked with my number. Next, the

matron led us to a room with four beds. Three of the beds had been made, while the fourth had a bare mattress. The matron sent me to the storeroom to ask for a sheet, blanket and towel, and to make sure to ask them to mark my number on them. Rosa left the room, I wore the clothes I had received and gave her back Dina's clothes. We said our farewells and she left. I lay on my mattress, covered my eyes, and could not hold back my tears.

When I opened my eyes, a pair of black eyes was looking down at me. I sat up and saw a boy standing in front of me with a face the color of chocolate. He signaled to me that he slept in the next bed and said that his name was Yossef. He asked for my name and I told him that my name was Avram. He repeated my name with an emphasis: "Avraham". He then pointed to his sheet and blanket and said that we would go to the storeroom to receive a sheet, blanket, pillow and towel. Yossef led the way and I followed. The girl in the storeroom asked for the number I had been assigned, and after I supplied it to her she marked it on the items that she had given me with a black marker. Yossef helped me set my bed. Afterwards, two boys entered the room, one tall with smooth long black hair, and the other shorter than me; a handsome boy whose hair was curly and blond and his eyes blue and alert. The shorter one, whose name was Pesach, threw a look at me and immediately turned away. The taller one smiled and introduced himself. His name was Menachem and he worked in the cattle shed and spoke some Yiddish. He translated anything I did not understand.

We went to pray Minhah, the afternoon prayer. There were many boys in the group, divided into two groups. I was in the older group. After the prayer, I was approached by a fellow that was older than me. He was bespectacled, thin, and had a high forehead. He extended his arm and told me he was Yaacov, our group leader. Rabbi Bachrach had mentioned my name and he wanted to know if I spoke Hebrew. I answered slowly that I understood, but could not speak it well. Yaacov smiled and said that following dinner, our group would meet in the club.

I followed the boys from my room, entered the dining hall and sat next to them. On the table, next to each person, was a blue plate containing half of a tomato and half of a hard-boiled egg. Next to the plate was a cup. Along the table were dishes with sliced bread, jelly, margarine, and tea urns. At the conclusion of the meal one of the boys began to loudly recite the food prayer. The remaining boys mumbled the prayer, quietly moving their lips. I did not know the prayer by heart, and remained silent. Following the meal, I went to the club with the group. Everyone sat down in a semi-circle and I sat down as well. The number of boys and girls was almost identical. The leader walked in, sat facing us, looked at everyone and said that he would like to introduce a new member who had joined the group. He turned to me and asked me to introduce myself. I said that my name was Avraham Strikovsky. The leader added that I had only recently arrived in Israel and did not yet know Hebrew



too well. He asked them to be considerate and to help me to get settled in the smoothest and easiest way, as would befit the oldest group in the institution. Afterwards he spoke about a number of issues, and the group members actively participated, talked and debated. Most prominent among the group was a short, thin boy, with piercing blue eyes. He sat next to the leader and when he began to speak, everyone stopped speaking and listened.

When the activities with the leader ended, some of the members remained in their place and continued to debate. I saw Yossef leave, so I left as well, caught up to him, and we walked back to our room together. He took out a thick notebook, placed it on the dresses near him, sat at the edge of the bed and began to write. I sat on the bed and gazed at the wall in front of me. My thoughts wandered. A month ago I had been in Uruguay, working in a coat factory, and now I was in an institution, starting over again with boys my own age... Menachem entered the room with another boy and asked me what kind of work I'd like to do. I told him that I could milk cows, plow with a horse, and sew with a sewing machine. He looked at the list in his hand and said that following breakfast the following day, I would work in the vegetable garden. Menachem said that he would tell me each evening where I would be assigned to work the next day. If another worker was needed in the cattle shed, he would recommend me for the job. Menachem repeated what he said in broken Yiddish, so that I could understand him better.

The next day I wore my work clothes, put on my "tembel" hat and went to pray with the other boys. Following the prayer we ate breakfast, and at the conclusion of the food prayer, we left the dining hall and divided into groups according to our work placements. There was an older man standing by our group, wearing thick glasses. His eyes looked like shiny black dots through the thick lenses, his face was covered in deep wrinkles, and the "tembel" hat on his head hid his glasses a little. The man said in a small voice that his name was Israel, and that anyone assigned to work in the vegetable garden was to follow him. He began to walk and we followed.

We were about fifteen boys and girls. We arrived at the field, and every member took a bucket and began to weed one of the garden beds. After about two hours, two girls arrived carrying tin jugs filled with cold water and some cake. At noontime, we finished our work and returned to the institution. On the way I asked my roommate, Pesach, what we did next. He said that we showered, put on clean clothes and went to eat lunch, and then from two until six we attended classes. After the Minhah prayer, we eat dinner, do our homework, and then go to the club or for a walk with a girlfriend. He smiled and asked if I understood. I continued asking: "And anyone without a girlfriend?" He answered: "Anyone who doesn't have one will go to the club and find one. If you don't go looking, you'll never find one!"

After lunch I went to the classroom and waited for everyone to come in and to sit down. The benches at the back were empty, so I went to the back. I saw a girl sitting alone, pointed to the chair next to her and asked if I could sit, and she nodded her head. The teacher hadn't yet entered, and the girl I sat next to was looking ahead at the chalkboard, while I looked at her. She had black wavy hair that reached her shoulders, a short, slightly flattened nose, thick lips and a small triangular chin. Suddenly she turned her head towards me and my gaze met her black eyes, which were framed by long brows. I smiled and said: "I'm Avraham". She returned the smile and said: "I'm Sima". I told her that I was new to the institution and she answered solemnly that she knew and then turned her head back towards the chalkboard.

The teacher entered, and everyone remained seated and continued talking. The teacher was a tall man, his head large, his hair black and curly, and he wore big glasses through which his eyes appeared very large. His pants were pulled up above his navel, and their bottoms were cut short. He pulled his desk chair towards him, placed his right leg on the seat, leaned his shoulder on the backrest, placed his chin on his palm, and asked the students: "Who can remind me what we studied in our last Bible lesson?" A few students raised their hands. The teacher looked around, and suddenly realizing I was there, he said: "Hey, you're new!" I stood and said: "My name is Avraham." "Avraham what?" Avraham Strikovsky." He recorded my name in his register.

The students' arms were still raised and the teacher asked one student to answer. The student's answer opened up a debate, which the teacher allowed to develop, while making sure that everyone spoke in turn. I sat quietly and listened. I did not understand most of what was said, because they were speaking so quickly. Sima also sat silently.

In the evening I went to the club and sat on a chair. Classical music was playing on the radio that stood in the corner. Sitting next to the radio, listening to the music with his eyes closed, was a boy from my group. He was redheaded, bespectacled, and wore a blue skullcap. Gradually, more boys and girls entered. Sima arrived with a tall, pretty blonde girl. Then Pesach entered, approached the blonde and spoke with her, and they left the club. Sima remained alone, but did not glance towards me. A few other girls arrived and sat in a circle, chatting and laughing. I went back to my room, where Yossef took out a Bible and showed me what the class had studied so far.

I worked in the vegetable garden for about two months. One evening while I was at the club, the work coordinator approached me and said that starting the next day I would work in garbage collection and would also take care of the mule. Another boy from the group, named Akiva, would help me lift the pails onto the cart and empty them. He explained that there were

several tin barrels, scattered throughout the institution grounds, in which the garbage was collected. My role would be to harness the mule, and with the help of Akiva, load the barrels onto a cart and then empty them in the field. He added that Akiva already knew the location in the field where the garbage was to be disposed. Since I had said that I knew how to take care of horses, my job would also include feeding and watering the mule. I asked what a mule was, and he explained that a mule was a cross-breed between a horse and a donkey.

The next day I arrived at the stable and met Akiva. He was a tall, strong, quiet blond boy, who rarely spoke. I approached the mule, which was restless. Her tail swung from side to side and her ears pointed sharply up. The trough was nearly empty, and on the wall across hung a bucket, which I took down, filled with water, and offered the mule to drink. She drank all of the water and I brought another full bucket, of which she drank about half. I petted her neck, and gently pulled the harness over her head, leading her outside towards the cart. I tied the reins to the hooks on the poles at the front of the cart. Akiva climbed on the cart with me, and there was nowhere to sit. We had to remain standing throughout the ride. I held the reins and used them to steer the mule, while Akiva stood behind me and held on to a steel pole, to prevent himself from falling. During each round we loaded two barrels on the cart and rode out to the field to empty them. We rode from the institution towards Rosh Ha'ayin. After about half a kilometer, we left the road and turned to a field on the left. We rode on for about three more kilometers, stopped, and emptied the garbage.

When we returned to the institution we had to wash the empty barrels that had been filled with kitchen refuse. We placed the barrels on a concrete platform by the kitchen and washed them with a hose. Next we turned them over to let them dry, and later the kitchen staff would return them to their place. The rest of the barrels did not require washing as the refuse in them was dry. After four rounds, we finished emptying all of the barrels. Upon returning from our last trip, Akiva hopped off the cart near the residences, while I continued riding towards the stable. I released the mule from the cart and tied her in the stable. I removed her harness, brought her water, and placed some feed in her trough. I washed my face and hands and went to eat. After the meal I returned to the stable and brushed the mule with a special brush, made of thin iron threads.

I returned to the residence, showered, changed clothes, and went to class. The group leader taught us a history lesson, and everyone listened quietly. Later we had math, geography, and Bible lessons. The Bible lesson was taught by rabbi Bachrach. His lesson was also quiet, but there was significant student participation. Anyone raising their hand was allowed to speak. The rabbi asked that we not interrupt each other, because anyone raising their hand would get their turn. Homework was never checked, and

no one ever asked me any questions. I did not raise my hand even when I knew the answers, because I was afraid to speak Hebrew in front of the other students.

Once a week we had a motivation talk at the club, during which the group leader was not always present. The group's council members ran these discussions. There were three members on the council, one of whom was Michael, the thin boy with the blue eyes. The second member was Dov, and he worked in the cattle shed and was tall and dark, and the third was named Coca, and he was tall, fat, and had a short, wide nose. During the motivation talks they talked about the obligation of the group members to complete any task assigned to them. The purpose was to prepare us for life on a kibbutz. During one of these meetings, the leader and the group members decided that our group would be called the "Yechiel Society". We would be the first group to leave "Mossad Aliyah" and to settle in one of the religious kibbutzim in Israel.

I rarely spoke with Felusha. At the institution they called her Tzipora. I occasionally caught sight of her in the dining hall, where she sat with her friends. She seemed to always be in a pleasant mood and always had a smile across her face. My group members knew that I had a sister in the institution.

The aunt would come to visit us once a month. She told us that she had found work as a cook at a kindergarten, not too far from Rosa's house, and that she walked to work every day. Sarah was working at a sweater factory and only needed to ride one bus to get to work. The aunt said that she met with the grandfather, Daniel, and with his son Baruch and his wife Yona, who were living in Ramat-Gan. Baruch and Yona had a sweet little boy named Aryeh. The grandfather had two more daughters living in Israel, Hannah and Michaela. They lived in the north, on Kibbutz Ashdot-Yaakov, and were both married with small children. When the grandfather had written that he had an apartment for us, he meant a residence on Ashdot-Yaakov, but because it was not a religious kibbutz, it was unsuitable for us. During each of her visits to the institution, the aunt left Felusha and a half-lira each. We could spend the money at the kiosk in Kfar Avraham, to buy soda water, a cookie, or a sweet. The money lasted for a few days. I never wasted my money, but whenever Felusha ran out she came and asked to borrow some of my money.

One evening I sat in the club, and Alex, the redhead, was sitting by the radio as was his habit, listening to music, while two other boys played chess. Sima came in, looked around, saw me and smiled, and sat down not too far from where I was sitting. She took a magazine from the table and began to read it. Her smile encouraged me, and I sat next to her and asked her if she wanted to go drink soda water at the kiosk. She turned her head towards me, pulled her hair out of her eyes in a circular motion, smiled and agreed. She rose from her chair and began to walk.

I remained seated, amazed that she had agreed. After a few minutes in which I allowed the shock to sink in, I followed her. At the entrance we ran into Dov, who asked Sima where she was going. She answered irritably: "What do you care?!" and continued to walk even faster. Her hair rose and fell in step.

We exited through the gate and turned left towards Kfar Avraham. We didn't speak at first, and I thought it was better to walk in silence. I understood that she was quite upset and asked her whether she had worked very hard that day. She answered that she was tired of sewing buttons and mending holes in boys' pants all day. I asked whether there were other girls working with her. She said that the storeroom supervisor wanted no one other than her doing repairs, since she did them so expertly. I asked her whether she could speak with the other girls during work hours, and she replied that she was tired of gossiping.

I told her about my work at the institution. I told her that I removed garbage along with Akiva, and took care of the restless mule. She asked how I could tell that the mule was restless, and I told her about the swinging tail, the pointed ears, and about the hind legs that would not stand still. Sima said that perhaps something was bothering the mule. I told her that I also thought so, and that was why I petted her and brushed her body with the special brush, which seemed to calm her. We arrived at the kiosk and I asked Sima what flavor of soda water she wanted. I ordered one glass of red soda water and one glass of yellow soda water.

On our way back, we talked about the pretty evening, the moon and the stars. I thought to myself that I had to ask her, now or never: "Will you allow me to kiss you?" She stopped and looked at me, and said: "Without hands." I faced her with my hands firmly at my side, leaned down and kissed her lips. We continued to walk without talking, until I broke the silence and told her that I had a sister at the institution. She looked at me disbelievingly. I inquired whether she had any siblings, and she told me that she had an older brother who was unmarried and worked as a mechanic, and a married sister. Before we arrived at the institution's gate, I asked her whether we could kiss again. She turned to me and closed her eyes. I embraced her and kissed her. When we entered the grounds of the institution she wished me a good night, thanked me for the soda water, and walked towards her residence. I continued walking towards my room, filled with expectations about Sima.

The following day I went out to collect garbage with Akiva as usual. When we turned the cart towards the field, a truck that had been driving behind us honked its horn. The mule became frightened and jumped forward. Akiva managed to jump off of the cart, and I tightly pulled the reins with my right hand while holding on to the cart's metal pole with my left. One of the barrels in the back of the cart slid towards me and I was forced to

jump out of the left side of the cart. The mule continued on for a few more paces and stopped.

I was lying on the grass and saw that my left hand was bleeding profusely. Akiva stood over me, looking at my wound. I told him to quickly take me on the cart to the institution's nurse. I removed a handkerchief from my pocket and pressed it on the source of the bleeding. Within seconds, the handkerchief had gotten completely soaked, and the blood continued flowing, although less than initially. Akiva turned the cart around, helped me climb up, and we rode back to the institution. When the nurse saw my palm, she became very frightened and told Rachel, a girl in my group that worked in the infirmary, to run up to the office and call an ambulance urgently. Meanwhile, the blood continued to flow, and the nurse replaced the handkerchief with gauze and a bandage. I sat on a chair, pressed on the bandage with my other hand, and felt sleepy. A siren began to sound, and when the ambulance arrived, I was carried onto it on a stretcher, and taken to the Kupat Cholim clinic in Petach Tikvah. Two robed men opened the bandages, and one said to the other: "Das iz a shlachte maise." "We will have to anesthetize him immediately."

I woke up with a big bandage on my hand, and was asked to sit outside, where a nurse brought me a cup of tea. After about two hours, the institution's nurse arrived, spoke with the doctor, and approached me with prescriptions in her hand. She collected the medication from the pharmacy and we returned to the institution. On the way, I asked her when I could return to garbage collecting. She looked at me with a smile and said that I had to be very careful. I would not be allowed to work for two weeks, and had to take three pills a day for ten days. "In a week's time, you'll return to Kupat Cholim and have the stitches removed."

When we arrived at the institution, the nurse took me with her to the infirmary, where she gave me a sling. The sling was tied around my neck, and held my arm steady against my chest. It was already afternoon and the nurse accompanied me to the dining hall and instructed me to sit by a table. She entered the kitchen and brought out two bowls of soup, two plates with fried fish fillets and potatoes, and a jug of juice. From the dining hall I went to my room to lie down, as I felt very tired.

I was too new to the group for anyone to inquire about me. The following day at the dining hall, Felusha saw my bandaged hand. She approached me and asked what had happened, and when I told her, she was unable to speak and began to cry. Over the next few days, I spent most of my time lying in bed in my clothes. I only left for meals in the dining hall. Aliza, a girl from my group who was responsible for cleaning the residences entered my room one day. She sat on the corner of my bed and asked how I was feeling, and whether I needed anything. I did not ask for anything, and was in a foul mood. One evening I came to the club and sat by the radio. Sima

and Pnina entered the club. When I saw Sima, I was pleased. I waited for her to come to me so that we could go for a walk, but she only glanced at me and continued walking with Pnina to the other end of the club. They sat down and began to talk. After a while I left and went to my room to lie down.

I barely ate anything on Saturday, and was not hungry. Yossef, the Yemenite fellow sharing my room, brought me a jug of juice from which to drink. On Sunday, the nurse accompanied me back to Kupat Cholim. A doctor dressed in a white robe saw us. He removed the bandage, and found that the gauze had stuck to the wound because of the congealed blood. The doctor pulled the gauze and a stream of blood sprayed from the wound and splattered his glasses. The doctor angrily turned to the nurse and said: "A pig's blood! He has to be taken to the hospital urgently." His words hurt me deeply.

I awoke at "Hasharon" hospital in Petach Tikvah. I was lying in a bed by a window through which the sun's rays penetrated. My hand was bandaged with a big, clean bandage. On the bed to my left was an older man who was snoring loudly, with his eyes closed and his toothless mouth open. The bed next to his was empty.

In the bed facing me sat a man who was reading a newspaper that hid his face. Suddenly, he averted the newspaper, looked at me and smiled. The gold teeth in his mouth glimmered like a beacon, and the sun's ray shone on them. I looked at him and returned the smile. The man began to speak in a stream of Yiddish: "Finally, you've woken up. You've missed lunch. Soon they'll serve us dinner. I understand that the doctors could barely save your hand. Well, they are butchers... they immediately just cut anything... maybe they were more considerate of you and took pity... tonight I'll have to run home, to my wife, you know why..." he said, and then laughed. I did not respond. "Why are you so serious and unresponsive? You've already had your operation, and I don't even have mine until tomorrow. They'll need to cut me on both sides, almost in half. The drinking has ruined my kidneys..." A young nurse entered the room, interrupting his speech. The man told her that he would be running away to his house tonight because of her, because whenever she came in, he developed an appetite. The nurse warned him not to go home, since tomorrow he would be undergoing a very difficult surgery.

The nurse approached me and handed me a pill with some water. I whispered to her that I needed to use the bathroom, and she said she would bring me a pot. I told her that I could not use the pot, and had to get out of bed. She considered this and said that she would help me go to the toilet. I tried to get up and the nurse helped me. The room began to spin, but I stood on my feet and, with the nurse's support, began to walk. When I returned from the toilet I felt better. In the evening, I received two slices of bread, half an egg, soured milk, and a cup of tea. The following morning I was able to get out of bed and go to the toilet on my own. I never saw the man with the

gold teeth again. Two other people were brought to the room, and everyone remained silent, staring at the ceiling.

Fortunately, I was lying by the window and was able to look outside from time to time. I occasionally thought about the institution, about Sima, and about Felusha and the aunt. When I thought of the immigration to Israel, I felt sadness, intense anger, and regret. Why did we have to come to Israel? What was the aunt's urgency?! Tears began to flow from my eyes. A number of doctors entered the room, walked to each bed, and read the cards hanging from them. One of the doctors asked how I was feeling, and I told him that the hand had ceased throbbing and the bleeding had also stopped. He smiled at me and told me I did not need to worry, however, I would have to be very careful to make sure I did not hit my hand on anything. He asked whether I was right or left handed, and I told him that I wrote with my right hand but threw stones with my left. The doctor smiled and looked at the other doctors, who shrugged their shoulders in bewilderment. The doctor turned to me and said: "In any event, be careful until your wound heals. You should also smile a little, so that people will not assume you are sad."

I spent most of my time at the hospital looking out through the window. The sky was blue, and white clouds appeared and then faded away. Occasionally, chirping birds would fly near the window. Towards evening, I saw the aunt's face at the doorway and was very happy. Pushing her way into the room behind her was Hannah, the grandfather's daughter, and my father's sister. The aunt, Rivkah, inquired how I was and how I felt. I did not respond, because I was angry with everyone. "He could be an actor in a theater," said Hannah loudly, in Yiddish. Aunt Rivkah removed a glass jar from her bag and told me that she had brought me a fishcake and a roll, from the Shabbat meal. She asked me to eat because it was delicious and would help me regain my strength. I said that I did not want anything. "He needn't do us any favors," said Hannah in a sing-song voice, and added: "Give me the jar and I'll eat it. It has been a long time since I've eaten fish." She took the jar from the aunt and asked for a fork. The aunt was stunned. Hannah put her hand into the aunt's purse, removed a fork that had been wrapped in a white napkin, and ate the fishcake and the roll. I turned my back to them, covered my head with the blanket, and wept quietly. I remained that way until they left the room.

The following day, the nurse told me that I was free to walk around, carefully. In the afternoon, Felusha came to visit me along with Rachel, the girl from my group who worked in the infirmary. We sat in a room that had chairs, tables, and a shelf with a radio on it. It was a special room in which patients who were mobile would meet with their visitors. Felusha had brought a package of chocolate, and offered each of us a piece. Rachel brought regards from everyone in the group, and Felusha asked when I would return to the institution. She said that yesterday she had been called to



the office and the aunt spoke with her on the telephone. She instructed her to go visit me and then to telephone a neighbor of the Tzionis who had a telephone, to let her know how I felt. Rachel went to ask the nurses when she would be allowed to take me back to the institution. They told her that if my fever subsided, they would release me before noon on Friday.

I returned to the institution on Friday afternoon. Half of my group was away, having gone to their parents or relatives for Shabbat. Yossef and I remained alone in the room, as he rarely left for vacations. On Friday evening Yossef was practicing reading the portion of the week, because on Saturday he would read from the Torah. Following the meal on Saturday he read from his books and notebooks and did not speak with me. I tried to speak with him and asked him questions, but he answered shortly, without lifting his head from the book, and continued reading. I took a book from one of the shelves, sat on a chair by the table and turned the pages with one hand. I was unable to concentrate and returned the book to its place.

I went for a walk on the main road, in the direction of Kfar Avraham. On the way I encountered a few of the girls from Felusha's group. The girls looked at me and whispered amongst themselves, covering their mouths with their hands. One of the girls, the boldest of the group, said that if I was looking for Tzipora, I would not find her as she had gone away for Shabbat. Truthfully, I had not been looking for her. I myself did not know what it was I was seeking.

On Sunday morning I awoke as usual and went to synagogue. I did not lay the tfillin, because I was afraid to use my bandaged left hand. No one said anything to me and no one offered any assistance. When the boys would leave for work, I would remain in my room or sit in the club, listening to songs and talk shows on the radio. Occasionally, if I had a piece of paper, I would draw the gate with the adorned tall pillars that appeared on the front page of the Pentateuch or the Talmud.

One day I had found a picture of the Temple Mount in a book, and drew it. The group members saw the drawing and showed it to Michael, the chairman of our group's council, who then asked rabbi Bachrach to buy me some sheets of thick paper and a box of six colors. From that point I would sit in the club and draw. Of all of the drawings, they selected three and hung them in the club. The members began treating me more nicely and I felt that I was becoming part of the group.

In the middle of the week, the aunt came to visit me, thankfully alone this time. She embraced me and we kissed. I led her to my room and we sat on the bed. The aunt took out some cake and sweets from paper bags and approached Yossef, who had been sitting by the table and writing, offering him the bag of cakes. He signaled that he did not want any. Next she handed him the bag of sweets and he helped himself to one and thanked her. The aunt asked me to come home for Shabbat, but I told her that since they had

not yet removed my stitches, I was afraid to ride on buses. The aunt and I walked together to Felusha's residence. We saw a few girls and asked them to call Tzipora. She came out and kissed the aunt. The aunt had not brought her any sweets, as she had received hers at home during Shabbat. Felusha and I walked with the aunt as far as Kfar Avraham, where she bought us some soda water at the kiosk. She then walked to the central bus station in Petach Tikvah while we returned to the institution.

On Friday afternoon, the aunt arrived at the institution and told us that she wanted to spend Shabbat with us. I was surprised, because usually the students went home to visit their relatives on Shabbat, and not the other way around. There were some empty rooms in Felusha's residence, where the aunt could sleep. That evening, the aunt came with us to the dining hall. We listened to the Kiddush and ate our meal. Following the meal we went for a walk around the institution, and when we became tired, she went with Felusha to their residence and I returned to my room. The following day, Saturday, the aunt attended synagogue with Felusha and prayed with the girls. At the conclusion of the Sabbath, we accompanied her to Kfar Avraham, where she bought us soda water again, and then returned home.

Before noon on Sunday, the nurse and I went to Kupat Cholim in Petach Tikvah to have my stitches removed. The cut looked good, white and clean, but not entirely healed. The doctor asked that we cover the spot with a bandage and that I refrain from working until the wound healed. A month and a half later the wound finally healed, and a white scar remained where I had been cut.

I returned to the institution and was no longer assigned to work in garbage collection. I returned to work in the vegetable garden. When I went to class, I saw that I had fallen behind on my studies a great deal during my absence. One day, while I was eating lunch in the dining hall, Felusha approached me and told me to wait for her outside after the meal, because she wished to speak with me. When we met outside, she happily informed me that, starting the next day, she would begin working at the office, on the recommendation of her teacher. She laughed and kissed me, and I was delighted for her. Felusha was a good student and spoke excellent Hebrew, and so she was very well suited to the role.

During the weekly talks, we started discussing leaving the institution as a group to settle in one of the religious kibbutzim. One day a fellow of about the same age as our group leader entered the dining hall. He wore a casquette hat on his head, a blue shirt with khaki pants, and sandals. The fellow approached our group leader, shook his hand, and sat down at the table where Michael, Dov, Coca, and the leader had been sitting. They ate and talked. Prior to the end of the meal, Dov circulated among the tables occupied by our group and told everyone to gather in the club after the meal.

We gathered in the club and sat in a semi-circle. The group leader stood and introduced the fellow as Avraham Kaul, who was the external coordinator of “Ein Tzurim”, a kibbutz belonging to the religious stream. Avraham wanted to tell us a little about “Ein Tzurim”, and what the members would expect from the first group that would join them. He stood, lifted his hat a little, turned his head from side to side, and looked everyone in the eye. He told us the following:

“Kibbutz ‘Ein Tzurim’ was established two years ago, in 1949. It is located about three kilometers from the road that connects the Masmia junction with Ashkelon, not far from Kiryat Malachi. Some of the members that established the kibbutz, were in ‘Ein Tzurim’ during the fall of Gush Etzion during the War of Independence. The remainder arrived from all over the country. There are three married couples on the kibbutz, but they are all still childless. The members of the kibbutz are religious and the men wear a knit skullcap, which they cover with ‘tembel’ hats while they work. There is a water well on the kibbutz that has survived since the days that the area was settled by Arabs, and two main buildings. One serves as a dining hall and synagogue, and the other serves as a laundromat, storeroom, and classroom. The walls of the buildings are very thick, immune to the heat of the summer and the cold of winter.

We have a chicken coop and a modern cattle shed. We are attempting to develop the areas of vegetable, grain, and fruit farming. We are still at the beginning of our way, and have not yet managed to construct living quarters, which is why some of our members still resided in tents. You will also have to live in tents, until we will build houses for the members now living in tents, at which point you will be able to move into the cabins they will vacate. At this stage, it is impossible for us to take on your entire group, which means that you will need to select eighteen to twenty members, both boys and girls to join us. For us, this is a first attempt to incorporate a youth group. You will usually work in the morning and study in the afternoon. We are committed to providing you with teachers to teach you at your current level of schooling.”

He continued, “We have a few members who studied in university, with knowledge of the Bible and the Talmud, and one who studied music at the conservatory. Tova and Rafi Ilan are a very talented couple. She is an expert on Hebrew literature and he on international literature, and they have many books. My wife is a math expert, and without bragging, I should tell you that I also studied math at the Technion. We have members who play the accordion and the recorder, and we also have a gramophone, records, and a large library. You have nothing to worry about from the perspective of education and culture.

Our expectations of the members who wish to join us are that they are motivated to work; willing to initially live under difficult conditions; sociable; and that they envision kibbutz life as their direction in life.”

At the conclusion of the meeting, arguments broke out among the council members regarding the selection of the group members who would go to the kibbutz. We had found out that the members not going to the kibbutz would be sent to “Mikveh Israel” or another institution, or could choose to return home. New rumors emerged every day regarding which members would be selected to go to the kibbutz. It seemed that everyone wanted to go.

Everyone was occupied with the topic of moving to the kibbutz. There was a feeling that anyone not chosen to go to the kibbutz was somehow inferior, because he or she was not sociable enough. We were informed one day that the entire group was to meet at the club in the evening. We assumed that we would be told which members were going to the kibbutz and which would go to “Mikveh Israel”. I was certain that I would not be leaving for the kibbutz. I had missed a great deal of schooling and work, was not very involved in social activities, and rarely spoke. On the other hand, I always participated in meetings, spent a great deal of time in the club, related well to everyone, and was considered a sociable enough fellow.

We gathered in the club and the tension was very thick. Everyone sat quietly and waited to hear Michael announce the names of the members going to the kibbutz. Although none of us were familiar with kibbutz life, everyone wanted to be chosen. There was an aura of enchantment to it, which reflected maturity and Zionism. After the names were read, there was silence. The members that had been selected looked around with a glint in their eyes and a glimmer of happiness. Those not selected sat with frozen expressions. I was among those selected to go.

After that evening, our group split into two camps; those leaving for “Ein Tzurim” and those moving to “Mikveh Israel”. The relationships and atmosphere changed, and the happiness that had previously prevailed had disappeared.

Those not selected debated whether to continue on to “Mikveh Israel”, return home, continue to study, or join the workforce. One of the biggest surprises was that Michael, the spirit of the group, had decided not to go to the kibbutz and was going to start studying at a yeshiva. Dov filled his place as the council chairman. Two days prior to the end of the school year, we were informed that a truck would arrive in three days to take us to the kibbutz. We had to get organized and to collect our personal clothing from the storeroom by then.

The day of departure from the institution was very difficult, and affected the girls most. Over time, they had formed strong and warm relationships, had shared heart-to-heart discussions, and had developed a

strong reliance on each other. Following the kisses and embraces, the eyes filled with tears, and finally the crying commenced...

## 15

We arrived in “Ein Tzurim” in the very hot hours of the afternoon. The boys settled in the two large tents and the girls settled in the cabin. After laying our belongings on our beds, we went to eat. Following the meal, Dov, Coca, and a young woman from the kibbutz led us to an Arab house that stood between the well and the dining hall. About thirty meters away were four buildings, constructed of aluminum and painted white. These were the toilets. Next to them, in an elongated aluminum building, were the showers. The building was divided in two, one side for the men and one side for the women. There was a strong scent of sulfur, since the men shaved with a cream rather than with razors. At the center of the kibbutz was a water tower and beneath it were offices.

We entered the classroom in the Arab house. It had no windows and was crowded and stuffy, but was not hot. A few burning lamps lit the room. The thin young woman stood by the chalkboard. A wide smile exposed two rows of large white teeth. Her eyes had a glint of light, and she looked straight into our eyes and smiled a smile that was impossible not to return. She charmed us at first sight. She introduced herself as Tova Ilan, and said she would be the leader responsible for our group, and also our literature teacher. Tova asked us to approach her directly with any problem, big or small. Since we were the first group to arrive on the kibbutz, she would make every effort to solve any difficulties we might encounter. She asked for our help in return. She spoke about the wonderful members who would teach us, and bestowed warm compliments to the members of the kibbutz. A tall, strong fellow, who had a protruding chin, an aquiline nose, light blue eyes, and a graying forelock, entered the room. Tova smiled at him, but he remained serious. He stood before us and began to speak:

“Shalom, and welcome to all of you. My name is Mike and I am the kibbutz secretary. We are very happy to accept you to our kibbutz. You will help us and we will help you. From this day on, you are no longer children in an institution, but rather members of the first nuclear group on the kibbutz, and we are very proud of you, for choosing to join us. Let me tell you a little about the kibbutz. The plan is to build the kibbutz in the shape of a Menorah. We are currently building permanent residences for the married couples and the more senior members. This year we completed the construction of a new and modern cattle barn, have ordered a large wooden dining hall from Sweden, and have many more plans up our sleeve. We require working hands, and you will work in all areas in which you are needed and will be partners in the establishment of a model kibbutz. Together with work, we have made sure that all of your educational needs will be fulfilled, with the help of members who have extensive knowledge in math, the Bible, history,

Talmud, music, and of course, literature.” Before he left, he looked at Tova, smiled, thanked us and wished us luck.

Tova opened a metal cabinet removed a package containing thin notebooks and gave one to each of us, along with a sharpened half-pencil. She asked us to write our names on the notebook cover and to write about ourselves and our relatives inside; who were our closest relatives in Israel, and where they lived; how we had arrived at “Mossad Aliyah”, and where we had been before arriving at the institution; what had we studied over the years and what books had we read; which area of the kibbutz did we wish to work in, and any other details we thought relevant to note.

She removed a thick book from the cabinet, sat down and began to read from it. The book was “The Comprehensive Collection of H.N. Bialik.” I wrote about myself briefly. I also noted that I had worked in the vegetable garden, knew how to milk cows and care for horses, and wished to study and to work on a tractor. Although I knew there were errors in my Hebrew, I continued to write. I was one of the last to finish, and after I handed the notebook to Tova, I went to the storeroom to receive equipment; a sheet, blankets, a towel, a soap-holder with soap, and socks. I returned to the tent, set my bed, and lay down. The group members talked about the areas in which they had wanted to work. Towards evening, we went to pray Minhah and to eat dinner. Tova asked us to remain in the dining hall in order to receive our work assignments for tomorrow, Friday, a day in which we only worked until eleven and had no lessons.

The work coordinator sat with the supervisors of the various fields, and Tova sat with them as well. When they had finished assigning everyone a position, they read everyone’s name along with the area to which they had been assigned. Chaya’le would work in the chicken coop while Hannah and Dov would work in the cattle barn. The remaining girls were divided between the kitchen, clothing storeroom, and vegetable garden. Most of the boys were assigned to construction or carpentry. The tractor was assigned to Issar, a short, muscular fellow who had been Michael’s best friend. I was assigned to the vegetable garden.

The next day, following the prayer and breakfast, I went to the field with Feitcher, the supervisor of the vegetable garden. There were a few other boys and girls from the group there, all dressed in work clothes and ‘tembel’ hats. The kibbutz fields were nothing like the fields in the institution. They were much more expansive, colored in a greenish-yellow hue, with a few trees scattered between them. We arrived at a spacious field of tomatoes and cucumbers. Some of the members weeded the field, while Akiva and I moved watering hoses from place to place, according to Feitcher’s instructions. We were given a ten minutes to rest and drink for every hour of work, which we also used to chat and laugh. Anyone who was thirsty could get a drink from the water hose. Feitcher was not a big talker, and prior to the conclusion of

the work day he told us that on Sunday we would begin to harvest the red tomatoes. When we had finished working, I went to shower, and then we ate lunch.

When we returned to the tent, we shared our first impressions of the kibbutz and the work. Most of us were pleased at having been selected to go to the kibbutz. Towards evening, we wore our Shabbat clothes, which consisted of a white shirt, short khaki pants, and a skullcap. We went to pray, and this time we were joined by many of the kibbutz members. The members were tanned, shaved, and dressed in Shabbat clothes, which included white or blue shirts, mostly short khaki pants, and sandals. The singing portions of the prayer were the same as the ones at the institution, only much louder, because there were many adults.

Before the meal, one of the members said the Kiddush, and the meal was served by the women of the kibbutz and the girls from our group. Between courses, we sang Shabbat songs. It was the first opportunity we had to see all of the kibbutz members and for them to see us. The atmosphere among our group members was pleasant and cheerful. Most of the time was spent recounting experiences from the first day of work. Later we walked up to the main road and back. There were a few boys who had hung back with their girlfriends.

The kibbutz had adult members, but they were not very old. It did not take long for us to feel as though we had matured and we no longer referred to ourselves as children, the way we had in the institution. On Sunday afternoon, during our literature class with Tova, we studied the poems of H.N. Bialik. She recited a song, began to deconstruct it, and anyone who had an opinion could express it. Tova, in spite of her gentle and frail appearance, eventually led us exactly to where she had intended.

During recess, while everyone went outside, Tova asked me to stay in the classroom. She handed me an envelope along with the address of the kibbutz, and asked me to write a letter to the aunt. She asked whether my hand hurt during work, and finally, she handed me two thin, punctuated books, titled "The Monarchy of the House of David", asked me to read them, and to tell her whether I enjoyed them. She said that I needn't rush to return them, as they belonged to the kibbutz library.

I understood that these were books intended for little children, due to the punctuation. At first I only read from them while I was alone in the tent, however, the more I read, the more I enjoyed them, and found the plot appealing. Later, I no longer cared whether the group members in the tent saw me reading. A week later I returned the books to Tova and she handed me two more books on the same subject. Tova accompanied me to the library and showed me a notebook, in which the borrowed book was noted along with the name of the borrower. Thus was opened a new world with which I had not been previously familiar. Until that time, I had never read a book



from beginning to end. After I read a few punctuated books, I began to read and to enjoy unpunctuated books. Due to my reading, my writing had also improved a great deal. I enjoyed writing the compositions that Tova had assigned, made fewer spelling errors, and expanded my vocabulary.

I began to participate in class discussions as well. Tova encouraged every student that raised his hand. She was very patient and asked the entire group to be patient and to listen to anyone who was speaking, even if they disagreed with what was being said. During other lessons, like math, I had a hard time. I did not understand what our teacher, Shulamit, explained, because I was missing materials that had been taught previously. My friends allowed me to copy their homework, but most times I could not even understand what I had been copying. She'altiel, who was a mathematics genius, tried to explain things to me, but because he was a genius, he had little patience for people who knew less than he did. He spoke quickly and also stuttered, which meant I was able to understand nothing.

One day, when the math teacher assigned ten problems based on the materials we had studied in class, I was only able to solve three. I copied another answer from the friend sitting next to me, which the teacher noticed, and the rest I did not attempt to solve at all. During lunch, Shulamit approached me and said that she wanted to speak with me after the meal. We began to walk towards the senior members' residences, and Shulamit told me that she noticed my difficulties with math, which stemmed from having missed materials due to various circumstances. She asked me to come to her apartment after dinner, where she would help me until I had caught up with the rest of the class. She asked me not to mention this arrangement to the group.

I began to visit her. In the room was a piano, which her husband, Yochanan, our music teacher, would play. On a shelf was a gramophone and beneath it a few records. Shulamit and I entered a small kitchenette with a table and two chairs. She took out a math book and we studied. She wrote a problem that she had previously taught in class on a sheet of paper, and explained to me how it was solved. Later she gave me a few similar problems and asked me to solve them in time for the next lesson. I had a difficult time solving them. I understood things while she explained them to me, but did not practice enough and would forget how to solve them when I was on my own. After a few meetings, Shulamit asked that we meet twice a week. I advanced slowly, and eventually became one of the average math students.

One evening, the work coordinator approached me and asked if I would be willing to wake up early the following morning and go to the field to work with a horse, since the kibbutz member who normally worked with the horse had to go to Tel Aviv. He explained to me that what was required was the collection of the straw that remained in the field after the combine had reaped the grain. I agreed, arranged to be woken at five thirty in the

morning, and went to the dining hall early in the morning to meet with the member who was responsible for the horses. He was already holding a package of food for me, and we went to the stable, which was situated next to the cattle barn. In the stable were two castrated horses. We placed a saddle on one of them, and a harness on the other. The member asked me to lead them outside, to see whether I knew how to handle a horse.

I asked whether they had been watered yet, and he instructed me to fill a bucket and to water them. The member took the harnessed horse and walked towards the back of the stable, where a tall wide rake with two tall wheels and a metal seat was standing. On the right side of the seat were a lever and a handle with a spring, which were used to raise and lower the rake.

The rake was in the raised position. We directed the horse backwards, positioned him between the two wooden poles that were attached to the front side of the rake, and tied the horse to them. I sat on the seat, held the reins, and after the member had mounted the other horse, exited towards the fields along a sandy road that ran parallel to the water pipe. After approximately fifteen minutes, we arrived at an expansive field, whose end we could not see due to the blinding sun. The member tied his horse to a low shrub, climbed on the rake, and explained how the straw was collected:

“When you enter the field, you lower the rake and progress forward. When it fills with straw, you lift the rake with the help of the handle, and the straw spills to the ground. You lower the rake again and keep going. When the work is completed, long lines of straw will be piled in the field.”

We switched places, and I sat on the seat of the rake and began to lead the horse while the rake collected straw. The member told me not to rush and to take a short break after a few rounds, which would be beneficial both for me and for the horse. He also reminded me to take a meal break, and it was preferable that I did it sooner than later, because the package contained a cream cheese sandwich, which might spoil in the heat. At eleven thirty I was to return to the kibbutz, place the horse in the stable, and give it water and feed.

I remained in the field by myself and continued to work. The member rode the other horse back towards the kibbutz in order to travel to Tel Aviv from there. I continued to rake as the horse plodded along. It was hot and dry, and the sky was bright and was dotted with a few white clouds. A column of trees separated one plot from the next, and I progressed between them and collected the straw. A covey of birds flew behind the rake and ate the seeds. I found the work enjoyable and fulfilling.

I stopped the horse in the middle of the field, stood on the rake and breathed in the aroma of the hay, when suddenly, an imaged flashed through my head: A car enters through the gate to the farmer's yard. Aunt Rivkah emerges from it. I run away and hide behind the farmer's son, yelling: “I

don't want to return to the Jews!"... I thought about Tova, whose encouragement led me to start reading and enjoying books; About Shulamit, who in spite of her solemn expression, exuded friendship and calmness with her quiet voice; of Yochanan the musician, Shulamit's husband, who managed to interest us in listening to classical music. I wished that in the future, I could own a plot of land of my own, where I would raise a horse and ride it for my enjoyment.

In the afternoon, I returned to the kibbutz and led the horse into the stable. After giving it some water and feed, I went to shower. When I arrived in the dining hall it was nearly empty. Everyone had already finished eating. I entered the kitchen and encountered Shoshana, one of our group members. I left the empty jar of cream cheese and the towel. I told Shoshana that I had not yet eaten lunch and she looked at me with her large eyes, laughed loudly, and said that anyone who was late did not get fed. She signaled for me to sit by one of the tables, and I sat down and began to laugh. It was her laughter that had made me laugh. After a few minutes, Shoshana brought out a tray and placed it on the table in front of me. On the tray was a bowl of soup, a plate of fried fish, mashed potatoes, and an orange. She sat facing me, smiled, and said "bete'avon", enjoy your food. I told her that she had brought out too much food, and she answered that I must be hungry, and I should eat everything to make sure I kept up my strength.

To my surprise, during dinner Shoshana came to my table and sat next to me. I whispered to her that since lunch I had been unable to stop thinking about her and that I was in a great mood. She looked at me with her big eyes, smiled a smile that exposed white teeth, and asked what I thought about her. I said that I had been thinking about asking her, whether she would like to join me for a walk after dinner. She said that I was a liar, and I looked into her eyes and said that this was truly my wish. After the meal, she stood up and left. I waited a little, walked out, saw that she was walking towards the girls' residence, and followed. Before entering, she turned her head back, saw me, and waited. I neared her and asked whether she wanted to walk a little and she hesitated, but agreed.

It was a bright, moonless night, with only the stars shining in the sky. Shoshana loved to read books. We talked about the books that she had read: "The Count of Monte Cristo", "The Black Tulip", "Tarzan", "Treasure Island", and so on. I told her about the books that I had read and told her, that in the future, I wanted to be an author. She looked at me and began to laugh. Suddenly, she covered her mouth with her hand and said that she had meant me no offence. I took her hand in mind, and at first she hesitated, but then she left it in my hand. We continued to walk and talk, still holding hands. Suddenly she remembered that she had to wake up early the following day to work in the kitchen. When we arrived at her cabin, she wished me a good

night and quickly entered her room. I returned to my room, perplexed at her behavior.

One day, Tova inquired after the aunt, and I answered that I thought she was well. She handed me a stamped envelope containing a sheet of paper. She asked what language I used to write the aunt, and I told her that I wrote in Yiddish. She asked me to write the aunt that evening, and to tell her about the kibbutz, about my friends, and about the work that I did. The following day I handed Tova the envelope with the letter that I had written to the aunt.

The kibbutz owned one large truck, of the "Autocar" brand. It was driven by a short fat man, with a paunch that hung over his belt. He always wore short pants and sandals, and was always referred to as "Fattie", which did not seem to offend him. Everyone liked him. His head was as square as a cube, and his eternal smile exposed protruding teeth. His nose was too short, his nostrils wide, and his small chin very pointed. Every morning, Fattie would deliver produce from the kibbutz to "Tnuva" and would return in the evening carrying the parts arriving from abroad for the construction of the new dining hall.

At the beginning of every week, we would be reassigned to the workplaces where extra hands were needed. At the time, construction of the residences was in high swing, as was the pouring of the foundation for the dining hall. Accordingly, I was reassigned to the construction area with a few other fellows. The kibbutz's construction supervisor was a slightly older man, named Yehoshua. He was blond and tanned, had a very short hair cut, a close shave, and always smelled of perfume. Unlike the other kibbutz member, he always wore long pants. He had a young and pretty Yemenite girlfriend.

I worked in construction along with a kibbutz member who had a very pleasant temperament, named Ratner. He was a strong, sturdy fellow, with blue eyes. I would hand him the building blocks and he would build the walls.

After a while, the single kibbutz members began to form relationships with the maturing girls in our group. It was especially evident among those who worked together in the same areas. During our group meetings, the council members and the other members were opposed to these relationships and demanded that the girls cease and desist. They said that if the situation continued, they would be removed from the group. I was the first who asked to speak. I did not usually speak during meetings, due to my broken Hebrew, but my speech had improved significantly, and I decided to respond. I explained that according to my understanding, we should not be opposed to the relationships that were forming between the kibbutz members and the girls from our group. It was a natural process, which developed on its own without guidance. It was unfair to expel the girls from our group, since they

had been with us for a very long time, and would be very hurt. Additionally, the kibbutz members would be angry with us, since the girls would remain on the kibbutz regardless, and the situation would lead to strife and hatred between us. Other members concurred with my opinion. The girls in question, spoke emotionally, and, breaking into tears every so often. The meeting ended without any actions taken against the girls, and the subject was never raised again.

Dov was a tall and handsome fellow. He worked in the cattle barn and liked to pinch the pretty and sympathetic girls. They were not offended by the pinching, and would run away from him smiling, while he gave chase. One of the girls that Dov enjoyed pinching was Shoshana. She smiled more than the others, before and after he pinched her.

One Friday at dinner, Shoshana sat next to me. After the meal and the songs, she stood and left. I followed her and we walked along the regular path. We held hands and talked about the meeting in which the group members wanted to expel the girls. She was also of the opinion that the girls should not be expelled. I told her that she must be sorry that there was not a young, handsome, and single kibbutz member working with her in the kitchen. She said that I was wrong, because she did not intend to stay on the kibbutz. I placed my hand on her shoulder and pulled her towards me for a kiss, but she moved away and said it was too early to kiss. I asked whether waiting another hour would make it a good time, and she laughed and said that she hadn't even decided whether to be my girlfriend or not. I told her that she must want to be Dov's girlfriend, because when he chased her and pinched her in front of everyone, she always ran and laughed. She angrily replied that it was all in good fun, but I thought it was serious. She turned back towards the kibbutz and we returned in silence.

The following evening, Shoshana sat next to me and looked at me a few times, but I was in an unpleasant mood and did not speak with her. She ate a little and left but I remained seated. The friends sitting around the table looked at each other, not saying a word.

The construction of most of the houses had been completed, and almost all of the kibbutz members moved into them. A new shower had also been built, and next to it a toilet with running water. The construction of the dining hall had almost been completed as well. We moved into the cabins that had been vacated. A few of the cabins remained empty. The kibbutz accepted another youth group, which included boys and girls both from the city and from other kibbutzim. Our group was joined by a few members from Haifa and from the Tel Aviv area. Among the new members were a few who sang very well. They formed a group and performed in front of the kibbutz members at every opportunity. They sang wonderfully and were a pleasure to hear. The new members brought new life to our group, but also broke the

camaraderie that had existed between the older members who had graduated from "Mossad Aliyah".

One evening, Sarah, a friend of Shoshana's, entered our cabin and asked me to come outside, because she wished to speak with me. Sarah was a solemn girl with piercing black eyes. Her hair was black, thick, and curly. To keep it in check, she would pin it at the side, tie a colorful ribbon around her head, and pull it back into a bun. Sarah wrote poems, and would occasionally recite them for Oneg Shabbat. She had an excellent grasp of Hebrew, was always the best student in our literature classes, and constantly devoured poetry books.

We went outside and walked towards the old well. She faced me and said that I needed to continue to be Shoshana's boyfriend and to stop acting like a baby. Shoshana was very sad and it was not her fault that Dov continued to chase and pinch her. I said that it seemed to me as though she enjoyed his pinching, which was why she always laughed. Sarah said that she would tell Shoshana not to laugh when Dov pinched her. I chortled. She stood in front of me and asked seriously: "So you aren't coming back to her?" I answered with an emphatic: "No!" She turned her back to me and said: "That's a shame. You are stubborn and you'll learn to regret it."

I received a letter from the aunt. She apologized for not replying to my letter right away, on account of her recent marriage. She thought about me every day and was pleased to hear that I was feeling well and enjoying myself on the kibbutz. The aunt had married a religious, thick-bearded widower, who was a head shorter than her. He had a small candy manufacturing concern on Florentine Street in Tel Aviv. His son and three daughters were already married and living in apartments of their own.

The aunt and Sarah had moved into the widower's house in Givatayim. It was a small house with two main rooms and another smaller room. The aunt and her husband slept in a room that also had a dining table, six chairs, and a large sofa. At night, the sofa opened into a double bed. The other room was Sarah's and had a cabinet and a sofa that opened into a bed. When Felusha came from the institution for her Shabbat visits, they would open the sofa and she would sleep in it with Sarah.

Felusha was working in the institution's office. They were very pleased with her and she was also happy. Sarah worked in a factory that made women's clothing and bathing suits. She would ride a single bus to work every. She had several girlfriends, but had not yet found a suitable husband.

I told Tova that the aunt had married a religious widower, whose children were already married and that she missed me and wanted to invite me for Shabbat. She promised that I would be welcome there. Tova told me to write a short letter that night, to inform the aunt that I would arrive for a visit on the following Shabbat. I always left my meetings with Tova in

elevated spirits. I had a sense that everything she did for me was sincerely heartfelt.

It was traditional on the kibbutz that anyone going home or to relatives on Shabbat would receive one kilogram of seasonal vegetables, and so, I received a kilogram of onions. On Friday morning I went to the main road and took the bus as far as the central bus station in Tel Aviv. Once there, I inquired which bus would take me to Givatayim, and asked the driver to let me off in the Beit Halachmi neighborhood, one stop after Rambam Hill, in front of the cemetery.

On the way we passed roads flanked with wide open fields. Here and there were a few single-story or two-story houses, painted white, with small windows and shingled roofs. The bus began to climb a hill and the driver told me that mine would be the next stop. I alighted and remained at the side of the road. In front of me was a row of tall pine trees. They rose from a thick cover of fallen pine needles, and surrounded the cemetery. Behind me was an empty field, and to my right was a row of single-story houses with gardens. On the left was a row of identical two-story white houses, which looked as if they had been shaved. These were the first housing blocks built in Givatayim.

A woman carrying a basket, from which two challas peaked out, walked by me. I asked her whether she knew where Mr. Shmuel Nayar lived. "Yes, yes, the short religious man, with the beard, the one who married the new immigrant", she said, and pointed at his house. I knocked on the door and the aunt opened it. We stood facing each other, looking one at the other. The aunt's eyes filled with tears and she said that she was thrilled to see me, and that I looked well, tanned, and was already taller than she. She embraced me, lovingly for a very long time. She prepared a cup of tea for me, and served it along with a slice a cake that she had baked. She said that we would eat lunch just as soon as Mr. Nayar would arrive home. I showed her the onions that I had brought from the kibbutz, and she clapped joyfully and said that just that week they had run into trouble finding onions, and she was thrilled that I had brought onions and not something else.

Mr. Nayar arrived, we shook hands, and he entered his room. During lunch Mr. Nayar asked me what life on the kibbutz was like. I told him that it was much better than the institution. There was a large new dining hall, pretty houses, many cows, and spacious vegetable fields. There was never a shortage of anything and every day new members continued to arrive. He said that he would like to visit the kibbutz, because he had heard a lot about the kibbutzim but had never visited any, in spite of the fact that he had lived in Israel for many years.

Towards evening, I accompanied Mr. Nayar to the synagogue on Arlozorov Street. Although he was a short man, his appearance was very impressive, and he was impossible to ignore. His round face was adorned with a well kept beard, and through his glasses, his small eyes shone. He

wore black pants, a white shirt, a dark tie, and a black coat that reached his knees. On his head he wore a wide-brimmed black hat. His shoes, which had thick soles, added a few centimeters to his height, and he always walked with his back straight.

At the synagogue, they respectfully welcomed the uncle with a greeting of 'Shabbat shalom, rabbi Shmuel'. He had a permanent seat in the honor row, on the eastern side. On the way to his seat, he pulled a book from the book shelf, sat down and perused through it. Following the prayer, the congregants blessed each other and dispersed to their homes.

When we arrived at the house, the aunt was wearing a white kerchief on her head, and she and Sarah were very nicely dressed. The Shabbat candles flickered on the table, in the candlesticks that the aunt had carried with her from Poland. Next to the candles were two challas covered in a white napkin on which the aunt had embroidered the words "Shabbat Shalom", and a wine bottle flanked by a chalice and saucer made of silver. We sat around the table. We each had a small glass next to our plates. Mr. Nayar opened the wine bottle, poured some into the chalice, and handed me the bottle to fill the remaining glasses. We all stood, and the uncle made the Kiddush in a small, hoarse voice. He raised the chalice and drank half of the wine that was in it. Next, he raised the challas, blessed them, sliced one of them, took a bite, and passed a slice to everyone at the table. The aunt brought out gefilte fish, meat with potatoes, and compote. At the conclusion of the meal, everyone received a cup of tea and a torte cake that the aunt had baked. We sang the prayers, but the tunes were different than those on the kibbutz.

After blessing the food, Sarah and the aunt cleared the table. Mr. Nayar asked what it was that I did on the kibbutz, and I told him that I worked during the first half of the day, wherever help was needed; in the vegetable garden, cultivating the fields, moving water pipes, construction, and occasionally, on the tractor, and then in the afternoons, we studied. Later Mr. Nayar began to read the newspaper, and I stood up and went into Sarah's room. I sat on the sofa and leafed through the journals that Sarah had brought home, most likely from her workplace, since there were mostly pictures of women in bathing suits in them. The aunt and Sarah entered the room, and we talked a little, with Sarah asking me questions about the kibbutz. She said that she could not understand how you could live in one place, with all of the same people. She said it would drive her mad.

The following day, after returning from synagogue, we had some light refreshments and waited for lunch. The aunt said that Mr. Nayar's children would be joining us for lunch, and indeed, four couples soon arrived. Altogether we were twelve people, and the table was opened up and placed near the sofa, so that some of the diners sat on the sofa and the others on chairs. The food was similar to what we had eaten the night before. The



sons-in-law sang in their pleasant voices, and the meal lasted a long time. Mr. Nayar was happy and the aunt became tired from running back and forth from the kitchen. At the end of the meal she had to lie down and rest a little on Sarah's sofa.

Sarah and I went for a walk in the area. Mr. Nayar's children waited until the Havdalah. They did not eat dinner because they had been satiated by lunch. Mr. Nayar gave them money and they returned to their homes on the bus. Sarah went to visit a friend, and the aunt and I sat down and talked about many subjects. She told me that Shula, Rosa's little girl, had not improved. She was not developing and cried most of the time, which made things very difficult for the rest of the family. The aunt said that she was hopeful that her marriage with Mr. Nayar would be a good one, and that their home would be a home for Felusha and me as well. She said that Phela had written to her, and would soon be leaving Montevideo to marry Monyek in Canada. Sarah had not yet met a suitable fellow, in spite of having met several candidates. After our talk, the aunt gave me a lira, so that I could travel back to the kibbutz. She pulled open the bed from Sarah's sofa and told me I should get some sleep, as I would need to leave early the next morning.

The following day the aunt woke me early, served me some sweet tea and cake, and gave me a sandwich for the road. We embraced and I returned to the kibbutz. I arrived before noon, and went to inquire where I had been assigned to work. At the office they had told me that I had not been assigned, because anyone who left for Shabbat was not assigned to work on Sunday. I went to my room and read a book.

During lunch, Tova approached me and inquired about the Shabbat spent with my aunt. I told her that it had gone well and that the aunt was very pleased to see me and enjoyed the onions that I had brought her. I had spoken with the uncle and he had very much wanted to visit the kibbutz, as he had never seen one up close. Tova said that she would speak with the office regarding a visit from the uncle and would let me know if it was possible.

One Saturday, there were only two of us in our room, as our third roommate had gone to visit his relatives. In the afternoon, while the other roommate was sleeping and I was napping, the door opened quietly, and Sarah from my group entered. She approached my bed and firmly whispered that I was to wake up, get dressed, take a blanket and come outside. I got dressed, folded a blanket, and left the room. Sarah was standing outside, waiting for me, and we walked towards the grove. She looked at me solemnly and said that I must be wondering why she had called me, and she was right. Sarah held an envelope in her hand and said that there were some poems in it that she had written, and wished to read to me. She was a girl of

average height, full and strong. Her lips were full and round, and her mouth was tightly clenched when she was not speaking.

I entered the grove; spread the blanket under one of the trees, and Sarah sat down and removed a thick notebook from the envelope. I lay on my stomach facing her, and leaned on my elbows. I used my palms to support my chin, and looked at her. I felt my eyes flutter and struggled to stay awake. The first poem she recited was about an early rising sun, whose rays lit the world, while the birds chirped and praised the deeds of the Creator, the good people suffered, and the evil people rejoiced, and so on... After the third poem, I turned over and lay on my back, and fought to keep my eyes open, but was unsuccessful and fell asleep.

I dreamed that I was falling into an abyss, with no air to breathe, and that I was about to fall into murkiness. I opened my eyes, and Sarah's hair, which had been sprouting from the ribbon on her head, covered my eyes, her lips sealed my mouth, her chest pressed on mine and I felt that her weight would crush me. I did not react, and only wanted her to stop smothering me. She opened her eyes, looked into mine, and said solemnly: "That was your punishment for falling asleep while I read my poems." She explained that she had chosen me to hear her poems, because I was a quiet and reserved fellow. Tova had told her that I would not laugh at her or tell the other boys the contents of her poems. Sarah said that she was too shy and she would not have chosen me for a boyfriend. Shoshana had also told her that I give up on things too easily. We returned to the kibbutz and never spoke of it.

Pesach, Akiva and I received a notice to report to the army for medical tests. After having spent an entire day of examinations together, Pesach and I became closer. We often took walks on the kibbutz and discussed the future. It was obvious that we would all be recruited into the Nahal, the Pioneering Fighting Youth unit. Pesach told me that I should not go to the Nahal, as it limited one's opportunities. One would have to return to the kibbutz and could not advance in the army. I told him that I had heard that one could go to officer training within the Nahal and to advance, but he stressed that even as officers, we would still work on the kibbutz.

One day, Tova called me and told me that there would be a workshop of Judaic art held at Wilhelma, where lectures will be presented about renaissance artists, and where the participants would be taught different techniques of drawing and illustration. The workshop would last from Sunday until Thursday, and participants would stay there for the duration. She told me to prepare myself, as she had registered me and I would be leaving on the upcoming Sunday. I stood there, stunned. She approached me, patted me on the shoulder a few times, looked at me with her charming smile, and said: "Don't worry, you'll enjoy this workshop. It suits you perfectly."

The workshop opened a new world to me, to which I had never been exposed previously. The lecturers brought books with the drawings of the great artists, discussed each picture, and talked about drawing techniques and the secret of color mixing during the renaissance period, and all sorts of other tricks that the painters had kept to themselves and had not revealed to others. We also spent time sketching different objects, learned to spray paint on paper surfaces, sketched with coal, and learned about shadow and light. I returned to the kibbutz and showed Tova some of the drawings that I had done at the workshop. She was amazed by them and took them to show to the secretariat members who had approved my participation in the workshop.

I felt that life on the kibbutz had changed me for the better. I stopped thinking about the past; about my stay with the Polish farmer, the return to the Jews, and the wanderings in Austria, Germany, and Uruguay. I had shed my foreignness and was hopeful for the future. I knew Hebrew well and read many books. My inner world had been enriched, and I had heard many lectures on issues of the day at the kibbutz, and felt more and more like an Israeli. I would express my opinions loudly and confidently, even when they differed from those of the council members.

One morning, Tova approached me and told me that I could invite the aunt and Mr. Nayar to the kibbutz for Shabbat. They could room in an apartment belonging to a couple of members, who were visiting their parents for Shabbat. On Friday afternoon, the aunt and Mr. Nayar arrived on the kibbutz, wearing their Shabbat clothes. I took them to Tova's apartment, where Tova and the aunt embraced. The aunt and uncle left their suitcase in Tova's apartment and we all went to eat lunch. They sat next to Tova and her husband Rafi, who immediately began to speak with them in Yiddish and in Hebrew. I went to sit with my group members. After the meal, the aunt and Mr. Nayar were taken to the apartment that was arranged for them, and we met again for the Minhah prayer. Mr. Nayar served as the cantor. Before dinner he made the Kiddush, and during the meal he sang the various prayers. Later, the members sang the songs they were familiar with, and it was very joyful and pleasant. I looked at the aunt, and she said to me: "This is one of the happiest days of my life."

The next morning, following the prayer, I took the aunt and Mr. Nayar for a walk around the kibbutz. They admired the large cattle barn, the newly constructed homes, and the large chicken coop. In the afternoon, they went to rest, and in the evening, following the Maariv prayer, Mr. Nayar made the Havdalah and we ate dinner. The aunt and Mr. Nayar said their farewells to Tova and Rafi, and thanked them for the warm hospitality that they had received on the kibbutz. One of the members then drove us to the "Egged" stop on the main road, where we waited for about half an hour. Before they boarded the bus I shook Mr. Nayar's hand and kissed the aunt, and then

returned to the kibbutz on foot. It was an enjoyable walk, as the weather was pleasant and the moon was full.

An argument broke out among our group, whether we should all enlist in the Nahal or whether we could each choose our own way. Surprisingly, it was the group members that had joined us from the city who advocated enlisting into the Nahal and joining a nucleus group that would one day settle and build a new kibbutz. It was decided that a vote would be held, regarding whether we supported enlisting collectively to the Nahal. Each person wrote the word “yes” or “no” on a piece of paper. After the notes had been tallied, the result was a tie. It was suggested that two military officers who were now reservists and lived on the kibbutz, would talk to us and give us lectures on the subject. One had served in the Nahal, and the other had been an infantry man. The lectures were given in the afternoons, during our lessons.

From the lectures, we found out that when enlisting individually, we would spend several days at the recruitment base, would be sent to basic training, and would be assigned to the various army forces according to our military profile number. Those with a low profile number were usually assigned to non-combatant units and would serve as gunsmiths, quartermasters, drivers, cooks, regimental guards, and the like. Those with a high profile number would be assigned to the infantry units, armor units, artillery units, and so on, according to the needs of the army at the time. There was also the opportunity to participate in different courses, according to skill, personal attributes, test results, and superiors’ opinions.

Enlistment into the Nahal would be no easier than enlistment into the other forces, and would sometimes be even more difficult. However, it had certain advantages; we would be serving with familiar faces and a tightly knit unit, there would be mutual assistance, time assigned for prayer, and an above-average group of recruits than the standard.

The lectures were very informative. Most of us were hearing for the first time about the intake into the army, basic training, drills, mustering, etc. Following the lectures, there were many of us who changed their minds. Pesach told me that he had changed his mind and decided he would go to the Nahal. I told him that I already knew kibbutz life, and wanted to know military life as well, and I would never learn about it unless I went. A few days later, Pesach came to me and told me he had changed his mind again and had decided to go to the army and not to enlist in the Nahal with the rest of the group. Around that time, I began to shave with a cream. Even though I had no hairs growing on my face, just a thin plume above my lip, I thought that I would be better off arriving in the army with a beard, to appear manlier.

Our studying became less regular at this point, and I worked on the tractor almost exclusively. I collected crates of vegetables from the field, so that they could be shipped on the truck to “Tnuva” the next day.

Pesach and I received a summons to report for duty in May of 1953. My friends said that the May enlistment was not the best, because it consisted mostly of fellows who had dropped out of school, and new immigrants who had been in the country for less than a year. Immigrants of enlistment age had to enlist even if they were already married. The November enlistment was considered the best, because it consisted of intelligent fellows who had graduated from high school.

On Thursday, after dinner, the entire group gathered. Tova stood in front of us, without a smile this time. She said that this evening would be one of the hardest evenings for her, as tomorrow, several of the group's members were leaving and were about to enlist in the army. It was quiet, and I am certain that everyone felt as though a new era was dawning. Tova asked all of us to remain in contact, and to continue to view the kibbutz as our home and the kibbutz members as our family. We were always welcome to arrive during holidays and weekends, without advance notice, and she would arrange lodging for us. We remained seated quietly for a very long time.

Pesach and I decided to enlist together and to go through basic training together. The following day, Friday, Pesach and I left for the main road and traveled to the central bus station in Tel Aviv. I escorted him to the platform from which the bus to Haifa departed, and arranged that on Sunday morning at eight, I would wait for him there and we would travel to the recruitment base together. We shook hands, and I turned towards the 53 bus, which would take me to the aunt's house in Givatayim.

### **Aunt Rivkah**

Aunt Rivkah passed away on Tuesday, 3 Elul, 5756 (18/08/1996) and was laid to rest that same evening on Har Hamenuhot, the Mount of Rest, in Jerusalem. She had selected the spot, in which she wished to rest when the time came. "Aunt Rivkah" – was how she was addressed by her entire family, her friends, neighbors, and all of the neighborhood children. Everyone called her "aunt", everyone loved her, respected her, and appreciated her, and she treated everyone with kindness and respect.

No one who knocked on her door looking for a donation ever left empty handed, and all of the letters she received around the holidays from yeshivas and Talmud Torahs were always answered in the affirmative.

On Purim she sent gifts and on Chanukah she handed out gelt. She remembered birthdays and anniversaries, and whenever she was invited to weddings, bar-mitzvahs or social events, she honored everyone with her presence, and when she was unable to attend, never forgot to send a gift. When any of her acquaintances fell ill, she always honored the mitzvah of visiting the sick.

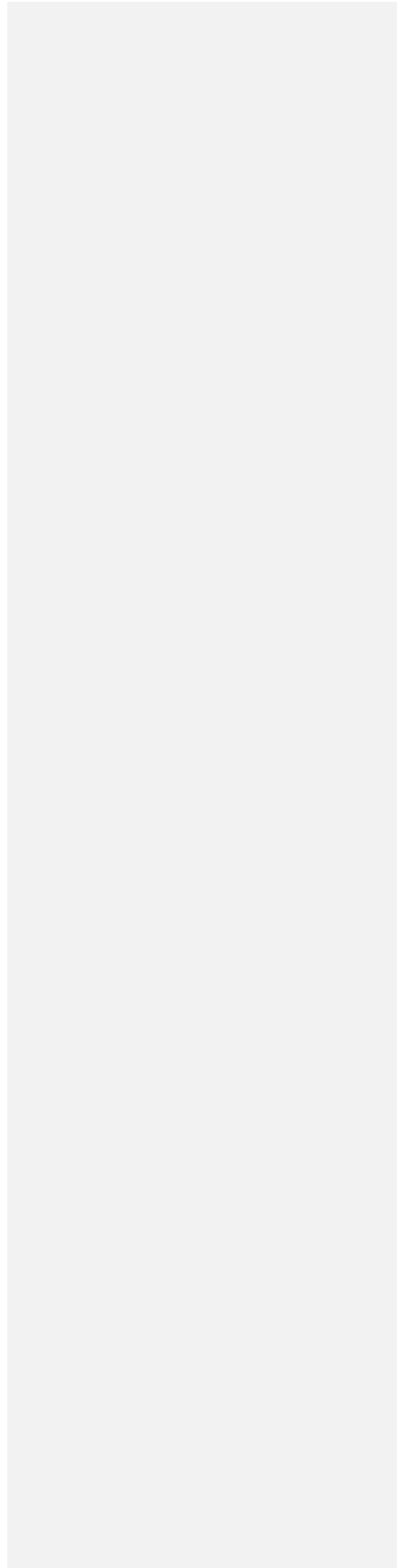
For many years she had been active, along with her friends, in a class that studied the portion of the week.

Even in the last months of her illness, when her strength had left her, she insisted on looking clean and well presented. She always remembered to ask her visitors about the well-being of their family and mutual friends.

The death of aunt Rivkah brought to an end an era that lasted nearly fifty years, starting at the end of World War II and ending on the day of her passing.



Avraham as a soldier





Aunt Rivka