

Bela's
JOURNEY

A Novel By
Esther Grant Savin

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A Savin Greenes Book *Sg*

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This edition published in honor of the author’s 85th birthday. Esther Savin - A loving mother, wonderful grandmother, and inspiring woman. Congratulations on 85 wonderful years!

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To Jack and Pauline

*Without whom this book
could not have been written*

In memory of Maury

**I am my beloved's
And my beloved is mine...**

--*SONG OF SONGS* 6:3

PART ONE

1905 – 1910

I

The shrill blast of the ship's horn jarred Bela Kransky from her reverie. In twenty-five days at sea she could never become inured to that terrible sound. She heard cheering. She scampered out on the dark lower deck, confused and frightened. She had pinned up her long black hair so that she would look older than her seventeen years, but as she ran it fell, scattering about her shoulders. People were rushing to the side of the ship, waving hats and jabbering excitedly. She grabbed the arm of a woman who fled past her.

"What? What is it? What's happening?"

The woman looked blankly at her, then wrenched her arm free and dashed to join those already at the rail. Bela hesitated and looked around. She couldn't bring herself to go where the others were. Looking out at the distant horizon or down at the water made her head whirl and her stomach tighten into a hard lump. Some years later, Bela would learn that she suffered from a mild form of agoraphobia, but all she knew now was that when she went out among crowds or in open spaces, her throat constricted and her palms became moist with sweat. At the moment, however, she had to find someone who spoke Russian.

During the six years they had lived in Japan, Bela had acquired a smattering of Japanese, a little German helped by a

somewhat broader but still limited knowledge of Yiddish, and even a few English words, learned from an American guest who had spent a week at the small inn her father had operated. There, she combined the duties of maid, desk clerk and assistant manager with those of surrogate mother to her sister, Chana, now nine, and brother, Vasily, seven. Chana was easy to manage, quiet and obedient, her large grey-green eyes often seeming to look through to some unseen place. Vasily, from the time Bela was forced to take over his care when he was barely nine months old, had regularly driven her to utter distraction.

But she loved them both with a hungry, possessive intensity. She often thought had she not had the children, the sudden death of her father would have been too much for her to bear.

They had moved from Russia (Eastern Siberia, actually) to Japan, when her father's physician insisted he give up dancing and travel as an itinerant performer for a more sedentary occupation. Over the years he had maintained a correspondence with a boyhood friend who owned a small hotel in Nagasaki catering mostly to Russian-Jewish businessmen traveling through that section of Asia, with an occasional guest from other parts seeking a Kosher meal. The friend had decided to go to America, so Avram Kransky seized the chance and became a hotel operator. It had taken everything he had saved, with the balance mortgaged to the friend; but he dared not let the opportunity slip by.

Bela, only two years old when her mother died, had no memory of her. Mariska, the younger children's mother, hated Japan. Nine months after their arrival, she left for the United States, promising to send for the children as soon as she was settled in the new land. But she never did.

Now, however, she insisted that Bela bring the children to San Francisco, California where she was living. Being not quite seventeen, it never occurred to Bela to question her stepmother's plan or to consider that she might have other options. She placed the sale of the inn in the hands of a Japanese investor who felt compassion for the young Russian girl and quickly sold it for a fair price. Bela was able, after paying his commission and the balance of the mortgage, to purchase third class passage for herself and the children on a steamer

to America, with even a bit left to carry her in the new country until she found work.

But the long journey, with no land in sight for days on end, was all but terrifying. Except for the children, she was completely alone. Her phobia bound her to their tiny cabin most of the day, and she abandoned the security of its walls only for meals or to search for Vasily, about whom she worried constantly. Vasily ventured out on deck whenever he found the opportunity, managing to strike up at least a smiling acquaintance with almost everyone on the ship. He had twice climbed up to A-Deck where the first class passengers strolled, lounged, swam or played shuffleboard and had been carried gently but firmly back to C-Deck by a deckhand, where he was told in no uncertain terms to "stay put."

As Bela gazed wildly around, trying to figure out what the commotion was about, a quiet voice behind her asked in Russian, "May I help you, Miss?"

She whirled about with a start, almost colliding with a tall, middle-aged man sporting a lush brown handle-bar moustache. Too overcome with surprise and shyness to reply, she only stared at his vest buttons from the four-feet-nine-inch level of her eyes. (She was a shade under five feet and barely 90 pounds).

"Allow me to introduce myself," he said formally, bowing slightly. "I am Vladimir Alinovitch Gorodin."

Still too embarrassed to speak, Bela, her slightly almond-shaped black-brown eyes downcast, nodded.

"I am traveling to America with my family, where we will join my brother and make a new life for all of us," he explained. "In fact, we are already almost here. That is what all the shouting is about. Tomorrow morning the ship will enter the Golden Gate and we will be in California of the United States of America."

Mr. Gorodin put his hand out to touch her shoulder. Bela shrank back. "Don't be afraid," he said gently. "My daughter is just about your age, and we have been watching you during dinner. She wanted to get acquainted with you, but she couldn't find you at other times.

"Come, let us go and look for the hills of San Francisco. We can soon see them through the mist." This time he held his hand out to her but made no attempt to touch her.

Hesitantly she placed her hand lightly on his. He did not close his fingers around hers but cautiously steered her, open palmed, toward the side of the ship, as if leading her in a minuet.

After a few moments looking out into the distance, Bela broke away and dashed back to the safety of the cabin. Chana was sitting on the cot that served as tightly crowded bed for the three of them

"We're here, Bela! We're here!" she squealed, a rare lilt in her voice.

"I know." Bela looked around. "Where is Vasily?" she asked, suddenly alarmed.

"Oh, a lady with a big hat with feathers on it came and took him to look at the new country -- from upstairs -- a rich lady. She said I could come, too, but I said I'd wait for you."

Bela bent and put her arms around her younger sister. Chana, long-legged and bony, was almost as tall as she.

"Oh my darling girl! Soon you and Vasily will be together with your mother," she crooned softly, rocking herself along with Chana..

"But you will be, too, Bela. I would never go anywhere without you. I'm not like that old Vasily."

Bela didn't answer, her throat tight with unshed tears.

"Here," she said, dampening a cloth with water from the pitcher, "wash your face and hands so that you will be all ready for supper when Vasily comes back, and I will tell you about a nice man I met on deck, who told about hills in San Francisco."

Chana's eyes got very round. "Real BIG hills, Bela? Can we climb them? Will the nice man help us?"

"I don't know, Chana. I don't know him. But maybe your mother will take you."

"All of us. She'll take all of us, won't she?"

"I hope so, Darling, I hope so."

II

Sunday, March 5, 1905 dawned clear and bright. The *Hirame Maru* was scheduled to dock at 9:00 a.m. Most of the passengers were busily packing. C-Deck was quieter than at any time during the entire voyage. Those whose baggage was mainly crammed into laundry sacks or like material ready for unloading, stood around in small groups talking in low tones. Despite the many languages spoken by travelers and crew, this morning exhibited none of the "Tower of Babel" character heard during all the previous days of the crossing.

The third class section consisted almost entirely of those seeking to make a new life. All the hopes of combined lifetimes seemed centered here and in steerage. Jammed into communal sleeping and eating areas were those having nothing to lose but their dreams, who had somehow, through blood and sweat, managed to raise the price of a ticket. Many were fleeing pogroms, conscription (which often meant a lifetime in military servitude), or imprisonment and frequently torture and death for anti-government activities.

With the exception of the crew, the few native Japanese on the ship were those hoping to find work on the railroads and farms in America. Some hoped to send to Japan for brides after they found work, but most would return home to their families when they had managed to accumulate a small saving. They were the ones who knew the laws of the United States would never allow them to own land or become U.S. citizens, no

matter how long they lived here. These restrictions would not change for more than two generations.

Bela and the children remained in the cabin, their meager belongings packed into one carpet bag. For once, Vasily sat quietly, his seven-year-old courage and curiosity overcome by the soberness of the event as he gripped Bela's skirt and Chana's fingers, unwilling to allow either sister out of his sight.

"Ow! Velvel, let go! You're hurting me!" Chana squealed, as she wriggled her fingers loose.

Velvel was small for his age, slightly built, with an unruly shock of black hair that constantly fell over his right eye. His eyes were almost black, like Bela's, but large and round with slightly drooping lids, giving them a somewhat sultry appearance, almost feminine. He had just lost his upper two front teeth, and the new ones were barely beginning to cut through the gum. Oddly, the gap in his mouth seemed to add to his natural charm.

He fidgeted, picked his nose and asked, "When are we going to be there, Bela? Will it be soon? I want to see the gold streets."

"Soon, Velvel," Bela replied, using the diminutive name of affection. She was brushing Chana's long strands of chestnut hair. Suddenly she stopped, brush in mid-air, and looked quizzically at him.

"What did you say? What are you talking about?"

"Well, I heard some man say to another man, 'In America even the streets are paved with gold.'"

"Oh, Velvel, that's nonsense. All he meant was it's easier to make a lot of money and get rich there -- I think."

She lay down the brush and began plaiting Chana's hair. She is so pretty Bela thought as she contemplated the gold highlights gleaming even in the dim light of the cabin. She'll be a beauty soon with her porcelain skin, the roses in her cheeks, and she'll be tall.

Bela would occasionally caution Chana, "Remember, beauty is as beauty does," relaying the response her father evidently thought appropriate to a young girl, when she would ask anxiously, "Am I pretty, Papa?"

Bela thus thought herself plain and unattractive. Privately she wished she could have shared in some of her sister's attributes. In

reality, however, Bela could be considered rather comely. In fact, many of the clients who came to her father's inn in Nagasaki thought her winsome and charming. Her eyes, brown-black, almond shaped with a slight upturn at the outer edges gave them a somewhat Oriental cast, and her raven hair, baby fine but thick and softly waved, were her best features. Her mouth was too large for her tiny face and her turned up nose too small. But her petite figure was perfectly proportioned. She looked, her father had often told her, very much like her mother, Elana, whom she could not remember.

Elana Kransky had died in childbirth, along with the infant son she had carried in her womb for seven months, when Bela was two years old. Elana's ancestors had come from the Altai Mountains near the Mongolian-Russian border to work in the mines near Chita in eastern Siberia, where she met and married Avram Kransky. Bela sometimes toyed with the thought that her mother had given her a little Tatar blood along with her olive complexion. In one more generation, features like Bela's would be considered exotic and would be viewed with envy, but that would come too late for her to be aware of her unique beauty.

Three short blasts on the ship's whistle told everyone that it had now entered the Golden Gate and was being towed by a tug to the proper pier. The deck hands, followed by translators, circulated among the passengers, advising them of landing procedures. Those coming to the United States for the first time would be directed to the Reception Center, from where they would be transported by Ferry to Angel Island for "processing." Regardless of where they were from, every passenger believed, either through hearsay or occasionally from direct contact with someone who had been denied admission, that he or she might not pass the health test. Since some degree of malnutrition was common, particularly among the steerage passengers, anxiety floated like a dark cloud above their heads. Rumors, although mostly false, were rampant. The fear, of course, was that they could be sent back by return ship.

An hour later, Bela and the children were on the landing pier, the dock official steering them not toward the Ferry Building with the other passengers, but to the crowd waiting behind the rope barrier

to greet returning relatives and friends. Bewildered and alarmed, she asked where they were being taken, but the dock steward understood no Russian and Bela was too upset to remember any of the few English words she knew. He merely shrugged, continuing to urge them forward with gestures. Then she spied a familiar face.

Mariska was shouting and waving, "Bela! Children! This way! Over here!"

Bela grabbed the children's hands, totally forgetting the satchel that contained everything they owned, and started to run toward her. Then she stopped. There was someone with Mariska. A man, clean shaven, young. Bela stood with the children, uncertain. The steward brought the bag and set it down beside Chana. He pointed toward Mariska and walked away, leaving the three of them standing on the dock.

Bela stared at the crowd behind the barrier, uncertain what to do. Chana and Vasily, each holding one of her hands, gazed up at her, trusting, waiting for her to act.

Then, voice firm, Bela said, "Come children; there's your mother. Chana, pick up the bag."

They walked resolutely toward Mariska. A guard lifted the rope for the three of them to duck under, but then Bela shook her head, backing away. "We must go on a Ferry to the Angel's Island to find out if we can come in America." She felt bewildered as she tried to hide her anxiety from the children.

"No, no. Fred's father has taken care of everything. Come," Mariska assured Bela..

"Oh, this is my husband, Frederick Spector," she continued. "We were married last month. He is a genuine American -- born here.

"Fred, this is Bela, and these are my wonderful children that I have not seen for many years."

By your own choice, Bela thought. She stared at the young man, not much older than herself. Nineteen or twenty, perhaps? She nodded her head in acknowledgement of him, saying nothing.

They walked toward the four-seated carriage Mariska had hired for the occasion, both horse and driver beginning to show impatience at Bela's hesitation. The five crowded into the cab, Vasily on Bela's lap.

Finally, as they drew up to the two-story gray trimmed white house on Harrison Street where Mariska and Fred were living, Bela

asked, "Mariska, you said on the way that Frederick's father arranged for us to avoid the examination we were told there would be. How could he do this?"

"Don't call me Mariska, my name is Mary now. And call Fred 'Fred,' because his father's name is also Frederick." She continued, "His father works for the immigration, and that's how he did it. Don't worry, it's all right."

But Bela was worried. "What if somebody finds out? Will they send us back?"

"Oh, stop it, they won't send you back," her stepmother replied with some annoyance. "You always were a worrier."

As Bela continued to look dubious, Mary laughed, saying, "Tell her, Fred. She doesn't seem to believe me."

"Well, my father is an important official in the Immigration Service, and he just wrote down on your visas that you were members of his family -- which is true," he assured her. "It's all perfectly legal."

Fred really didn't understand any of it, but that was what his father had told him to say if anyone asked.

Bela said no more, but it was months before she felt safe from deportation.

III

The days were filled with sight-seeing and new experiences as Mary and Fred toured Bela and the children around San Francisco. One Sunday, after the newcomers had been in the city about two weeks, they all took the Market Street Cable Railway to Golden Gate Park, where their first stop was the glass Conservatory.

As they walked into the spacious building, Bela gasped, "Oh, look at that strange flower: the one with all those different colors. It looks like a funny bird."

"That's right, Bela," Mary answered, eager to display her knowledge, "it's called "Bird of Paradise. This building has plants and flowers from all over the world -- even Africa."

"They are all so beautiful." Bela liked it there. She could have stayed all day. She felt safe in the glass enclosed domed structure, and she loved the flowers and plants, but Vasily was restless.

"Come on, come on, let's go." He pulled on Bela's hand. He had become very clinging since their arrival, often holding fast to Bela, at times refusing to let her out of his sight even for a few minutes.

"Don't be a silly little boy," Mary chided, upset by his continuing reluctance to acknowledge her, "Come, I know a place that you will love, my son," she cajoled him.

Still hanging on to Bela, he asked cautiously, "Where?"

You'll see," Mary replied.

"Can we go now?" he asked, interested in spite of himself.

"Of course. Fred, get a cab. We're going to Playland."

As they waited for Fred to locate a taxicab, Bela studied her stepmother for the first time since their arrival. She had not realized how matronly Mary's figure was, with its full bosom and slight sway-back. Chana had her mother's coloring, except that Mary's hair was lighter, almost blonde, and her eyes were bluer, although smaller and narrower than Chana's.

"She's really beautiful," Bela murmured to herself.

"What?" Mary said.

"Oh, nothing. I was just admiring your hat." She had not meant to speak out loud.

Mary laughed, giving her head a coquettish toss. "Well, when you get a job you can get one with feathers, too. Of course, you're too short to wear one like this," she added.

Bela felt her face flush. "Where are we going that we need a taxi?" she asked, changing the subject.

"To Playland-at-the-Beach," Mary replied. "Vasily will love it. There are roller coaster rides and a Ferris Wheel and all kinds of games. It's very popular. Oh, here comes Fred, now."

The children clambered into the cab, Vasily attempting to elbow his way in ahead of Chana and receiving a shove in return that sent him sprawling

"All right, children, that's enough. There's room for everybody," Bela scolded, hanging back. She had never been close to an automobile and was nervous about riding in such a noisy sputtering contraption.

"Bela, come on," Mary shouted over the noise, "you're holding things up."

"Here, let me give you a hand." Fred stretched a long leg out the door and reached for her arm, his thin fingers grasping her elbow.

"Thank you, I'm fine. I'm coming," she said climbing onto the high running board and seating herself in the space between them.

Bela was fascinated by the beauty of the park and the activity of the city. Despite the anxiety she always felt outdoors, she found, to her surprise, that she enjoyed touring with Mary and Fred. The children's excited comments at each new sight delighted her.

"Bela, see? A windmill," Chana exclaimed as they neared the Beach.

"I liked the carousel best," announced Vasily, "and I'm going to go there a hundred times."

"And I'm going to go to Haight Street every day and look at all the beautiful dresses in the store windows. I might even buy one when I'm rich," Chana replied, undaunted. Hastily she added, "And I'll buy one for you too, Bela."

One afternoon when they had been in San Francisco three months, Bela came home early from the Burana Cigar factory, where she had found work as an inspector. (Her job was to examine each hand rolled cigar to make certain no loose bits of tobacco protruded from the ends, to trim off any small amounts, and to return it to the line if it didn't look right.) Her period had started this morning. The cramps, since her arrival in the new country, had become excruciating each month. She really couldn't afford the time off -- her wages were seven dollars a week -- but today she couldn't stand the pain. She would lie down with a hot water bottle clutched to her belly.

"Mariska, it's me," she called, forgetting the name change. "I didn't feel well so I came home."

There was no answer. She's probably out shopping, Bela thought. The children were still at school, which meant she had the house to herself for a while and could lie down and relax. She put the kettle on to heat water and went into her room. She removed her blouse, drew a shawl over her bare shoulders, and carried the blouse to the bathroom. She rinsed it in the basin, as she did every night, so that it would be clean for work the next day. It was the only one she had.

She returned to the kitchen. The water was hot enough. She reached for the glass jar that doubled as a hot water bottle and was about to pick up the steaming teakettle when she felt a hand on her shoulder. She froze, nearly dropping the jar.

"Hello, Bela, you're home early," a familiar voice said in broken Russian.

She released the breath that had dammed her lungs. It was only Fred.

"I'm not feeling well. They let me go home so I could lie down." Shrugging off his hand, she proceeded to fill the bottle.

"Come, Little One, I will make you feel better." He reached his arm around her waist and slowly pulled her toward him, removing the kettle and then the jar from her hands and placing them on the stove.

Stunned at first, Bela recovered quickly and broke free. "Don't be silly. You're my stepmother's husband," she protested.

Fred laughed, a scornful note in his voice. "Her? Don't be so naive. She's an old woman."

Struck with loyalty toward Mary, Bela flared, "You pig! She's only twenty-nine! And you? You're nothing but a -- a --!" She struggled for a word. "-- a brat!"

She tore past him and fled to her room, slamming and locking the door, tears of rage blinding her. She knew she would have to leave, find a room somewhere. She had hoped to be able to work a little longer, set aside a little more money, but that was out of the question now.

She lay down, still furious. She didn't even have the warmth of the bottle. That stupid fool. Who did he think he was? What was he doing home in the middle of the day, anyway? He never seemed to do much of anything. She was suddenly overwhelmed with pity for Mary, who was married off to Bela's father, a thirty-seven-year-old widower, when she was nineteen and was now married to a boy who knew nothing about being a husband. Gradually Bela began to feel better. The cramping eased somewhat. Finally she fell asleep.

After work the following day, Bela made her way to the address given her by one of the girls at the factory. With her quick mind and natural facility with languages, she had learned sufficient English to be able to convey her predicament to some of her coworkers. Her knock was answered by a tall heavy-set woman of about fifty with a slight squint. No, she didn't rent rooms normally; but yes, she had a vacancy since her eldest daughter got married, although it had to be shared with Tessie, the younger one, who was almost eighteen. Would that be all right? The rent was three dollars a week including meals. The food would not be kosher, but pork was never served.

The room was pleasant, with two single beds and cretonne curtains on the sole window. Tessie, blonde, vivacious and friendly, seemed pleased at the possibility of a roommate her own age. Bela

felt uneasy. With the responsibility of having to care for Chana and Vasily from the time she was ten years old, she had never had a friend her own age and wasn't sure what it would be like. But what choice did she have?

"I'll take it," she said. "When can I move in?"

"Any time you want."

"I'd like to move in tonight, right after supper."

"Fine."

Bela counted out three dollars and handed them to Mrs. Katz, who stuck the bills in the pocket of her apron.

The goodbyes were difficult. Chana clung to Bela, sobbing, and no amount of assurance that she would be only a few blocks away would stem the tears. Vasily, bravado masking his anxiety, forced a smile and wished his elder sister good luck.

"I'll come and see how you're making out tomorrow," he told her, gulping down the lump rising in his throat. Suddenly he grabbed her skirt, pleading, "Don't go, don't go, Bela!" Clutching her arm, he screamed, "I'll go with you! I'll take care of you."

Torn with the children's pain and her own, she held them both against her. "Oh, my dears. My babies. I cannot stay now, and there is no room for you where I will be. But I promise you. I will come every Sunday, and we will --" A sob choked off the end of her sentence.

"I don't know what the big hurry is," Mary clucked. "You always want to change things. You're never satisfied." Underneath the brittle words she did not want Bela to leave. She could not understand what was happening. Had she made her angry, somehow?

Fred, a grin hiding his embarrassment, wished her luck in her new home. He really hadn't meant for things to get out of hand like this, but he had sense to know that if he tried to persuade her to stay, it would just make things worse.

IV

Bela opened her eyes one morning in early August to find Tessie looking at her and smiling. She sat up, her brain still cottony with sleep.

"What time is it?" Then, with alarm, "Oh, God, I'm late for work. I'll be fired!"

"Relax," Tessie soothed, her blue eyes twinkling with mischief. "It's Sunday. Even Mother is still asleep."

"I wanted to see if I could get you to wake up just by concentrating, and it worked!" she crowed.

In the six weeks since Bela had moved into the Katz home, the two girls had become fast friends. Tessie, tall, her blonde ringlets usually refusing to stay pinned in the pompadour fashion her peers affected, tended somewhat to fleshiness, though not actually plump. Impish and fun-loving, she was the perfect complement for Bela's gravity; and Bela's dormant adolescent energy had begun to emerge in response to her friend's *joie de vivre*. Bela stretched, got up and walked to the window. She raised the shade and looked out.

"Oh, it's so foggy. You can't see anything out there. Do you think it's going to rain?"

Her English was improving daily, helped along by her insistence that they lapse into Russian only when she totally misunderstood the meaning. When that happened, Tessie later would teach her the English equivalent of the conversation. Today, they were speaking English.

"Nah, it won't rain. It practically never rains anywhere in California in the summer." Tessie, a Senior at Fremont High, had learned that in her Geography class. "In fact, some people like to say

that if it rains here in the summer, it means something is going to happen."

"You mean something bad?"

"Well, no, not exactly bad. Just '*something*.'"

"Well, anyway, that's only superstition," Bela sniffed. "I don't believe in superstition. That's for ignorant -- is that the right word? -- people what don't know better."

"Yes, that's the word," Tessie approved, adding, "I know that. Actually, a few of us kids just made it up to bother Mr. Ford, the teacher." An afterthought occurred: "You mustn't say 'people *what* don't know,' say 'people who or that...'"

"Okay," Bela replied cheerfully.

At breakfast, Tessie asked, "Are you going to spend the day with your brother and sister again?"

"No, they're all going to Fred's parents, and I didn't want to go. I don't like them much."

"Then what shall we do today?"

"Can we go to a picnic in the park?"

"*'On a picnic.'* It will probably be foggy all day, and my hair gets fuzzy."

"No, I meant *to* a picnic," Bela responded proudly. "Some people at work are having a picnic -- it's a meeting picnic. Wear a hat for your hair."

Tessie looked at her in amusement. "You're getting pretty smart," she said with affection. "You know, it's probably a union meeting or a bunch of Socialists."

"So?"

"Let's go!"

That night after dinner, the three women sat together in the living room, Bela and Tessie chattering animatedly while Mrs. Katz attempted to read the *Jewish Daily Forward*, the "bible" of the working class Jewish immigrant. Her eyes bothering her, she put the newspaper aside and closed them.

Mrs. Katz was a widow. Her first name was Brocha, which means *blessing* in Hebrew, but everyone, even her closest friends, called her Mrs. Katz. The family had emigrated from Odessa, a busy port city on the Black Sea, when the children were three and six. Saul

Katz died of tuberculosis during the winter of 1895, when Tessie was eight and Agnes, the older daughter, eleven. Mrs. Katz had managed to put aside a small sum from her husband's meager earnings in his shoe repair shop, which was what they lived on now, supplemented by her work as a part-time cook.

Both girls were educated in the United States, thus they never had to worry about language -- they were bilingual, comfortable in English and Russian, with some Yiddish -- or with adapting to American life. But Mrs. Katz had come to the new country as an adult and knew only too well how difficult the adjustment could be, even with the support and help of a mate. She didn't know why Bela had moved out of her stepmother's home, but the child must have had a good reason.

She found herself listening to the girls' conversation. Bela's "Engrush," as Tessie jokingly described the mix of English and Russian which usually resulted from her eager attempts at communication, captivated Mrs. Katz. More than that, however, she found she was growing very fond of this spirited immigrant girl.

"What was the second speaker saying?" Bela asked Tessie after a brief lull. "He talked too fast for me."

"Well, I didn't really understand a lot of it, either," she answered. "He said something about how there's going to be a 'lockout,' and that you would all lose your jobs if there's a strike."

Bela's eyes widened. "What's a lockout?"

Tessie shrugged, "I don't know. But a strike is -- "

"I know what a strike is," Bela interrupted, beginning to feel anxious. "That first speaker, Ari Abramovitz, he came by my table once and gave me a paper to read. I couldn't read it, but he said it was about a 'strike' they were going to have, maybe, and said in Yiddish what it was."

"Well, is there going to be a strike?" Tessie asked. "In my Social Studies class the teacher said strikes were bad. *You* wouldn't go out on a strike, would you?"

"I don't know. I wouldn't want to lose my job. That would be terrible."

Mrs. Katz could remain silent no longer. "A strike, girls, is the only tool workers have to protect themselves. It forces the bosses to do something about bad conditions and low wages."

She turned to Bela. "How many hours do you work a day?"

"Usually ten, sometimes more. One day last week I worked twelve. I didn't get home until after nine o'clock."

"How much money do you make?"

"Seven dollars a week."

"And on the day you worked twelve hours, did you get paid extra?" Mrs Katz' voice began to rise.

"No."

"And do you think that seven dollars a week is a good wage?"

"It's all I can get until I learn better how to talk," Bela responded, eyelids lowered.

Mrs. Katz almost shouted as she drove her point home. "Aha! Exactly! And the bosses know this and take advantage of you -- of all of us!"

"But what about that lockout? What about my job? I can't lose my job." Bela was becoming genuinely alarmed.

Mrs. Katz lowered her voice, trying to reassure Bela. "The only way any of you can lose your job is if you don't all stick together. And the lockout is a threat not to let you come back to work if you strike, and you know they can't do that. Who will make the cigars?"

Bela was thoughtful. "Maybe I will ask at work somebody -- maybe Ari -- no, maybe Ronia, what -- *who*," she corrected herself, "who told me about *this* place." She nodded. "Yes, she gave me good advice before."

Mrs. Katz shook her head, resigned. She would like to have said more. She knew the Burana Cigar Factory's reputation for exploiting newcomers, especially women, but she could see Bela was becoming upset and she didn't want to push too hard. Well, she thought, maybe the best people to convince her are the other workers.

A few days later the three were again sitting together in the living room after dinner, when Bela announced quietly, "We are not going to have a strike."

Mrs. Katz looked up. "Why not? What happened? They called it off? They got their demands?"

"Well, they had a vote, and most of the people voted 'no.'"

"And? How did you vote -- 'yes' or 'no'?" Mrs. Katz speared Bela with a look. She already knew the answer.

Bela flushed. "I said 'no.'"

Mrs. Katz nodded but said nothing.

Bela tried to explain. "I know you wanted I should say, 'yes, I want the strike,' but I couldn't. I was afraid. I was afraid they would fire me just because I voted for it -- or worse, that they would send me back to the old country." She began to cry.

"No, no," Mrs. Katz put her arm around Bela, "don't cry. I'm not angry. I understand." Soothing, "Remember, I was an immigrant, too. I know what it is to be a stranger in a strange country. It will get better, I promise you."

"I suppose Ari will never speak to me again."

"You like Ari?" Tessie's interest suddenly sparked.

"I would like him to be my friend, yes," Bela was thoughtful. "He is very smart and knows many people. But now he will think I am very stupid and a coward."

Mrs. Katz smiled. "He will not think you are stupid. And I think he will definitely talk to you again -- many times. But you need to learn more English, so you can talk to each other."

Tessie and her mother looked at one another as the same thought struck them both.

"Bela!" Tessie squealed, "you should sign up for the English class they have at my school!"

"But I have to work," Bela replied.

"No you don't because they are at night." Tessie's voice was triumphant.

Bela looked doubtful. "I have only been in school two years. I had to take care of Chana and Vasily -- and my father. They wouldn't let me go to a high school."

"Yes, they will," Mrs. Katz assured her. "They have people who can't even read or write, and you read Russian good."

"Yes, but I don't know anything."

"Look," Mrs. Katz continued, "when you have learned English better, then you can take other subjects in night school. You can take Citizenship classes; then in five years you can take the test and be a citizen."

"Oh, then I will be American, yes?" Bela was convinced. "But what must I do? How do I get in school?"

"I'll help you register," Tessie offered. "The new term starts in ten days, so Monday, after you come home from work, we'll go over to Fremont and get you signed up."

V

About thirteen months after their arrival in the United States Bela was awakened one morning by a violent jerking of her bed, accompanied by a sound like the rending and tearing of wood and breaking glass. As the powerful jarring continued, she was pitched onto the floor, her bed sliding across the room, striking the wall with a crash.

She heard screaming. Then she realized it was her own voice. She became aware of a cacophony of rumbling, roaring, banging, unintelligible shouts and shrieks. She was too confused and frightened to distinguish them. It felt like the end of the world had come. The jolting continued for what seemed an eternity, as Bela tried to get up and was slammed back down.

The date was April 18, 1906. The earthquake lasted about seventy-five seconds. The room was an unrecognizable shambles. Tessie was crying hysterically.

For some inexplicable reason, Bela began to crawl and rip through the rubble until she found what she was looking for -- her alarm clock, remarkably still in one piece. It was stopped at 5:13.

Mrs. Katz came tearing into the girls' room, her hair swinging in a queue down her back.

"Tessie! Bela! Are you all right? Are you all right!" She tripped on a piece of broken plaster that had fallen from the ceiling and plunged headlong across the debris, further betrayed by her poor eyesight.

"Mama!" Tessie screamed, as she and Bela tried to climb over broken bedsteads and chairs in an effort to get to her mother.

"I'm all right, girls, I'm all right. Just stay there." A tiny trickle of blood crept from a half-inch cut over her right eyebrow. She wiped at it while she sought a handhold to pull herself upright with her other hand.

Another shake came, much weaker than the last, but terrifying. They all remained stunned, immobilized. After about ten minutes, Mrs. Katz slowly stood up, now careful where she placed her feet. They began to hear the clanging of bells. The three, still trembling, cautiously made their way to the broken window.

Tessie gasped. A reddish glow could be seen in the distance. "Fire! Oh, Mama, I'm scared!"

Suddenly Bela, who had not spoken until now, screamed, "Oh, God, the children!"

She leaped over broken and mangled furniture and dashed out the front door into the cold air of early dawn, still wearing her nightgown.

"Bela, Come back!" Mrs. Katz shouted. "You can't go out like that! Put something on!"

But Bela was oblivious. Even her fear of the open was forgotten. Only one thing concerned her now. Find Chana and Vasily. Make sure they are all right. The poor darlings must be frightened out of their wits. She could not entertain the possibility that they might be injured -- or worse.

She ran the five blocks to Mary and Fred's house, leaping over broken bricks and pavement, dodging spurting water mains, circling in and out of clusters of dazed people standing in night clothes or wrapped in blankets. Her bare feet were becoming scratched and cut from the scattered wreckage, but she felt none of it as she arrived, breathless, at the house on Harrison Street.

She started up the stairs. A voice called, "Bela, don't go in. We're here."

She recognized Mary's voice. She looked around, but the light was still too dim to make out faces among the people huddled in front of the building. Then she saw an arm wave and ran to it.

"We can't go back in. It's too dangerous." Mary was holding Chana's hand. She reached for Bela, as Chana threw herself on her sister, sobbing.

Bela lifted Chana in her arms, unfazed by her size, hugging and kissing her. Then her heart leaped as she looked one way and the other. "Where's Vasily!" she shrieked.

"It's all right, Fred has him. They're across the street," Mary sighed and shook her head. "He still won't come to me if he can help it. He wants only you, Bela."

"What's going to happen to us?" Mrs. McCarey, one of the neighbors, grabbed

Mary's arm. "The whole world is in ruins. How could God do this? Why punish the innocent little children?"

Mary put her arms around the weeping woman, patting her on the back. In a tremulous voice she said, "It's terrible, but I don't think God is trying to punish anyone."

Fred, who had crossed back to their side of the street when he spotted Bela, was holding Vasily who had fallen asleep, his head on Fred's shoulder.

Bela looked at Fred. "You must be tired, holding him so long," she said, beginning to feel a measure of warmth toward him, but keeping her distance.

"Nah, he hardly weighs anything." He hesitated, then in an undertone, "Bela, I'm really sorry about that day."

Bela nodded. "Not now, please."

"What did you say, Fred?" Mary asked. "I couldn't hear you."

"Nothing. I was just commenting on the mess we're in."

"My God, Fred, we're going to *have* to do something." Mary wrung her hands. "We can't just stay here."

Still, not knowing what else to do, the five of them stood together for the next six hours, waiting, part of the small group of other residents on the block shivering and hungry. The plumes of smoke that had begun to rise shortly after the quake were getting larger and nearer. They could smell the burning wood.

Vasily had awakened about an hour ago and was holding Bela's nightgown. "Bela, I'm hungry and I'm thirsty. When are we going to eat?"

"Soon, Velvel, soon," she tried to soothe him.

"Bela, are we going to die? I'm so scared," Chana moaned, huddling against her.

"No, we're not going to die. If we were, we would have already," she replied with more assurance than she felt.

Their immediate fear was for the aftershocks that were coming every few minutes, adding to the destruction. Bela began to wonder if they *would* die, perhaps from hunger or thirst. She shook herself mentally for thinking such nonsense. She wasn't going to stand by and let that happen -- not after coming half way across the world to be here.

"Come on, let's go." She beckoned to Mary and Fred as she held out her hands to Chana and Vasily.

"Where?" Mary asked. "There's no place to go."

"I'm sure there's help. The government won't let us starve. That much I know from my Citizenship class. We'll find it."

Mary and Fred looked at each other.

"Most of the smoke seems to be coming from there," Bela pointed in the direction of the Embarcadero, "so we'll go this way."

Mary shrugged, and they started walking northwest. In spite of the agony and stress of the quake itself and the long hours of standing barefoot in the chill, walking seemed to lift their spirits somewhat. Perhaps it was just the stimulus given their muscles by movement; more likely, it was the feeling that they were finally beginning to regain some control. They walked in silence, the children each holding one of Bela's hands, Mary and Fred behind them.

At first, the destruction seemed total, but as they walked they became aware that a few buildings appeared to have survived almost intact. There seemed to be no pattern to it, as they would observe a structure standing unscathed, surrounded by ruins.

At the corner of Folsom and Seventh Streets they were stopped by a man in army uniform. Bela, still wary of all uniforms, a holdover from her childhood years in Russia, clutched Mary's arm.

"Sorry, Folks, you can't go no farther here. There's fires all up Folsom, and they're burnin' outta control. There ain't no water."

"What do you mean, 'no water'?" Fred asked, shocked.

"The water mains in the whole area is all busted, and the Pumpers can't get no water pressure."

A small crowd of people, almost all still in night clothes, some with coats over them, had gathered.

"But we live on Eleventh and Folsom," someone shouted.

"Sorry, Mister," the soldier shook his head.

"My house is all right. It's right up there," a woman pointed toward a two-story Victorian in the next block, apparently undamaged. "I just went down to get my daughter and her family, so we would all be together. Please," she pleaded.

"Look, Lady, my orders are, 'nobody goes past this line,'" pointing to a rope barricade. "Besides, I heard that they might dynamite if the fires don't stop by themselves, and they ain't stoppin'."

A chorus of moans emanated from the crowd, which seemed to sway in unison. Several curses were heard. The woman with the intact house began to weep softly.

A woman cried, "My mother's lace tablecloth."

"My grandfather's picture," another cried.

"My new furniture."

"My home."

"Everything we had worked so hard for."

Symbols of grief, not only for lost possessions but for a lost world. Gradually the crowd dispersed as people, bereft of their anchors, moved aimlessly away in the directions still open to them.

When the family reached Ninth and Mission Streets, Mary begged, "Bela, stop for a minute. I'm exhausted, and my feet hurt."

"This city is doomed," Fred growled, wreathed in gloom. "They'll never rebuild it."

"Did you see how many buildings are in ruins?" asked Mary in an awed voice. "And the burning, it's all over. Bela, where are we going? There's fires all around us."

Bela didn't answer. She was thinking the same thing. A man still wearing his nightcap came toward them at that moment, a flabby woman with disheveled brown hair and four sleepy-looking children a half pace behind him.

Bela, now able to speak passable English, stopped him with a gesture. "The City Hall. Do you know if they have food there? And clothes?"

"The City Hall is no more. It's a pile of garbage." She realized there were tears in his eyes.

"Thank you," she said, numbed. She turned and looked at Mary and Fred, who stared at her in silence.

"Let's go this way," she pointed up Ninth Street. "There is no fire this way."

No one stirred. "Come on," she urged, "we'll find help. Don't just stand there."

"It's no use, Bela, we're just wearing ourselves out for nothing. Everything's gone." Mary began to cry. Chana and Vasily joined in.

Bela, too, was at the breaking point, but she knew that if she gave up now, she'd never move again.

"All right, sit here and rest," she said, pointing to an unbroken section of curbstone near the corner. "Fred, come with me. We'll see what's on Market Street."

Awed by the tone of authority in Bela's voice, Fred responded with a nod, "O.k."

Vasily started to run to Bela, who was already beginning to move north on Ninth Street, shouting, "I want to go with you, Bela."

Mary, inspired by Bela's air of confidence, grabbed his arm, sat him down on the curb, and said firmly, "No, you will stay right here with Chana and me, and be quiet."

Vasily, surprised at the tone in his mother's voice, made no further protest.

As they walked up Ninth Street, Fred endeavored to make conversation. "You're a pretty brave kid, Bela. You got guts."

"I'm not brave. I'm desperate."

"You're not going to find anything, you know. The government doesn't work that way. They're all out to take care of themselves -- just like my father."

"Look, if you can't say something helpful, just shut up. And you shouldn't talk that way about your father."

In spite of her uneasiness -- no, her dislike -- of Fred, she was actually glad to have the company. It was a distraction.

"Why not? My father's never done anything for me."

"He's still your father. And he did do something for me."

"You mean getting you your visas? Ah, you'd have gotten in anyway. He wouldn't have done it otherwise. He doesn't stick his neck out for anybody."

"Look!" Fred suddenly shouted, pointing to the corner of Market Street. "It's a Red Cross worker!"

"What's that?" Bela asked, following the direction of Fred's trembling finger. "That's good?"

"Yes, yes that's good. They may have food. Come on, let's go!"

He grabbed Bela's hand and they ran to the corner.

Arriving breathless, they saw that a queue stretched the full length of Market Street to Eighth. Tired and discouraged, they walked slowly toward the end of the line. When they got to Eighth Street, Bela began to cry. The line continued for another half of the long block between Market and Mission.

Fred said, "Look, you go back and get Mary and the children, and I'll wait here."

Bela hesitated. "No, I'll wait; you go."

"Hey, come on. Don't you trust me? Anyway, I speak better English than you."

She knew he was right. She nodded, turning back toward Mission Street.

When the four returned, they were surprised to find that Fred had progressed almost a quarter of the way along Market."

"It's going pretty fast. Somebody said there are three people serving soup and bread and telling about where to go" Fred's voice betrayed his excitement as the line moved another two feet.

It was almost three o'clock when they finally got to the head of the line. They had been on the street for nearly ten hours without food, water or bathroom facilities. The first worker handed each a steaming metal cup and a slice of bread, pointing to the woman next to her, who stood with a pad and pencil.

"I'll need your names, please" Her voice was gentle, which surprised Bela, who anticipated the officiousness she associated with authority. "Fine," the woman said, writing as Fred dictated, "now talk to Mrs Walker, over there." She pointed to the third Red Cross worker seated at a separate table, who was handing another group of people a yellow slip of paper.

Bela noticed that not everyone was directed to the third person. She felt uneasy, wondering why this was. She knew that in the old country it could be a bad sign.

"Where do you live?" Mrs. Walker asked. "Oh yes, that whole area is burning, and some of the buildings will probably be dynamited to try to stop the fire," she said when Fred had given their addresses.

"What are we going to do?" Mary had said very little since Bela had picked them up at the curb, but now she wailed in anguish, ringing her hands. "Our clothes. Everything we own."

"I know," the woman said with empathy, "it's been horrible for all of us. But the army is putting up tents, so at least you'll have a place to stay."

"Here," she handed Fred a yellow slip. "Lucky for you, we're placing families with children. Do you know where the Panhandle of Golden Gate Park is?"

"Yes, but we have no clothes. Look at us," Mary repeated, speaking for all of them as the full horror of the day began to penetrate.

"They'll have some clothes there. You'll have to walk, though. There are no trolley cars operating and the few taxis are charging whatever they can get, so you'd better get started."

VI

Bela waved to her father as he climbed the train steps. She could see him inside the car as he walked down the aisle, her legs pumping furiously in an effort to remain alongside. She stopped when he took a window seat. She waved again. He looked at her with his soft brown eyes, and she realized they were filled with tears. She saw his lips move, but she couldn't understand the words.

"Say it again, Papa. I can't hear you," she shouted.

His lips moved again, but she shook her head. Suddenly the train was gone and in its place was a forest. The trees were strange and unfamiliar, many of them twisted and torn up by the roots as if seized and scattered by a giant hand. A feeling of sadness for the dead and dying trees overcame her, and she began to cry.

Bela awoke with a start. Her body was bathed in perspiration. Tears were running down her cheeks. At first, still caught up in her dream, she couldn't figure out where she was. Confused, she looked around. Five cots covered almost all of the available space. Then she recalled with a shudder the terror of the earthquake and its aftermath, the exhausting trek to find help. She looked up at the khaki colored ceiling and saw, of all things, a bear paw print! The incongruity of the sight made her laugh through the tears.

Mary sat up, rubbing her eyes. "What is it? I thought I heard something."

"It was me," Bela replied. "Look." She pointed to the ceiling.

Mary gazed upward. "My God, it's a bear paw." With a wry grin she added, "Well, here we are living in a shelter once occupied by a bear. Full circle."

"Or at least he walked on it when it was folded up. Maybe he found a better place to live," Bela replied.

By now, Fred and the children were awake. They could hear stirring noises as other occupants in the tent area began to face the new day. Moans and gasps accompanied the aftershocks, which were still coming about every half hour. Hysterical screams and shrieks were heard now and then, as some lost the war of nerves.

Bela waited until the others were out of the tent. She could not bring herself to dress in Fred's presence. Then she stepped into the blue denim coverall the woman in charge of their area had given her last night. Although it was a child's size, she found the legs a little long and turned cuffs on them. The worn boys' size tennis shoes were a little wide, but the looseness felt good on her tender bruised and scratched feet.

She stepped out and looked around. Their tent was about fifty feet from the corner of Stanyan and Fell Streets in the Panhandle, a long narrow strip of grass and trees attached to Golden Gate Park. The Park proper began just at the other side of Stanyan. Now a double row of tents, their pointed roofs lending a bizarre rakish touch, extended eastward to Baker Street, a distance of approximately eight blocks.

Some of the people had been able to salvage cooking equipment, but most, Bela and her family among them, had not. An outdoor food distribution point had been set up at the western end of the Panhandle. A soldier, wearing an arm band with the letters "MP," was blowing a whistle and waving a white gloved hand toward a rapidly forming breakfast line.

Vasily and Chana were among the first there, Vasily elbowing his way in front of Chana.

Fred intervened. "All right, Vasily, not this time. Ladies first." He placed his hand on the boy's shoulder and gently but firmly steered him around behind Chana, who looked up, rewarding him with a dazzling smile.

At the head of the line another soldier ladled out bowls of hot oatmeal. There was also dehydrated milk mixed with water for the children, and black coffee for adults.

But Bela had no desire for food. Her throat was beginning to hurt, and her eyes burned. She stepped out of the line and began to walk back to their tent.

"Bela, where are you going?" Mary called.

"I'm not hungry. I think I'll lie down a little while."

"Save my place," Mary told Fred. She caught up with Bela and took her arm. Peering at her, she said, "My God, Bela, you look terrible. You're sick. Here, let me take you back to the tent and put you to bed."

"No, I'm all right. I'm just tired. You'd better get back in line or you'll miss breakfast."

"All right." Mary was genuinely concerned. "I'll bring you something." But when Mary returned with the steaming bowl, Bela was asleep, her cheeks flushed.

Bela slept the entire day and through the night. The next morning she awoke to the patter of rain on the tent top. As she tried to sit up, she was swept with nausea and light-headedness. Her head fell back on the pillow. She looked around but the tent was empty. She closed her eyes, her head pounding, her cheeks hot and dry. Suddenly a violent chill wracked her body, shaking the cot with its force, her teeth chattering.

"Oh, my God, Bela!" Mary, entering the tent, was stunned by the sight. "You *are* sick. I'm going to try to find a doctor."

Bela was now too ill to protest. She lay, her body alternating between violent chills and raging fever for three hours, although the time seemed endless to Mary and the others. The doctor, a tall silver haired man of about sixty, dressed in a crumpled army major's uniform, entered the tent about noon without knocking.

"What have we here?" he said without preamble, quickly adding, "Oh, I'm sorry, I'm Major Godfrey; I'm the doctor."

After carefully examining Bela, he straightened up and stood, lips pursed, tapping the bell of his stethoscope on his open palm. He turned to Mary.

"Would you step outside with me for a moment please, Madam?"

Mary followed him out. "What's wrong with her, Doctor? Is it the grippe?"

Dr. Godfrey shook his head. "She's very sick. I think it's pneumonia, but in any case she should be in a hospital. Unfortunately, the few hospitals still in operation are filled with people injured in the quake. I'll try to get her in somewhere, but I can't hold out much hope. I'll let you know later today."

Mary shook her head and walked back into the tent.

"She's getting worse," Fred said. "Look at her."

"I know. She has pneumonia." Mary told Fred what the doctor had said. Chana looked on, her large eyes wide with concern.

Vasily looked at Mary, then at Bela now moaning slightly, her lips moving silently, then back at Mary. He ran to Bela and threw himself on her, pleading, "Bela, Bela, don't be sick, please. Don't die."

"No, Vasily, she won't die." Mary tried to draw him away and into her own arms, but he clung to Bela, now barely able to respond. "Come, she's asleep. We have to let her rest so she'll get better." Gradually Vasily relinquished his hold and allowed Mary to lead him outdoors. The rain had stopped.

Chana followed, placing her thin arms around her brother. "Don't cry, little brother, Bela's strong. She's just tired from all that walking," she soothed, wishing she was as certain as she tried to sound.

Fred looked up and saw the clouds were breaking up as patches of blue could be seen here and there. "Look, see the sun is trying to come out," he pointed. "That's a good sign."

Vasily held fast to Chana.

Major Godfrey returned around four o'clock. He had shaved and changed into a fresh uniform, but fatigue still showed in his eyes.

"Is she going into a hospital?" Mary asked, although she was afraid she already knew the answer.

The doctor shook his head, his expression grave. "I'm sorry, there's nothing." He entered the tent to check on Bela, who was tossing her head from side to side and mumbling.

"Her fever is very high," He said. He handed Mary a bottle of dark red liquid. "Give her a tablespoonful of this every four hours. It will help control the fever." He looked at Bela, shaking his head. "She's not going to know much about what's going on for the next few days. I'll stop by every day." He shook his head again, adding, "I sure wish we could get her into a hospital."

During the next week, Bela's delirium became increasingly more profound. Once she cried out, "Papa, Papa, it's falling!" Another time, she tossed on her cot, mumbling, "Vasily, put the dynamite down."

On the sixth day of her illness, Dr. Godfrey said, "I don't know what to tell you. Her fever is getting higher. She is very, very sick."

Mary asked, alarmed. "Can't you get her into the hospital now?"

Dr. Godfrey looked grim. "Even if I could, she is too ill to move at this point."

It seemed to Bela that she was back in Siberia, riding once more in the rear of her father's open wagon. It was night, and as she lay on her back she gazed up at the millions of stars glittering out of a black sky. Suddenly, one star began to grow. It became huge and luminous while the dark sky closed in around her. Then she was in a black walled tunnel where nothing was visible except the brilliance at its end.

"Let's go there, Papa," she called to her father. "It wants us to come." She couldn't see her father but she knew he was there, driving them to the beautiful place at the end of the tunnel. She was very happy.

Abruptly, a dark ring encircled the light, slowly spread over it; and the light was gone.

VII

Bela opened her eyes to find Mary bathing her face with cool water.

"Bela? You're awake?" Mary squealed.

Bela tried to speak, but the sound wouldn't come. She licked her cracked lips and tried again. "What time is it?" she croaked, looking around the tent. "Did I oversleep?"

"Oh, Bela, Bela! My dear, you've been sick. But you'll be well soon, now." Mary ran outside calling, "Fred, Children! She's awake! She passed the crisis!"

They all rushed in, the children falling over themselves and each other in their effort to reach Bela. Mary and Fred simultaneously reached out to halt the onslaught.

"Children! Careful!" Mary shouted, grabbing Chana's dress.

Vasily tried to wriggle out of Fred's grasp, his feet pawing wildly at the dirt floor of the tent, but Fred held him firmly, admonishing, "Hey, easy. Your sister's very weak. You have to be gentle and quiet."

When Vasily quieted his frantic movements, Fred released him. Both children tiptoed cautiously to Bela, who reached unsteady arms to them, her mouth slowly breaking into a feeble grin. Suddenly everyone was laughing, including neighbors from the tents on either side, who had gathered at the excited shrieks.

During the next week, Bela slowly gained strength, while Mary nursed her and neighbors brought food. Although she slept a great deal, it was a healing sleep, no longer menaced by nightmarish and bewildering apparitions.

Once, however, as she lay awake on her cot she was startled by a crash, followed by a series of thuds and a woman's scream. Alarmed, she rose and staggered to the door of the tent. The sounds continued, interspersed with a man's voice shouting angry curses. She realized that the couple in one of the tents next to theirs was fighting. Sickened by the knowledge that the man was evidently beating his wife, she felt her ancient fear confirmed: He sometimes stopped by Bela's tent wearing his police officer's uniform.

Bela's convalescence was rapid. As strength returned, she began to take longer walks, finally covering the full length and breadth of the tent area. One day, as she strolled along Oak Street beside the Panhandle, no longer fearful of the open sky, she heard a voice behind her.

"Bela, is that you?"

She turned and saw a familiar ruddy face liberally sprinkled with freckles, topped by a mass of unruly copper curls.

"Ari! Oh, Ari!" She ran to him. They hugged, indifferent to the knowledge that they were little more than acquaintances. Suddenly embarrassed, Bela pulled away.

"Bela. how are you? How did you make out? You look very thin. Are you in one of the tents?" Ari shot questions so quickly that Bela could only laugh. "Oh, God, I'm sorry. My Yiddish isn't very good, you know, but I'll try," he apologized.

Bela shook her head and laughed again. "It's all right. I understood you. I'm going to night school, you know, and I speak English most of the time now, even if my accent is terrible!"

Bela recounted the events of the past month, since the Earthquake and Fire, ending with, "...you know, when I was so sick, I had such awful dreams...more like...like...how you say.....visions. So real they were...like I was some place else...in Russia or Japan, or...Oh, I don't know where. But I remember them, and sometimes.. ...well, sometimes I'm frightened, but sometimes I wish I was there, not here..." Her voice trailed off.

Ari nodded soberly. "I know, things are not always so good for us here -- not what we expected."

Bela recovered, laughing, "Not a big earthquake, anyway!"

"Well, if you can laugh about it, you're really in good shape." Ari suddenly struck his forehead a resounding blow. "My God, what's

the matter with me! Here you are just over a terrible illness, and here I am keeping you standing and jabbering! Come, let's find a place where we can sit down." He looked around. "Ah," pointing, "there's a bench. Can you walk half a block?"

"I'm really fine; but, yes, sitting down would be nice."

They strolled to the bench, Bela letting Ari's hand rest gently on her elbow.

They sat in silence for a few minutes, a mild May breeze softening the heat of the bright sun, the scent of spring strong in the air.

Ari looked around. "Isn't it remarkable?" he observed. "To see the trees and flowers growing, the insects buzzing around, all so unconcerned; it's hard to believe that such tragedy took place less than five weeks ago."

"I know," Bela nodded, "it's so beautiful here. It almost makes living in a tent fun. You know," she mused, "I don't miss living on Folsom Street at all."

"What's the matter!" Ari stared at Bela, who had suddenly turned white. "Are you sick? What's wrong?"

Bela covered her mouth with both hands. "Yes, I do." The muffled words came from behind her hands.

"What?" Ari asked, bewildered. "What are you saying?"

Bela put her hands down. "Yes, I do. I mean, I don't miss Folsom Street, but I miss *them*."

The tears welled up, but Bela shook them away. She wasn't going to cry in front of Ari. "Mrs. Katz and Tessie. The people I was living with. I don't know where they are. I don't even know if -- if something happened to them." She couldn't say the words. "I just don't know -- "

"Why don't we drive over there? They may have moved back in, for all you know." Proudly he added, "I have a flivver, now."

Bela shook her head. "We went there last week -- Mary, my stepmother, and I. There's nothing left. It was all burned. We took a taxi. It cost almost all the money I had saved from my paycheck."

"I can imagine," Ari replied. "Have you looked in the paper?"

"Why? What good would that do?"

"Because every day since the day after the Earthquake, the combined paper has published the names of people looking for other

people, and they don't charge anything; so maybe your friends are in there. They're probably worried about you, too. I'll go get one and meet you back here in half an hour.

"You just sit right there, and don't move!" Ari was off down Oak Street before Bela could say anything more.

Better than his word, Ari was back in fifteen minutes. "I thought I'd have to walk all the way down to Divisadero, but I found a newsstand right at the beginning of the Panhandle, and I ran all the way back," he panted.

Bela's heart began beating wildly as Ari opened the paper to the columns of names and messages.

"What's their name? Katz?" Ari ran his finger through the "K's". "Hm-mm. Wait a minute. Let's look again, slowly."

He read each name aloud. There were three Katzes, but the first names were wrong.

Bela's face showed her disappointment. "Do you think maybe their first names --? Look for Tessie or Brocha."

Ari looked through the "T's" twice, shaking his head as he read the long list. There were more "T's" than any other letter -- even more than "S". Bela was desolate. She was certain their message wouldn't be in the "B's".

Ari was half way through "B" when he suddenly stopped, puzzled. "Wait a minute." He returned to the start of the "B's".

"Babbitt, Baker, Baker, Ball, Baum, Becker,..." he read; then, "Well, I'll be damned! Here it is!" He shouted.

"Where! Where!" Bela snatched the paper out of Ari's hand.

They read together, out loud, "Bela Kransky, contact Mrs. Katz or Tessie immediately, Piedmont 380W."

"It's them! It's them! They're all right! They're safe." Bela threw her arms around Ari and kissed him. "Thank you! Thank you!" She drew back, flustered. "Oh, I'm sorry."

Ari smiled. "Don't be sorry. It was very nice."

"What should I do? I must find a telephone!" Bela jumped up, poised to run, not knowing where.

Ari reached out, grabbing her hand. "Hold on. There aren't any buildings around here with public telephones. Let's think a minute."

"But I think most of those buildings are in the bad area -- where it's all burned." Bela's brow wrinkled.

Ari nodded. "That's true." He paused. "Look," he said, "there is a phone in the boarding house where I live, if you would not mind coming there with me."

Focused solely on contacting her friends, Bela asked, "Will it take us long to get there?"

Ari smiled. "I live only five blocks away, on Hayes and Clayton. Are you able to walk it?"

"Oh yes, let's go."

"Wait a minute. Don't you want to tell somebody where you're going? They might worry about you." Ari's voice betrayed his amusement at her eagerness. How trusting she is, he thought.

"Oh, of course, I'll tell Mary. Our tent is right up there, near Stanyan," she indicated with her raised arm, mentally chiding herself for her recklessness.

As they walked to Ari's house, he said, "That number is in Oakland. Do they have friends there?"

"I don't know, maybe," Bela replied. "Mrs. Katz needs the rent money she used to get from me. I wonder how they're getting along."

The telephone conversation was a blending of laughter, tears, and exclamations of joy and questions that Ari, standing behind Bela as she stood on tiptoe to speak into the mouthpiece of the wall phone, found impossible to follow. He was impressed, however, with the love that he sensed reflected in Bela's jubilation, and from the crackling sounds he could hear coming from the telephone receiver Bela held to her ear.

When she finally hung up, Ari asked, "Where are they living?"

"It's a house on 12th Street and -- " Bela hesitated. " -- Magnolia?"

"Yes, that's a pretty nice area. Several Jewish families live around there."

Bela nodded. "They're living with friends -- the Gormans." Bela thought for a minute. "They want me to come there -- to live."

"Well, what do *you* want to do?"

"I don't know. I've never lived in Oakland."

"You never lived in San Francisco until you came here."

Bela smiled. "You're right. It's not that, though. It's my job. I've already missed more than a month. I just hope they won't fire me."

"You don't know!" Ari said, surprised. "No, of course you don't. You've been sick. Bela, Burana Cigars is no more."

"No more? What do you mean, 'no more'?" Bela felt faint. Her ears buzzed.

Ari gently placed his right arm on her shoulder, supporting her with his left hand. "Are you all right?"

Bela nodded, speechless.

"Burana went out of business because of the Earthquake. Most of the people are working somewhere else."

"And the others? What about them?" Bela had regained some of her composure.

"Still looking." Ari gazed intently at Bela, reading her alarm.

As they walked back to the Panhandle, they were silent. Ari wracked his brain. He wanted desperately to help, but his integrity prevented his offering empty words of encouragement. Anyway, he knew she wouldn't believe him; she was too smart.

When they arrived at the tent, Bela looked up at Ari, smiling, determined not to reveal her distress again. "I would offer you some tea, but as you see, we don't have a teapot."

"I will forgive you only if you promise to have dinner with me tomorrow night," Ari smiled back.

"Yes. Yes, I will."

Bela looked up. A blue jay flitted from an evergreen tree to a eucalyptus and back, its harsh cry filling the air. "Never envy the bluebird's beauty; pity its voice," she murmured.

"What did you say?" Ari asked

"Oh nothing," Bela replied, somewhat embarrassed, "just something my father used to tell me when I wanted something I couldn't have."

Ari took Bela's hand, pressing it gently. "We'll talk tomorrow."

Bela's eyes followed Ari's retreating somewhat stocky figure as he strode toward Fell Street on his way home, the late afternoon sun turning his hair a bright orange.

VIII

"I have a surprise for you," Ari said, spearing a piece of lettuce with his fork.

"A surprise? For me?" Bela's dark eyes sparkled as she sat across the table. "What is it?"

"First, let me fill your glass," he said, pouring champagne.

"Oh, enough!" Bela held up her hand.

Ari laughed. "All right, Miss Kransky, but I think you will want to drink to this." He set the bottle back in the ice bucket, and raised his glass. "Here's to the newest inspector at the Russell Uniform Company of Oakland, California. Drink up, Lady!"

Bela looked around. "Where is she? Do I know her?"

Ari bared his slightly uneven teeth in a wolfish grin.

"Oh-h, Ari! How?" Bela was overcome.

"Easy. The foreman is an old friend of mine. He used to have the Union job I have now -- business agent for the I.L.G. -- before he got to be a boss. It turned out that the factory is expanding, and they needed a couple more inspectors."

"ILG? What's that?" She felt things were happening too fast.

"I.L.G.W.U. -- the International Ladies Garment Workers Union. They're very new out here, but they've been in New York for about six years. We hope, eventually, to include all the factories that make women's wear," he explained. "That's Labor's goal, but we're a long way from there."

"How shall I thank you? You're so kind." Bela's smile faded. She placed her hand over her mouth, a gesture Ari was beginning to recognize as a sign of anxiety or misgiving.

"What's wrong? Don't you want it?" he asked.

"Of course I do; but what do I know about making uniforms?" Bela's voice quavered with disappointment.

"What did you know about making cigars?" he countered. "Anyway, all you have to do is make sure the seams are together and all the buttons are on. You know the kind of stuff that's needed. Don't worry. You'll do fine."

As they sipped their coffee, Ari reached across the table and took Bela's hand. "Now I have another surprise for you. We're going to drive down to the Ferry Building, take a boat across the Bay, and drop in on your friends, the Katzes."

"Now? Now? You mean right now? Tonight?" Bela shrieked, tears of joy filling her dark almond-shaped eyes and spilling onto the plum-colored table cloth. They both howled with laughter when Bela, waving her hands in excitement, sent her water glass flying.

"Yes, now," he shouted, caught up in her emotion. He signaled the waiter to bring the check.

The air over the bay was mild, with just the suggestion of a chill. They stood close together on the outside upper deck of the ferry, the side wheel churning up a fine spray which occasionally spattered them, evoking little squeals and giggles from Bela. The sun had set as they were boarding, and now, two-thirds of the way to Oakland, the dark shape of Yerba Buena Island, nicknamed Goat Island after its chief inhabitants, was silhouetted against the purple twilight. Trembling with anticipation, Bela could scarcely contain herself.

"They've had the notice in the paper for almost a month. They were about to give up -- they were worried -- they were afraid something had happened to me -- it's so lucky I saw you -- I never would have looked in the paper -- I might never have seen them again." She chattered on, her exuberance shutting off further attempts at two-way conversation, as the crescent moon slowly rose behind the Oakland hills.

The boat pulled into the slip, its sides squeaking against the wooden pilings as waves rocked it. Taking Bela's hand and slipping it around his arm, Ari guided them to the orange and white Key System train waiting on the track at the Oakland Mole.

"Well, well, aren't we lucky," he crowed, "there's the 'F' already waiting for us."

"Oh my," Bela puffed as they ran for the train, "the front of that train looks like its an angry man!"

"What?" Ari asked, helping her up the car steps and guiding her to a straw seat. "What makes you say that?"

"Oh, I know it's silly, but if you look at it, there's the brown roof that curves back like he combs his hair straight back. Then the two windows are his eyes and the headlight's the nose and that step on the bottom is his mouth. But what makes him look mean and angry is that black bar down the middle between the windows -- like a frown."

By the time Bela had finished her description, Ari was roaring with laughter. "What an imagination you have! You should be a writer."

Bela said stoutly, "Well, anyway, it's fun to look at things in different ways. Don't you ever see pictures in clouds, for instance?"

"Yes, I do, but I suspect you're more creative. I mean it seriously." He squeezed her hand.

As the train rolled along Fortieth Street, its wheels clacking a rhythm against the tracks like a Spanish dancer's castanets, Bela became quiet, her mind rushing ahead to the meeting with Mrs. Katz and Tessie. Although it had been only a few weeks, so much had happened in the interim that it now seemed like years since they had been together. She wondered how much the terrible events of the quake and fire had changed them. They had sounded the same, but then you couldn't really tell because voices were so different on the telephone. Besides, what would she know? She had never talked to anyone on a telephone before. She knew *she* was different now than when she had run out of the house on that awful day. She hoped they would still like her. Maybe once they saw her again, they wouldn't want her to live with them.

"...next block." Ari's voice broke into her thoughts.

"What?" she asked, startled.

"I said we have to get off next block," Ari repeated, reaching for the button on the wall to signal the stop.

Bela's heart began pounding. "Are we there already?"

"Not yet. This is Fortieth and San Pablo. We have to take a trolley to Twelfth Street and then walk a couple blocks."

They finished the trip without speaking, Ari apparently sensing Bela's need for silence. As they walked to Magnolia Street,

however, Ari mused, "You know, if the ferries would carry automobiles, we could have driven all the way. Oh well, maybe some day."

Then they were there. Tessie flung the door open, and she and Bela were in each other's arms, alternately laughing and crying, Mrs. Katz prying Tessie away in order to embrace Bela. All her doubts melted away as Bela stood in the door frame breathless, tears rolling down her cheeks, while Ari stood back on the tiny stoop, smiling.

"Oy, what's the matter with me; my manners!" Mrs. Katz shouted, lapsing into Yiddish in her excitement. "Come in! Come in!" She grabbed Ari and Bela each by an arm and pulled them into the parlor.

Two women and a man stood up, smiling, as the four entered.

"These are my friends Nettie and Herman Gorman; and, Bela, you know my daughter, Agnes. She's visiting from San Francisco. Their place didn't burn. They were lucky," Mrs. Katz announced in one breath.

Bela nodded and introduced Ari, catching a twinkle in Tessie's eye and blushing.

"Nu, tell me what has happened with you. On the phone you said you've been sick?" Scrutinizing Bela, "You look even thinner than before."

Bela again recounted her experiences of the past five weeks: The harrowing trek through rubble and falling bricks to find the children, the horrors of her delirium during the height of the fever, ending with the encounter with Ari and his help in locating the Katzes.

As Bela unfolded the story of her ordeal, Mrs. Katz placed her arm around Bela's shoulders, holding her tightly. Tessie, gazing up at her friend in open-mouthed admiration, sat on the floor at her feet.

"It's no wonder you got sick," Mrs. Katz said, shaking her head in disbelief, "but you're a strong girl. No, excuse me -- a strong woman!"

"How did you do it?" Tessie marveled. "I mean about the kids -- going through all that danger to try to find them. I know I couldn't have."

Bela shrugged. "I don't know. I didn't even think about it. All I thought about was finding Vasily and Chana safe."

An hour later, as Bela and Ari rose to leave, Mrs. Katz said, "So when can you move in?"

Bela felt intense relief. In all the tumult of their visit, there had been no mention of her living with the Katzes again. She looked around for the Gormans, but they had slipped out earlier.

"It's all right. They agree," Mrs. Katz assured her.

"As soon as I start working, again," Bela replied. She looked at Ari. "Next week?"

Ari nodded.

"Nonsense!" Mrs. Katz exclaimed. "You will move in tomorrow. The sooner you get out of that tent, the better!"

"But I have no -- "

"Tomorrow!" Mrs. Katz shouted, cutting Bela off.

As Bela and Ari parted in front of the tent upon their return, it was past midnight. He took her hand. "I'll help you to move tomorrow. I'll pick you up around ten."

Bela smiled. "I don't have much to move: Just what I'm wearing," she said, looking ruefully down at the too large white blouse, black skirt and tennis shoes, pulling the heavy black shawl more snugly around her shoulders, "and those coveralls -- all thanks to the Red Cross."

"That's o.k. I'll help you, anyway. Goodnight." He placed his hands gently on her shoulders and kissed her softly on the cheek. Then he was gone.

She stood peering into the night, surprised and confused, her cheeks hot despite the chill.

IX

For the first time since her recovery, Bela had trouble sleeping. As she tossed on her cot, her body aching with fatigue from the long trip and the excitement of seeing the Katzes, her mind darted from Ari, to the move, to the children, to Ari again. Finally, knowing that her restlessness was disturbing the others, she got up, put on her now well-seasoned coveralls, took the shawl, and walked outside.

The moon had long since set, but dawn was still an hour away. The gas street lights were still not lit, a lingering aftermath of the Earthquake, and the dark night was like the tunnel in her dream, black and featureless. But no, it wasn't featureless, for as she looked around, her eyes growing accustomed to the night, she could barely make out the outlines of trees, their stillness broken momentarily by a light breeze rippling the leaves. She thought she heard a child cry, and realized it was a bird calling out in its sleep. Do birds dream, she wondered? They must, she thought, if they cry in their sleep. She pulled the shawl tightly around her, shivering from the pre-dawn cold.

Her thoughts returned to Ari. Struggling to sort out her feelings and the events of the previous evening, she realized that, in her enthusiasm and gratitude, she had given him a message she had not intended. She valued his friendship, his gentleness, his sensitivity -- and in these last two days she had found him to be a supreme comfort. But she knew she could never love him -- at least not in the way she sensed, despite her inexperience, he was beginning to expect and want.

She heard a step behind her and turned. It was Mary.

"What's wrong? Can't you sleep?" Mary whispered.

Touched by Mary's concern, Bela related the trip to Oakland and her plan to move back with the Katzes.

"I was going to tell you first thing in the morning. I hope you don't mind." Since her illness, she and Mary had begun to develop a friendship which she did not want to jeopardize.

"No, it's probably a good idea all around," Mary replied. "It would be foolish for you to try to commute, and it will most likely be easier for us to find a place to live.

"And," she added, "I didn't want to tell you this, but Fred's parents offered to let him and me and the children live with them until we find something."

"Oh, you should do that!" Bela replied, relieved. She had been fighting a heavy burden of guilt at the thought of moving, as though she were abandoning her responsibility to them when they had nowhere to go.

"Oh, we will, now that you're taken care of," Mary assured her.

In spite of the release she felt, Bela also squelched a small twinge of rejection.

She felt somewhat better when Mary put her arm around Bela's tiny waist, saying, "We'll miss you."

Suddenly Bela had an impulse to talk to Mary about Ari.

Mary listened quietly as Bela tried to explain her conflicted feelings. "He's sweet and gentle, and in the short time we've known each other I've begun to feel very safe with him. But I don't love him, except...I guess...as a dear friend."

Mary shook her head. "How do you know? You hardly know him. Give yourself a chance. You'll probably be madly in love with him by next month.

"Besides," she added, "what's love? You live with a man long enough, you learn to love him."

That didn't happen with you and my father, Bela thought. Aloud she said, "Maybe you're right. I can't believe that's all there is, though."

At precisely ten o'clock the following morning, Ari was at the tent door as promised.

"Bela," he called softly, "are you ready?"

Bela opened the tent flap, dressed in her coveralls and holding the blouse, skirt and shawl over her arm.

"All ready," she announced, smiling, showing no sign of her sleepless night.

Ari took the clothes she was holding, and as he folded them carefully, placing them in the brief-case he had brought, he said, "I figured you wouldn't have anything to carry your clothes in, so I brought my portfolio." (He pronounced it "portfell".)

"You really think of everything, don't you?" Bela remarked.

They drove to the Ferry building, the little windshield wiper chugging an inadequate gap through the fog on the glass, as Ari worked it with one hand and steered with the other. (The vacuum wiper was yet to be developed.) He stole a glance at Bela sitting straight backed beside him.

"You are very quiet this morning," he said. "Is everything all right?"

"How can I talk over all this racket? The engine and that thing dragging back and forth on the glass -- they're enough without my adding to it!" she responded sharply.

"Well, it seems that we're a bit testy today," he said lightly, covering a prickle of uncertainty at her apparent change of mood.

"Oh, Ari, I'm sorry. I didn't sleep too well last night, and I guess I'm just tired." Bela felt ashamed at her behavior. This man was so good to her. "I'm sorry I'm being so horrid."

But the conversation during the drive to the Ferry continued to lag.

The trip on the boat was somewhat better. Bela's anxiety at possibly giving out wrong signals seemed to ease as her warm and caring nature reasserted itself. The ghostly sound of the fog horns could be heard moaning in the distance, but the mist over the Bay was rapidly dissipating as the sun warmed the air. It was cold when they boarded, so they had sat inside the cabin on the upper deck, watching the ever present seagulls maintaining speed alongside. As they passed Yerba Buena Island, the sun suddenly shone full force, and the fog disappeared.

"It looks like it's going to be a nice day after all," Bela said, gazing out the cabin window.

"It's almost always nicer in the East Bay," Ari commented.
"The climate is generally milder than San Francisco."

Bela nodded. "Yes, so I've heard; but I'll miss San Francisco."

"A lot of my organizing work is in Oakland, so I'm over there several times a week," Ari said. "You won't be lonesome."

"Oh, look at that big ship over there," Bela pointed toward the Golden Gate, feeling an urge to change the subject.

"That's a cargo ship, probably coming from somewhere in the Orient."

"Where I was," Bela said, her eyes shining.

"Where was that?" Ari asked, surprised. "Aren't you from Russia?"

"Siberia, actually...Chita...Vladivostok and Chita. But before I came to America, I lived in Nagasaki, Japan."

"Japan? How come Japan? There are no Jews there, are there?" Ari shook his head, wondering. "I know so little about you."

"Of course there are Jewish people there, like everywhere," Bela laughed. "Anyway, there isn't so much to know about me."

She told him about their move from Siberia for her father's health, his subsequent death, and her trip to San Francisco with the children.

"My God," he marveled. "You've done a lot of living in your short life."

"Look," Bela said, "we're coming into the Oakland Mole."

Ari laughed as they walked onto the outside deck to observe the docking. "You learn your way around fast."

"Well, we were just here last night." But she was pleased at the compliment.

As they waited in the drafty Mole for the "F" train to appear, Ari said, "I guess we're not as lucky today."

"No. I guess not." He's trying to make conversation, Bela thought, and I'm not making it any easier for him.

They stood together in silence, the minutes passing, the tension mounting. Both felt relieved when Ari spied the slowly approaching train. "Ah, there it comes."

Bela sensed his growing discomfort and knew that it was her fault. She must do something about it once she was settled, she

thought, but not today. She was struggling with too many conflicting emotions at the moment: Excitement at being with the Katzes again; leaving the children, probably for good, this time; starting a new job. She just wasn't up to dealing with her feelings for Ari at this point. All she knew right now was that she wasn't as sure what they were today as she was before her talk with Mary last night. Maybe her trouble was that she expected too much of love. After all, she'd only read about it in novels and seen it in plays.

X

The Katz family had never been devout. They viewed themselves as "Secular Jews," strongly steeped in Jewish ethnic identity, knowledgeable and proud of their heritage. They did not attend synagogue services, except on *Rosh Hashonah* -- the Jewish New Year -- and on *Yom Kippur* to hear *Kol Nidre*, which they considered hauntingly exquisite music. Politically, they were Socialists. When Mr. Katz died, Morris Hillquit, a prominent New York labor lawyer and Jewish socialist activist, sent a telegram of condolences to Mrs. Katz and the children, which Mrs. Katz would pull out and re-read on occasions when she needed the comfort of her little box of memorabilia.

There was one tradition, however, that Mrs. Katz did follow: The Friday night family dinner, complete with *gefilte fish*, chicken soup with matzo balls or *kreplach* (little meat dumplings similar to ravioli or wonton). and roast chicken. Sometimes special guests were invited.

Thus, when Bela and Tessie came home from a stroll around Lake Merritt one Sunday afternoon about a month following Bela's move, Mrs. Katz looked up from her newspaper and said, "Bela, how would you like to invite Ari for Friday night? It's my turn to cook, and Nettie Gorman says it would be fine with her."

"Oh, yes, that would be nice." Bela had seen Ari only once since the move, partly because some issues demanding his presence in the San Francisco office had arisen unexpectedly, but also because she had put him off a couple of times when he wanted to come over. This would help assuage her guilt.

"Good. Tessie, Victor will be here, too, yes?" Tessie nodded.

Bela felt uneasy. Although she had met him only briefly when he came to call for Tessie each Saturday evening, in the last month she had listened to Tessie describe Victor repeatedly in rapturous terms. The words had not actually been spoken, but it was clear Tessie adored him, and it was probably only a matter of time before they became engaged. She hoped inviting Ari for Friday night dinner was not misunderstood. She did not want to confuse things between them again. She resolved to try to talk to him as soon as they were alone.

"What's wrong, Bela? You look so serious." Mrs. Katz pulled off her new pince-nez, rubbing the bridge of her nose with the thumb and forefinger of her other hand.

"*Oy veh*, these things are so uncomfortable," she mumbled in Yiddish.

"You've got a little red spot on each side of your nose. They look like they hurt," Bela replied, avoiding the question.

Mrs. Katz looked at her suspiciously but said nothing.

"That was a delicious dinner, Mrs. Katz," Ari commented, laying his napkin down beside his empty plate. "You don't know what it means to have a home-cooked meal with such warm and loving people."

"You're welcome here anytime, Ari," Mrs. Katz beamed.

"Bela's like my own daughter, and her friends are our friends."

"Here, let me clear the table." Bela stood up, collecting Ari's and Victor's dessert plates.

"Wait. Not yet." Mrs. Katz took the dishes from Bela's hands and set them down. "Let's have one more cup of coffee. Tessie?"

Tessie, smiling, picked up the coffee pot and began to pour.

Sensing what was about to happen, Bela shook her head when Tessie reached for her cup.

Placing the nearly empty pot carefully on the table, Tessie cleared her throat. "Mama, you do it."

"No, it's your job," Mrs. Katz said, laughing. "This is a modern family, where everybody takes care of their own business."

"What's going on?" Agnes asked, gazing from one to the other.

Levi, Agnes's husband, shrugged. He could never understand the women in this household, and he was glad his wife didn't come over often.

Nettie Gorman spoke for the first time since dinner began. "Brocha, don't be an idiot. Speak up!" She was almost the only person who called Mrs. Katz by her given name.

"All right! All right, already!" Still laughing, Mrs. Katz took a deep breath. "I would like to announce the engagement of my daughter, Tessie, to Mr. Victor Frankel.

"There! Nice and formal!"

Before the echo of her last words had faded, everyone was shouting and hugging Tessie. Everyone, that is, except Bela, who sat quietly, and Ari, who placed his hand gently on Bela's and tried to catch her eye.

"You're not all excited like the others. Aren't you happy?" Ari whispered.

"I'm happy for Tessie, of course." She moved her hand away.

XI

The next few months were hectic for Tessie, Bela, and Mrs. Katz as they worked to formulate plans for Tessie's wedding. The only item not given to argument was the date, Sunday, April 21, 1907, chosen by Tessie to commemorate the first anniversary of the Great Earthquake, as it was now referred to by most San Franciscans.

"You must wear white, Tessie," Bela admonished. "That's what virgin brides are supposed to wear."

"How do you know I'm a virgin?" Tessie giggled.

"Well, I guess I don't, but you can pretend, can't you?" Bela was half serious, somewhat disconcerted by her friend's teasing.

Or was it teasing? she wondered. She silently chided herself for thinking such thoughts about her best friend. Besides, modern girls didn't subscribe to the prudish restrictions of the *bourgeoisie* -- did they? At least that was what her American friend Millie, at work, said. She wanted to be modern and she wanted to be a real American, but ideas like this confused her. She suddenly wished her mother were alive, so she could ask her about sex and love and talk to her about Ari. Could she talk to Mrs. Katz? Maybe. She would think about it.

"All right, girls, we've been over this business of the gown a dozen times! Enough!" Mrs. Katz's voice broke into Bela's reverie. "Tessie, it's your wedding. You can wear anything you want, but don't be so smart with the remarks."

"I was only joking. Bela doesn't need to be so serious all the time."

"All right," Mrs. Katz said, softening. "We're all tense, with the wedding only two months away and with so much to do."

"But, Tessie, if you want me to get your gown finished on time, you're going to have to decide right now. You've put it off long enough."

"O.k., Mama. White, but no train and a shoulder length veil. I don't want a dress I can only wear once. We can't afford it, with Victor just starting out in Law."

"That's my girl. We'll go shopping together tomorrow for the pattern and goods." Mrs. Katz turned to Bela. "And you will wear pink. The Maid of Honor always wears pink."

"And it's a perfect color for you, Bel, with your black hair and beautiful olive skin." Tessie was already regretting her harsh words of a few moments ago.

As the time of the wedding approached, the atmosphere grew more frantic. The service would be held in the Gorman's parlor, with a reception following. This meant limiting the guests to their closest friends, and the argument that ensued erupted into the couple's first serious quarrel. Yet, the fact that they weathered it seemed to Bela to deepen Tessie and Victor's love. Did disagreements strengthen a relationship? she wondered. Maybe if they were resolved with compromise, they did. Bela filed this new bit of wisdom away to be looked at later, when her mind was less distracted.

With a caterer too costly to be considered, Tessie, Bela, Mrs. Katz, and Mrs. Gorman spent the last two days before the wedding making little tea sandwiches and covering them with damp cloths to prevent drying out. Stopping by on Saturday, the night before the ceremony, to see if there was anything he could do to help, Ari ended up making a fruit salad and stuffing hard boiled eggs.

"Ari, you're a wonder," beamed Nettie Gorman. "You're going to make some girl a wonderful husband." She turned an arch glance to Bela.

Oh, Damn, Bela thought. If I weren't so tired, I would have seen that coming.

But Ari, by now aware of Bela's feelings although they had never talked about them, was equal to Mrs. Gorman, laughing, "I couldn't agree more. Unfortunately, the girls don't!" Bela looked at Ari gratefully.

"Where are you and Victor going on your honeymoon?" Ari asked Tessie, more to ease the tension for Bela than for information.

"Well, I guess I'm not supposed to say," Tessie said with a rueful grin, "but we're only going to San Francisco. Victor has to be back at work Tuesday. You know, he just started at Hill, Murphy, and Stobel, and they only let him have one day off."

There were groans of sympathy.

Then everyone laughed at the stunned expression on Tessie's face as Ari shouted, "Hey, that's great! You can use my machine. Victor can drive, and I have to be in Oakland this coming week anyway, so I can't use it." He still had not figured out a way to get his car across the Bay.

Tessie leaped at Ari, throwing her arms around him and planting a kiss on his cheek. "Oh, Ari, can we? You're wonderful! Thank you!"

"Yes, Ari, you are a good man," Mrs. Katz nodded, her eyes filling with tears. "I wish my husband could have known you."

Bela looked at Ari, smiling. "You know, Ari, that is the highest compliment Mrs. Katz has ever paid anyone."

"I'm honored," Ari replied.

Later, as Ari was leaving, Bela whispered, "You are a good person and my special friend, Ari. I'm just not ready for anything more right now. I have to find out who I am, first."

"I know."

"I never had a chance to be a kid. And now I guess I don't know much about being grown up. Does any of this make any sense? It's hard for me to explain in English, still."

"Your English is fine. Yes, it makes a lot of sense -- And if you ask me, you're more grown up than a lot of people twice your age. Just keep it up, Honey. I'll be here if and when you need me."

"I know, Ari. Thank you."

"Good night, Grownup. See you tomorrow." He touched her cheek lightly and left.

That night Bela slept soundly, the anxiety and guilt she had been feeling around her evasiveness with Ari finally gone.

Sunday morning, April 21, 1907 dawned bright and sunny. The fog of the preceding week was gone, revealing a deep almost cobalt sky.

"It's a beautiful day for your wedding, Tessie darling," Bela said, bending to kiss her friend.

"Good morning, Bel," Tessie replied, kissing Bela, her curly hair tousled from sleep, the rags she had carefully placed as curlers the night before hanging in disarray. "Well, so much for my formal hairdo," she moaned, catching a glimpse in the mirror as she stood up.

She is so calm, Bela marveled. Aloud she said, "Your hair is always beautiful. I don't know why you even bothered to put it up last night."

In conformity with the Katz agnosticism, Tessie and Victor were wed in mid-afternoon by Judge Harry Brown, a former law professor of Victor's.

Then the service was over. As most of the guests milled around the table nibbling dainty little sandwiches and eating salad, Ari and three of the other young men danced a *Kazatska*, squatting and kicking their heels high in the air, while the young women sang and clapped in rhythm to the Russian music. It soon became an endurance contest as one by one the dancers lost their balance, laughing as rumps hit the floor with a thump. Finally, only Ari remained, legs flying in defiance of gravity and his stocky build. Then he, too, fell, rolling over on his side, holding his stomach, laughing and gasping, his normally ruddy face now aflame with the exertion. Bela, laughing, shook her head and ran to him, caught between concern and amusement.

"Are you all right, Ari?" She placed her arm under his neck, cradling his head.

"Of course; I'm fine!" He looked up at her, laughing, his eyes shining. "Pretty good, wasn't I?"

"Yes, you were wonderful. Maybe not so wonderful tomorrow."

Mrs. Katz, laughing, called out, "All right, everybody, come. They're going to cut the cake."

His thin normally pale face flushed with excitement, Victor gazed adoringly at Tessie as they stood hand-in-hand, her height

matching his, behind the two-tiered cake Mrs. Katz had spent most of the night decorating.

"Well, Mrs. Frankel, you're an old married woman now," Victor whispered, his straight black hair almost eclipsed by Tessie's blonde ringlets twining around the wisp of soft tulle veil. "How does it feel? And you'd better stop the frowning -- people will think you're sorry you married me."

Tessie laughed. "No, I wasn't frowning, I was thinking. I've never been able to understand why they say, 'I now pronounce you man and wife'-- why not 'husband and wife'?"

"Hm-mm, I've never thought about it, but you've got a point. I assume that it's because in the eyes of the law a man is a man, but a woman is just a wife."

"But that's not fair."

"No, it isn't." Victor looked thoughtful. "Maybe some day it will change."

Tessie picked up the cake knife, flipped a dollop of frosting onto Victor's aquiline nose and kissed it off. "I'm glad I married you," she murmured, inserting the knife for the first slice.

Bela, observing the interchange from a discrete distance, thought, if I could be sure of that kind of love, I wouldn't be so afraid.

Later, when Tessie threw the bouquet, Bela caught it with the agility and dexterity of an accomplished baseball fielder catching a fly ball. Everyone laughed, applauding both her athletic skill and the symbolism, while her cheeks took on the roseate hue of her dress.

"You're next, Bela!" someone shouted, as she shook her head vigorously.

"Not me," she countered and quickly tossed it to Mrs. Katz, who, with a surprised expression, caught it reflexively, creating even greater hilarity.

After the Bride and Groom departed, the guests began to disperse. Soon, only Ari was left.

"I'm going to be in Oakland for the next two weeks, at least," he told Bela. "We're trying to organize the Sharpson Coat Factory. I'd like to see you. O.K.?"

"Yes, of course."

"You'll probably want to rest the next couple of evenings.
It's been a busy time for you. How about Wednesday?"

Bela nodded. "Wednesday's fine."

"Good. I'll pick you up about six-thirty."

XII

In the days following the wedding Bela and Mrs. Katz struggled to adjust to Tessie's absence. While Mrs. Katz missed her younger daughter and looked forward with longing and anticipation to the couple's Friday night visits, it was Bela who felt the void most keenly. She knew that the depth of intimacy she and Tessie had shared as best friends during the last two years could never be recaptured, even though they still talked on the telephone each day. She also knew that they would always be close friends, and assumed their relationship would probably take on a more mature quality, maybe even be better.

But it can't ever be the same, she thought, as the days stretched into weeks and then into months. Tessie was my first real friend, and nothing can ever take the place of that.

She tried to explain her feelings to Ari one Sunday afternoon in late summer, as they sat on the grass by Lake Merritt eating the chicken she had packed. But to her surprise, Ari, always so sensitive and understanding, didn't get it.

"You need to get out more with people. Get to know some of the girls at work better. Expand your horizons."

Bela shook her head. "No, that's not the problem. I do have friends. There's Millie Hammond at work. And I see Ronia Baskin -- you know -- I worked with her at the cigar factory when I first came to San Francisco -- about once a month." Bela sighed. "I don't know how to explain it. No matter how many friends I have, it will never be like with Tessie, and I miss that. Maybe that's part of growing up, but I guess I don't like it very much."

Tossing a pebble into the Lake, Ari stood up and stretched.

"How would you like to go for a ride on the water?" he asked, looking down at the tiny, forlorn figure.

Bela brightened. "Oh, I'd love it."

"The Boathouse is about a third of the way around the Lake from here. Can you walk it in those shoes?"

Bela glanced down at her fashionable high-button high-heeled white shoes and laughed. Leaping up, she piped, "Let's go!"

An hour later the little rowboat was gliding smoothly on the tranquil blue-green Lake. Bela trailed her fingers in the water, the rhythmic slap of the oars beating a soft tattoo as Ari rowed.

Bit by bit Bela began to feel at peace, the longing with which she had been grappling wafting away into the growing dusk.

Later still, as they walked hand-in-hand to the trolley which would take them back to the Gorman house on Magnolia, Bela sighed again.

"Oh-oh, I thought you were finally enjoying yourself," Ari clucked.

"Oh, I am."

"Then why the big sigh?"

Bela laughed. "This time it's a sigh of contentment. Thank you for getting me out of my bad mood."

"Good girl."

As the days and weeks wore on, Bela's life settled into a routine of getting up in the morning, going to work and home to the Magnolia Street address at the end of her work day. She talked to Tessie on the telephone each evening after the supper dishes were washed and put away, but they saw each other regularly only on Friday nights and occasionally on Sunday afternoons when the four of them, she and Ari, Tessie and Victor would picnic or go to a Sunday afternoon concert.

One evening around the middle of October, when Bela came through the door of the uniform factory after work, she felt more tired than usual. It was already dark, as she began to walk to the corner to catch the trolley for home. She heard her name called. Startled to recognize Ari's voice, she turned and saw the familiar grin less than four feet away.

"Ari! What are you doing here? I thought you had a meeting tonight."

"I do, but it's not 'til eight. That gives me an hour-and-a-half. I thought you might like a ride home since it looks like it may rain."

Bela was confused. What good would his walking me to the trolley do, if it's going to rain? she wondered.

Aloud, she said, "Ari, it's nice of you to want to keep me company, but I'm awfully tired tonight, and I really want to get home. Call me tomorrow."

"If you're tired, you'll like this." He took her arm and steered her to the black vehicle standing behind a horse and carriage at the curb's edge, its skeletal frame supporting a flapping top as the entire structure rocked slightly in the rising wind.

"Ari!" Bela stared in astonishment. "Is that yours? How did it get here? Isn't it in San Francisco? I mean ..."

Ari laughed, clearly pleased with himself as he helped her onto the passenger's seat. "I know what you mean. I wanted to surprise you. I've been negotiating with a chap I know who's active in the Sailors Union of the Pacific. He runs a tugboat, and he's agreed to ferry my machine back and forth once in a while -- when he can, that is."

Bela shook her head in wonderment. "You really are amazing, Ari. And you union people do help each other, don't you? -- Even different ones."

Ari looked at her as he reached for the crank to start the motor. "That's what unionism is all about, Bela," he said soberly.

Bela nodded. "I'm finding that out."

Ari pointed to two jutting rods on the post under the steering wheel. "When I turn the crank, move that one on the right down just a tiny bit."

"Me? Oh, Ari, what if I do something wrong?"

"Don't worry. Just move it slightly -- about a quarter of an inch -- when I say 'now'."

Bela swallowed hard and nodded. Ari turned the crank with a jolt. "Now!"

She moved the lever. The engine coughed, sputtered and died.

Ari walked back to the cab. "That's fine. Only this time move both of them: The first one like you did, and then as soon as the motor catches, move the other one about the same amount."

Her heart pounding, hands on the levers, Bela listened. As soon as she heard the engine turn over, she moved the spark. As it hiccupped and strangled, she moved the gas lever. The motor roared, back-fired once, causing her momentary alarm, and settled into a steady chug-chug.

As they pulled into the street, Ari said, "You're a natural. Now that we have old Bessie here, I'm going to teach you to drive."

"Me? Drive? I'll never be able to afford a machine."

"No matter. You can drive mine to keep in practice."

He looked down at her sitting so straight, smiling and looking proud, but he refrained from saying what he most wanted to say: that it could be theirs together if only she would agree.

As they drove toward the Gorman house, Bela said, "That was good timing, Ari. I'm so grateful not to have to stand and wait for the trolley and maybe stand up all the way. I was really tired tonight."

"Always glad to be of service, Ma'am."

That night for the first time she shared her thoughts with Mrs. Katz as they sat alone together in the living room, the Gormans having retired early.

"Whenever I get to thinking about Ari, I feel bad. He is so good to me, and he always knows the right thing to do. And once he knew how I felt, he didn't pressure me anymore."

"But I think you pressure yourself."

"Yes, I guess I do. I'll probably never meet another man like Ari. Tessie is already married, and all the girls at work ever talk about is finding a husband."

"'Finding a husband.' Yes, that's what it's all about for them, isn't it?"

"Look," Mrs. Katz put down the newspaper and removed her pince-nez, rubbing the angry red spots they left. "First of all, you and Tessie are different. She has wanted to get married ever since she was a little girl. And you -- you have never been a little girl. You are a

very special person, Bela. And that's probably one of the things Ari sees in you."

Bela nodded. "He once said something like that."

"And that is something you want from a man, especially your husband." Mrs. Katz hesitated. "But it's not all."

"What else is there? I don't understand why I don't love him, when he is so good to me."

"Sex."

"What?"

"Sex. Sex appeal. You can love him as a friend, but sex is very important, even though we're not supposed to talk about it or admit it."

"Mary, my stepmother, says you can learn to love somebody later, after you're married."

"Rubbish!" Mrs. Katz responded with heat. "That is the worst mistake a woman can make."

Bela nodded, thoughtful. Mrs. Katz picked up *The Forward*, replaced her glasses and began reading. Bela wanted to talk more, but she was too embarrassed.

She went to her room, undressed and went to bed, forgetting to wash her face and brush her teeth, a ritual that always amused Mary. Then she remembered that she had not called Tessie. In order to share the expense, they took turns calling each other, and tonight had been hers. But she was so tired. Oh, well, she thought, drifting into sleep, I'll call tomorrow.

The next evening, immediately after dinner, Bela ran to the wall phone and gave the operator Tessie's number.

"Hello?" Tessie's voice was cool.

"Oh, Tess, I'm so sorry about last night. I was so tired I couldn't think straight. I just went to bed and forgot to call. Forgive me?"

"Yes, I forgive you." But Bela could tell by her clipped tone that Tessie was angry.

Suddenly Bela was annoyed. She loved Tessie like a sister, but she found her occasional sulks and lack of sensitivity to other people's needs somewhat irritating. She decided not to tell her about last night's conversation with Tessie's mother.

"Ari got his automobile over here, and he brought me home from work last night," Bela said into the void of Tessie's silence.

"Oh, Bel. Tell me all about it," Tessie's chill melting with her eagerness to hear about her friend's adventure.

"There's nothing to tell." Now it was Bela's turn to be cool.

"Oh, come on, Bel. Don't be angry. I'm sorry I was a bitch, but I was hurt and worried."

Momentarily taken aback, then amused by the new word in Tessie's vocabulary, Bela responded with an affectation of nonchalance, "Well, I guess I'll soon be borrowing Ari's horseless carriage and driving over to visit you and Victor."

"What!! Bela!! Really??"

Unable to contain her excitement any longer, Bela burst out, "Ari is going to teach me how to drive, and when I can, he's going to let me borrow it when I want to!"

"That's terrific! Then you can take us to the doctor."

"Doctor? Tessie! What's wrong?"

"Um-mm, nothing's wrong. Nothing at all." Tessie paused. Bela held her breath as a light dawned.

"Bela, I'm going to have a baby. I'm two months pregnant."

"Oh, Tessie. How wonderful." Bela grew serious. "Are you o.k.? Have you seen a doctor?"

"I'm fine. Yes, I've been to the doctor, and he says I'm perfect in every way: age, size, everything. And don't worry, I'm going to have my baby in a hospital. Victor wouldn't have it any other way."

"Good. Does your mother know?"

"Yes, but I made her promise not to tell you. I wanted to tell you myself."

"Oh, Tessie. And here I was chattering about driving the silly machine. How stupid of me."

"No, No, Bel. I was stupid. I shouldn't have been so mean to you. It's just that I was so anxious to tell you about the baby; I was disappointed when you didn't call last night."

"I know. It will never happen again, I promise -- even if I have to wake you up in the middle of the night."

"I'll have a baby to do that next May!"

"Oh, Tess, I love you."

"I love you, too, Bel."

The conversation over, Bela went into the living room, but Tessie's mother was not there. She walked down the hall to Mrs. Katz's bedroom door and knocked softly.

"Come in, Bela," the voice called.

Bela opened the door and entered. "How did you know it was me?"

"Who else?"

"Isn't it exciting about the baby? I'm so happy for her and Victor. I wonder if it will be a boy or girl. What do you think they'll name it? I guess they'll name it after Tessie's father -- your husband, I mean. Oh, God, listen to me babbling." Bela laughed, placing her hands on her cheeks and shaking her head in chagrin.

Abruptly, she ran to Mrs. Katz and buried her head in the older woman's ample breast. They hugged each other.

As they separated, Mrs. Katz held onto Bela's shoulders, gazing directly into the shining dark eyes. "Don't become a baby sitter. You've had enough of that already in your life."

Bela giggled. "Only once in a while I will. But I guess you will be the official one."

Mrs. Katz laughed. "What's a grandmother for?" She grew serious. "Bela, my darling, about last night -- I didn't mean to embarrass you. But if you want to talk some more..."

"It's o.k. You didn't. And I guess I do -- want to -- to talk some more. I don't know very much. I didn't even know about -- you know -- the woman's monthly, until it happened. Scared me to death."

"I can imagine." Mrs. Katz patted the edge of the bed, setting aside her sewing basket. "Sit. You want to ask questions, or you want I should talk?"

"Both." Bela took a deep breath. "How can you tell if somebody has it -- sex appeal, I mean?"

"Now that's a real question." Mrs. Katz thought for a moment. "It's easy -- and it's hard."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, it's different for everybody, but if somebody is sexually attractive to you, you know it. And if not, you keep wondering about it -- like with Ari."

"How do you know if someone attracts you that way?"

"You know it, that's all." Mrs. Katz shook her head in frustration, groping for words. "I'm sorry, that's no explanation. Look, if you are physically attracted to someone, you want to feel the warmth of his body against yours, and -- and you want to go to bed with him."

Bela nodded. "Yes, I guess I already know that -- in a way. But could it change? Could it happen later? There are so many things about Ari that I really love." Bela hesitated, blushing. "I just can't think of him -- you know -- that way."

Mrs. Katz's arms enfolded Bela. "So many women marry thinking either it will change or it's not important to them -- that it's only important to the man. And they think that pleasing him will be enough." She shook her head. "And they end up miserable."

"Wait! I have something for you to read." She rose and went to the closet, returning with a blue pamphlet the size of a small writing tablet.

She held it out to Bela. "We should wonder through what providence this book survived the quake. I found it in a dresser drawer when they let us go back to get what we could before they dynamited."

"'The Martial Rights of Women,' by Elizabeth Corley Browne," Bela read slowly and looked up, eyes questioning.

"'The *Marital* Rights of Women'" Mrs. Katz corrected, smiling slightly. "She's a Socialist, but she's also a nurse. Don't show it around, though. A lot of people think it's not a nice book, but they're wrong."

"You know," she continued, "a lot has been written in the modern press about the rights and needs of men, but women aren't supposed to have any. Read it, Bela. I think it will help you. In any case, it won't hurt." She added an afterthought, "It also tells you how to prevent babies when you want to."

Bela stood up, her body beginning to ache from the tension generated by the discussion. "I will. Thank you."

On impulse she kissed Mrs. Katz and ran out the door and into her own, now lonely, room across the hall.

PART TWO

1910 - 1915

XIII

The next three-and-a-half years were relatively uneventful for Bela. The one exception: Mrs. Katz and Bela had moved from the Gormans the year before, about the same time Tessie and Victor had moved to San Francisco. The two women were now living in a large Victorian-style house at Eighth and Brush Streets. Mrs. Katz had no trouble renting rooms as more immigrants arrived in Oakland. Many of them had moved to the Bay Area intent on living in San Francisco, but had found rents there still too high in the wake of the Great Earthquake just over five years ago.

Bela continued to see the children regularly each month, more often when she could. Chana now spelled her name "H-a-n-n-a-h," suggested by her eighth-grade teacher as a concession to the American inability to pronounce a guttural fricative. On the brink of fifteen, Hannah would enter high school in the Fall.

One Saturday evening in late May in the year nineteen hundred eleven, Bela listened with awe to the speech her sister had prepared for her eighth grade graduation.

"Oh, I didn't realize -- your accent is all gone!" she exclaimed.

"I know. The other kids helped me a lot. Some of them made fun, but most of them would just correct me."

The early signs of future beauty that Bela had detected in Hannah so many years ago were coming to flower. She was tall, nearly five feet eight inches, her thick warm brown hair long enough for her to sit on. Her flawless skin had thus far escaped the blot of adolescent acne. One small dimple was brought to life when she smiled, showing even white teeth. Once more and for the last time,

Bela felt a twinge of envy as she gazed into her sister's enormous gray-green eyes.

On that day Bela also listened to Vasily intone the portions of Torah he had chosen for his Bar Mitzvah to take place next Saturday, the third of June. She did not understand Hebrew; still her breast swelled with pride at the bell-like clarity of his voice, thinking wistfully of the changes soon to afflict it.

When Vasily finished reciting the speech (in English) he had prepared to follow the recitation of Torah, he cleared his throat and stared at Bela.

Bela applauded heartily. "That was wonderful, Velvel."

Vasily continued to stand, gazing at Bela, unblinking. She realized he had something more to say.

"What, Dear?"

Vasily cleared his throat again, and inhaled mightily.

"Henceforth, I am to be called 'Walter,'" he announced. "No more 'Vasily.'"

"'Henceforth'? Where did you learn that word?" Bela asked, impressed.

"At school. My teacher says it all the time. 'Henceforth, you will all take your seats immediately.' Like that she says."

Bela laughed. "I am glad you are developing such a good vocabulary -- And you have no more accent, either. Only I have one, now. I guess when you're young..."

The substance of Vasily's words suddenly struck her. "Why 'Walter'?" she asked.

"Well, I'm tired of being called 'Very Silly' by kids. And Walter is a boy who is very popular. He is captain of the baseball team at school."

Bela looked at her brother, still slight and undersized, the shock of black hair falling characteristically over his right eye. She nodded, comprehending his longing to be like the others, but said only, "All right, Walter."

"Anyhow," he added, "I think it will be easier to remember my name when I'm a famous musician."

He had been studying piano for the past year two years, thanks to Fred's parents, who allowed him to practice daily on their piano. He surprised everyone with his previously unsuspected talent,

and, encouraged by his music teacher who donated the lessons, he hoped to become a concert pianist.

Now twenty-four, although still small and delicate, Bela had matured. Her small breasts were firm and pointed, her belly flat and taut. She was pleased that her well-rounded fundament did not need a bustle, and thankful that she did not require being laced into a corset. She was a sensuous woman, although unaware of her sensuality. In general she was satisfied with her appearance. For this she knew she had Ari to thank, at least in part, inasmuch as his continued attentiveness over the years had helped her to develop poise and self-confidence.

Bela and Ari saw somewhat less of each other now, perhaps, she hoped, because he was seeing other women. She considered Ari her best friend next to Tessie, and she wanted him to be happy. She worried that he would never find the kind of passionate love she knew she could not give him, unless he started looking elsewhere. Thus, she was rather surprised the following evening at the first call from Ari in a month.

"How would you like to hear Harvey Townsend Friday night?" he asked.

"Harvey Townsend, *the author*?" Her voice betrayed her excitement. "I've read all his books! Did you read *Dark World*, about the West Virginia coal miners, and *Old Patch Coat*, the one about the mountain lion? They were wonderful!"

"All right, all right!" Ari laughed, although with a trace of annoyance. "Yes, yes, I read them! Do you want to hear his lecture? It's a fund-raiser for the Triangle Fire victims."

"Oh, yes, of course."

The Triangle Shirtwaist Company in New York City had erupted in flames one afternoon in late March, resulting in the deaths of 146 young workers, almost all Jewish or Italian women and teenage girls. Bela identified strongly with the victims, as did many of her co-workers. There had been several appeals to raise money to help the survivors who had been badly injured and those families who had lost a breadwinner.

"It's at Langley Hall," Ari told her. "I'll pick you up at seven, and we'll have a bite after the lecture, since there won't be time to eat before."

"O.k."

Bela was thrilled at the thought of hearing a lecture by a writer whose work she admired so much. She sometimes perceived him as an American Dostoevski, a high compliment since *The Brothers Karamazov* was her favorite novel. Interestingly, although Bela was pretty much self-taught when it came to literature, many American critics agreed with her.

Following Ari's call, Bela telephoned Tessie again. It was her second call to Tessie that day, a rare extravagance with calls across the Bay so expensive, but she had to tell her about Friday. Tessie sounded even more tired than usual when she answered. Bela felt a momentary prick of conscience. She knew that Tessie's children, David Saul, now three, and Cecilia, the one-and-a-half-year-old girl, ran her ragged. Well, she wouldn't keep her long.

"Oh, Bela, you lucky thing," Tessie said when Bela had told her about the lecture, "I wish I could go, but trying to get someone to take care of the kids on a school night is just about impossible."

"Why don't you come, Tess? It's not really a school night, it's Friday. And besides, your mother would probably stay with the children."

"My mother will probably want to go. She knows Townsend personally. Anyway, I guess I'm not that eager to hear him. I'd rather save my child care time for dinner out and a show."

Bela chuckled with understanding. "I guess you need that more than some old lecture." Yes, she thought after hanging up, she is tired. There was a time when Tessie would have leaped at a chance to hear Harvey Townsend speak.

She dashed into the living room, the thought to invite Mrs. Katz to come with them having occurred to her from her brief conversation with Tessie.

"Would you like to hear Harvey Townsend Friday night?" she asked Mrs. Katz.

"Oh, I am going, of course. Do you want to go with me?" Mrs. Katz looked up from her nightly perusal of the newspaper.

"Ari invited me to go with him. Why don't we all go together?"

Mrs. Katz hesitated. "I don't want to intrude with you and Ari."

"You know better than that. Come with us. Ari will bring you home in his 'Bessie'."

"Mrs. Katz laughed. "Is that what he calls that horseless carriage of his? All right; if you're sure Ari won't mind."

"I'm very sure."

Friday night as the lecture ended, Mrs. Katz and Ari both looked at Bela. Her eyes were shining, her lips slightly parted, as she applauded vigorously, unconsciously rising to her feet, gradually followed by others nearby. Finally the entire audience stood. Caught up in her own enthusiasm, Bela was totally unaware of having led a standing ovation.

The speaker, clearly pleased, looked out over the audience, smiling. He turned to the young woman who had triggered this overwhelming response and bowed slightly. Her companions looked at her again, amused at her apparent lack of awareness of the recognition she had received from the podium, as she continued clapping.

"Would you like to meet him?" Mrs. Katz shouted in Bela's ear.

Bela looked at her. "Did you say 'meet him'? Do you really know him?"

"Know him? I've known him since he was a boy in knickers. I knew his parents."

"Oh, I'd love to meet him. Come, Ari, Mrs. Katz is going to introduce us to Harvey Townsend!" She could scarcely contain her excitement.

As they made their way toward the speaker's stand, Mrs. Katz shouted through the din, "Hold on to her Ari. This is some crowd."

"Don't worry, I am," Ari replied, laughing.

As they approached, there were already a number of people crowding around him, but when Harvey Townsend looked up and saw Mrs. Katz's happy face, so familiar to him from his childhood, he motioned her through.

The crowd parted slightly at his gesture, allowing the three to pass. He stepped down from the podium, extending both hands to Mrs. Katz, then embracing her. But his eyes traveled to Bela.

"Your parents would have been so proud of you, Harvey. In fact all the old Debs crowd would be," Mrs. Katz enthused.

She turned to Bela and Ari. "Harvey's parents and my husband and I worked to raise money for the defense of Eugene Debs and the others after the American Railway Union Strike of 1894," she explained.

"That's right, Debs and several others were jailed on conspiracy charges because they were strike leaders," Harvey added, straightening. "They got Clarence Darrow to defend him.."

"Yes, and the whole thing ended in total confusion," Mrs. Katz said.

Harvey Townsend picked up the story. "I was just a kid then, but I remember it very well. After a month-long trial, one of the jurors got sick, and the judge continued the case -- until May, wasn't it? Anyway, it was never re-opened."

"Debs was very unhappy," Mrs. Katz continued. "He wanted an acquittal."

They had become so entangled in memoirs, they did not realize that the small group around the speaker had swelled as more people gathered to listen to this impromptu recitation of a relatively unknown scrap of labor history.

Seeming to suddenly remember where he was, Townsend whispered, "Wait for me, please," and turned to the group surrounding them.

Bela, Ari and Mrs. Katz stepped back and watched as he answered questions, responded to comments and signed autographs.

While they waited, Bela asked quietly, "What happened after?"

"Well," Mrs. Katz replied, "my husband, Saul, died the next winter. Then the following spring both of Harvey's parents were killed in a train accident."

"How ironic that it was a train crash that killed them," observed Ari. "They were so involved in train workers rights and safety." He knew something of the Townsend history, having read about them in labor publications.

"Yes," Mrs. Katz agreed, "it was a terrible tragedy. Harvey was only fifteen at the time."

"Who took care of him?" Bela asked, warming with pity for the orphaned boy.

"No one," Mrs. Katz shook her head. "Oh, it wasn't that many of us wouldn't have been glad to have him. He was a wonderful youngster. But he chose his own way. He was also very strong willed," she added with a rueful grin, apparently remembering.

"What did he do?"

"He became a forest ranger, helped by an employee friend of the family. Told them he was sixteen. He loved nature. That was when he wrote *Old Patch Coat*."

"Oh, I loved that book. It was such a tender story," said Bela. "And he was so young to write something so moving."

"Yes. I understand it was based on a real experience. He actually found an orphaned cougar cub and raised it -- And that it really did save his life once, when he was attacked by another mountain lion," Ari marveled,

"More than once, actually, I think," Mrs. Katz replied. "He just used one time in the story."

"And then the poor thing was shot by a hunter." Bela said, tears of grief and anger in her eyes as she recalled the tale. "How terrible it all must have been for him."

Harvey Townsend finished his last autograph with a flourish, handed the book to the woman, and strode briskly to them, apologizing. "I'm sorry to keep you waiting, but I have so much to ask you. Can we go somewhere?"

"We were going to get a late supper. None of us had dinner. Would you like to join us?" Ari offered.

"Sure would. I haven't eaten either and I'm starved!"

"Let's go then," said Ari. "Button up, everybody, it's going to be cold in the machine."

"Oh, you have one of those? How do you like it?"

Ari laughed uncomfortably, but said nothing.

"No, no," Harvey said hastily, evidently sensing Ari's discomfort, "I'd like to talk to you about it. I'm thinking of getting one."

Ari, relieved, nodded. "I can certainly tell you what not to get," he laughed.

XIV

For the next two weeks Bela was caught up in the excitement of the children's events: Walter's Bar Mitzvah on Saturday and Hannah's graduation the following Wednesday, for which Bela took a holiday from work. She initially felt a faint twinge of guilt at having to lie to Mr. Graham, her foreman, telling him she was ill and had to leave early, but she quickly brushed the feeling aside. After all, what was more important than being with the family on such a significant occasion? And beside, she lost a whole day's pay, even though she had worked half a day, so *they* certainly hadn't lost anything on her.

On Friday night, June 16, almost two weeks after his Bar Mitzvah, Walter appeared in a recital with two other pupils of his teacher, Signor diGrosso. The last one on the program, he played the first and second movements of Brahms' *D Minor Piano Concerto*.

When it was finally over, Bela was too stunned to applaud. She had heard him play before, short pieces, and she knew he was good; but now she realized his virtuosity. She felt herself swelling with pride as she watched her brother bow, his black hair falling in his eye, perspiration trickling down his cheeks and dripping off the tip of his nose.

Tears of joy choked her as Mary leaned over and shouted through the clamor of applause and "Bravos!", "Well, what do you think of our boy?"

"I can't believe it! He *will* be a concert pianist! He will! You've done a wonderful job with him."

"*We* did a wonderful job," Mary responded, "you and I."

Impulsively, Bela threw her arms around Mary, all the anger, all the pain and bitterness she had felt toward her stepmother over the years now finally, truly resolved.

As Walter approached them, pushing the tenacious lock off his forehead, Bela ran to him, pinning his arms in a snug embrace.

"Velvel, Velvel, you were wonderful!" she squealed, laughing and crying at the same time, while Mary stood by smiling. "We're so proud of you."

Standing stiffly in adolescent dignity, though clearly pleased, he replied, "Well, it would have been better with an orchestra." Relaxing as Bela released him, radiant with the glow of achievement, he added, "Signor diGrosso is gonna try to get me a date with the symphony, Bela, Mama -- the Opera Symphony."

Then, abandoning the last vestige of effort at sophisticated nonchalance, he croaked, betrayed by modulating vocal chords, "Can you believe it?"

He stood, red-faced but grinning, as the women simultaneously planted a kiss on each of his cheeks.

Sunday morning breakfast was the only meal Mrs. Katz served to all her roomers. At present there were five, two couples and a middle-aged single woman who had been a teacher in Poland. Mrs. Katz no longer considered Bela a roomer, but she continued to insist on paying rent..

One Sunday morning, about a month after the Townsend lecture as they cleared the breakfast dishes, Mrs. Katz asked Bela, "What are you doing next week-end?"

"Next week-end?" Bela asked, stacking the plates, and shook her head. "Nothing I can think of."

"How would you like to go to Carmel next Saturday morning and come back Sunday night? It's only two hours by train. If we leave early enough, we could get there in time for lunch."

"I work Saturday."

"So take off; take a vacation; be sick... They don't pay you anyway when you're off, so what's the difference?"

"Why? What's in Carmel?" Bela asked, bewildered, but intrigued. She'd heard Carmel was beautiful, although she had never thought of going there.

"What's there," Mrs. Katz replied, "is Sun Ranch. That's where Harvey lives. He raises horses."

Bela's heart leaped. She had found the writer very attractive with his tall commanding figure, his crisp, curly black hair just beginning to grey prematurely at the temples, and his deep-set blue eyes fringed with dark lashes. But she thought she would never see him again.

Fearful of appearing too eager, she replied carefully, "Well, we might go there for the day, one of these days."

"Not one of these days, next Saturday; and not just for the day. He has invited us for the whole week-end."

"You -- you mean he invited you, not us, don't you?" barely daring to hope, as her heart began to race.

"No, he invited *us*. In fact, he specifically mentioned you. He said, 'and be sure to bring Miss Kransky. Tell her I insist.'"

Bela nodded. "Maybe. All right. I guess I can take Saturday off. I sure can use a little vacation after all the excitement with the kids."

For the rest of the week, Bela felt a lightness of heart that she scarcely dared admit to. It's the lovely spring weather, she told herself. To her friends at work, she merely shrugged when they commented on her unusual vitality and spirited responses. Mrs. Katz observed with keen interest and amusement her young friend's euphoria, but she kept her counsel.

During Friday night dinner, Bela said casually, "Your mother has invited me to accompany her to Carmel tomorrow. Wasn't that nice of her?"

"What's doing there?" Tessie looked at her mother, then remembered. "Oh, Harvey's place. What --?"

David Saul burst into the dining room shrieking, "Mama, Mama! Cecilia took my fire wagon. Make her give it back!"

Tessie lifted her son and carried him back into the living room calling. "Cecilia..."

Bela felt a flash of gratitude for the boy's interruption. She was sorry she had brought it up.

XV

Around two o'clock on Saturday morning Bela, unable to sleep, rose and turned on the overhead light. Throwing a robe over her long-sleeved flannel nightgown, she made her way bare toed down the hall to the kitchen. She lit the gas under the kettle to brew tea. While she waited, she stood next to the stove holding her hands over the steam, warding off the early morning chill in the high-ceilinged house. When the tea was ready, she picked up the glass of scalding liquid and carried it to the green painted table. Years of exposure had made her hands nearly impervious to the intense heat.

She couldn't understand why she was so wide awake. Usually after Friday night dinners, with the excitement of seeing Tessie and bounding around with the children, she would fall asleep almost as soon as her head touched the coolness of the pillow. But not tonight. It was probably the train ride they would be taking to Carmel, she rationalized. She had never been on one, except for the electrics that went to the Ferry Mole.

But deep down she knew that wasn't it. For an immigrant girl to be invited to spend a week-end at the home of a distinguished American author was like a dream come true. Actually, she thought, it was probably Mrs. Katz who suggested to Harvey -- *Harvey?* -- *Maybe I should call him "Mr. Harvey,"* she chided herself -- that she be included in the invitation.

She hoped he wouldn't think her an idiot. She wished her English was better. At that moment it dawned on her that she no longer thought in Russian, reflexively translating to English before speaking. When this change had occurred she didn't know, it had been so gradual. But now it was almost as if English were her native

language -- except for that damn accent. There were just some things she couldn't say right. No matter how hard she tried, her tongue wouldn't obey. Well anyhow, she'd read all his books so at least she wouldn't be a total ignoramus. Besides, he probably wouldn't even talk to her. And why should she care what he thought? She'd probably never see him again, as busy and famous as he is.

She rinsed her glass, dried and put it away. Returning to bed, she fell asleep immediately.

"I'm terribly sorry," Harvey said as Bela and Mrs. Katz followed him into his parlor early Saturday afternoon, "I should have warned you that it would be another half-hour ride before you got to the spread."

"No, no, it was fine," Mrs. Katz assured him. "You were right there at the station waiting for us, so it was no problem."

"And the ride was lovely," Bela added, while noting an authentic Sheraton desk against the wall left of the entrance.

The women sat down on the tapestry covered eighteenth century sofa, as Harvey stood facing them next to a marble fireplace. He propped an elbow on the mahogany mantelpiece on which stood several silver and gold trophies. Bela was unable to see the inscriptions, but three were models of horses, one in a prancing pose with a rider seated on it, two silver cups and one gold.

A photograph of a horse hung over the desk, and to the right of it a photograph of a group of men and women, evidently on a picnic. A stray sunbeam from the round eye-level front door window fell upon the latter, giving a momentary suggestion of a halo. Then the effect vanished as the angle of the sun changed slightly.

"Yes, I'm sure it was a great ride for you." Harvey's tone reflected a touch of sarcasm. "You know, I sometimes forget how uncomfortable that old buckboard can be."

"Oh, but it wasn't!" Bela said. "And the countryside is so beautiful -- like a Monet painting."

He looked at Bela, one eyebrow raised in surprise. "Ah, you like Monet?"

"Yes, I do." Bela replied, chin raised, prepared for the usual argument. "I like all the contemporary painters, even Renoir."

"And so do I," he replied, smiling. "Unfortunately, you and I are part of a small minority. I'd like to talk to you about the impressionists one of these days soon."

Bela felt her face grow hot. 'You and I,' he had said. He put us together -- like we're equals. Somewhat flustered, she tried to check her straying thoughts.

She nodded, wishing she didn't blush so easily, "Oh, yes. Any time you wish, Mr. Townsend."

Smiling, amused, he turned to Mrs. Katz. "Let's have some lunch. Then I'll show you around the place."

Harvey opened the mahogany double doors facing the front of the house and led them into the dining room. Bela's eyes widened as she saw the doors slide into the wall on either side. She had never seen anything like it. She was even more overcome when she glanced up and saw the sparkling crystal chandelier that hung gracefully over a table set with white linen and white china edged with gold.

As they seated themselves, Harvey turned to Bela. "I know Brocha Katz' view of religious observance, Miss Kransky, but I don't know yours. So Gladys, my housekeeper, prepared a dairy meal to be on the safe side."

Bela smiled. "Thank you, Mr. Townsend, that was thoughtful, but my observation of the dietary laws is pretty lax, although I don't eat pork."

"Well, Gladys is a good cook, so enjoy," he said, dipping up a spoonful of cold cucumber soup, "and if you will call me Harvey, I will call you Bela -- if I may."

Taken aback and unable to reply, Bela looked down at her soup, quickly ladling some into her mouth.

Mrs. Katz chimed in, "Everybody calls our lady Bela. It would be odd if you didn't, wouldn't it, Darling?"

Bela swallowed hard, nodding.

Lunch over, Harvey stood up. "Would you like to see my place? It's only four acres. so we can probably walk it in a couple of hours or so."

"Why don't you two go?" Mrs. Katz said, stretching and leaning back in the heavy Duncan Phyfe dining chair. "I'm a little tired and I have a bit of a headache starting."

"Oh, no, we'll stay here with you," Bela's urged. "We can all talk."

Four years of night school had given her a mastery of English equal to or greater than the average American high school graduate, but she felt her confidence fading. She gazed intently at her friend, her eyes pleading.

"No, you go. I'll be fine. I'll read." Mrs. Katz leaned over to look at the overflowing bookshelves beyond the half-open door to the library, which faced the wall against which the desk stood. "And maybe a little nap. Don't worry and don't hurry."

"Please come, Bela," Harvey's tone was insistent. "I'd really like to have you see it. Especially the horses. Katzie has seen everything. She'll be all right. Gladys will be here. Please?"

Bela looked at Mrs. Katz, exasperated but unable to think of anything to say that wouldn't sound rude. After three or four seconds, she nodded.

They walked down the three front stairs and along the path lined with rose trees. After several feet Bela stopped. Turning, she noticed the house for the first time: white with green shutters at each window, two pillars holding up the second floor bay window, a wide porch extending the full breadth of the front. A modified Georgian style, it reminded her of pictures of plantation homes in the antebellum south. She half expected to see an elderly slave owner sitting in his wicker rocker, sipping a mint julep.

"How do you like it?" Harvey asked, looking down at her from his six feet.

Bela hesitated. She wasn't sure she liked it; it was so huge, and she felt overwhelmed by the affluence. "It's very imposing," she finally replied.

Harvey displayed a knowing smile. "Yes, I guess it is pretty overpowering. It's the house I grew up in, and I just have never been able to bring myself to sell it. I've sold some of the farm land, however."

Bela saw his expression and felt a tinge of remorse. "Oh, it's a lovely home," she said hastily. "Of course you wouldn't want to give it up."

"Well, I might some day, with good reason --."

"Like what?" uneasy, but endeavoring to maintain her end of the conversation.

"Oh, maybe if I planned to marry someone who didn't like it. -- or something like that," he replied, grinning.

"Oh." Bela caught herself riveted by his deep set blue eyes, a crisp black curl falling over his forehead. She wanted to ask if there was a "someone," but she didn't dare. In the silence that followed, a crow could be heard cawing as it circled overhead.

"Come, I want you to see the horses." Harvey took her elbow and they began walking again.

"How many do you have?"

"Four; two mares, a gelding and a stallion."

"What's a gelding?"

"A male which has been castrated."

Bela looked bewildered. "Castrated?"

"You know -- sterilized."

"Oh."

"It's a common practice -- makes them easier to handle." He paused, then continued matter-of-factly, "One of the mares is soon to foal -- have a baby -- so we can't ride her. Do you ride?"

"When I was very little, in the Old Country. I haven't ridden a horse since I was about ten." She was grateful for the change of subject.

"It's like riding a bicycle. Once you've mastered it, you never forget. But we'll give you Jerry, the gelding, when you come here to ride. He's very gentle."

When I come here to ride? Is he saying I'm invited to come again? She hoped he wouldn't detect her excitement. Controlling the tremor in her voice, she asked, "What is the pregnant one's name?"

"Princess Pat," he replied, "and she really is a princess. She comes from a long line of thoroughbreds." He took her arm to help her over the rocky ground. "I'm sorry, the land needs a lot of work, but I never seem to get to it."

"Don't you have someone? A gardener? The flowers around your house -- and the lawn -- they're so beautiful and well cared for."

"Yes, I have Ito; he's the gardener." He chuckled. "Ito doesn't do this kind of thing -- dig up rocks, that is. He's an artist."

Bela nodded, serious. "In Japan, landscape architects are highly valued. It's considered a fine art."

Harvey glanced down at her with raised eyebrows. "How do you know so much about Japan?"

"I lived there -- from the time I was eleven until almost seventeen."

"Katzie didn't tell me that. I'll have to introduce you to Ito. He's very homesick, and I'm sure he'll love talking to you. He shook his head in amazement. "You've done a lot of traveling. Do you speak Japanese?"

"Very little. I haven't had a chance to use it, so I've forgotten most of the very few words I did know." She hesitated. "I'm afraid I couldn't converse with him, but I'd like to meet him, anyway."

Harvey laughed. "Oh, Ito speaks English. I just thought it would be an added treat for him, if you could chat with him in his native tongue."

They heard a whinny as they approached the horses, all four standing within a twenty-foot radius of each other, munching grass, tossing their heads, flicking their tails to shoo away the flies.

"Come on, Pat, come on, girl," Harvey called.

One of the horses, her sides swollen with the burden she carried within her, looked up, tossing her head back and stamping her front hooves in sequence, as if doing a little dance in place. Her coat was a brilliant golden brown, almost the color of burnished copper, her light blonde mane and tail blowing like ripe wheat in the breeze. She whinnied again.

"Over here, Baby; come on."

The horse walked slowly, but unhesitating, to Harvey and Bela. He reached into his pocket and took out two lumps of sugar. The horse nuzzled her soft mouth in his outstretched hand, crunching the sugar, while his other hand stroked her gently between her eyes and down the length of her nose.

"That's my girl. How are you, today, hm-mm?"

Bela was moved by the gentleness and love the man and the creature displayed toward each other. "What a beauty she is. Is she related to the horse whose picture you have in your parlor?"

"He was her grandfather, King Harold," Harvey replied. "He was my father's favorite. He died when I was five. There was an epidemic of glanders. He caught it at a dressage competition. My father never entered a show after that."

At that moment a shaggy black and white shepherd dog came bounding up, tail wagging furiously, tongue lolling as he panted, leaping with joy at Harvey and then at a somewhat startled Bela.

"Aristo, down!" Harvey ordered, grabbing the eager animal and attempting to keep him from jumping on Bela again. "Easy, boy, slow down."

Squatting with the wriggling mass of fur in his arms, he glanced up at Bela. "Sorry, I hope he didn't tear that pretty dress. He generally obeys quite well, but he hasn't seen me for a few days, so I guess he's a little overexcited. Besides, he loves company."

Bela laughed, hunching down and reaching for the dog. "Oh, no, he's adorable. He didn't hurt anything." She stroked his head, scratching him behind the flattened ears. "I love dogs. I wish I could have a pet."

As the dog calmed down, Harvey released him, and they both stood up.

"What did you call him?"

"Aristo. It's short for Aristophanes. He was a Greek dramatist."

"I know -- *The Frogs*. But how did you come to name him that?"

"I don't know -- it just seemed to fit him. Even as a pup, he seemed to have a little streak of satire." He bent and rubbed Aristo's back. "And he has a great sense of humor."

Bela looked at the dog, its eyes sparkling, mouth open, lips pulled back as if grinning, and she giggled. "He's laughing at you right now."

Harvey chuckled. "I know. He does that a lot. He thinks I'm very funny." He straightened again and took Bela's elbow. "Why don't we walk over to the stalls. I'd like you to see the set-up."

The horse stalls were about two hundred feet from where they stood. Bela gazed around as they began to walk together, pleased to

realize she had become totally relaxed and was actually enjoying the tour.

There were six stalls, white-washed with clean straw covering each floor. Saddles, blankets and riding paraphernalia were hung on the walls in four of the stalls; apparently each horse had its own gear. There was a name painted on the lower half of each door of the occupied stalls: *Princess Pat* was the first; next to her, *Jerry*; then *Geraldine*; and at the far end, with two empty stalls between, *Pegasus*.

Bela assumed, correctly, that *Pegasus* was the stallion. This man loves the myths of ancient Greece, she thought.

"You have six stalls," she observed. "Are you expecting to get more horses?"

"Well, one will be for P.P.'s baby, once it's old enough to have its own; and I eventually plan to breed Peg with Dina."

"Of course, I should have thought of that," Bela said, just as a grizzled elderly man of about seventy, in cowboy boots, a ten-gallon hat pushed back on his head, approached them.

"Howdy, Harv, how goes?" The drawl was more Central Valley, California than Texas.

"Bela, meet Clarence Field, better known as Tex -- even though he's never been south of Salinas." Taking Bela's hand, "Tex, this is my friend, Miss Bela Kransky, visiting from Oakland."

"Please' ta meetcha, Miss," the cowpoke tipped his hat slightly.

"The immaculate state of these stalls and the beautiful condition of the horses is all due to Tex's diligence. I couldn't manage without him."

"Horses take a lotta work, Ma'am. They gotta be groomed every day and fed and rode, and their stalls gotta be kept clean. But I get along."

"I think you do a lot more than just get along," Bela assured him. "It shows that a great deal of loving care has gone into it, and I think Mr. Townsend's very lucky to have you."

Tex made no reply, but he looked pleased.

While Harvey conferred briefly with Tex about ranch business, Bela strolled around, examining the enclosures again and

circling the area. She discovered a small cottage behind the horses' area, white with black trim around the two front windows, which she surmised to be Tex's quarters. A white picket fence surrounded a small but lush vegetable garden. On each side of the small porch was a pot of red geraniums.

When she returned to the two men after a few minutes, Harvey said, "I guess we'd better get back to the house. Katzie's there. Hey, Tex, why don't you stop by for a drink tonight."

"Tonight? Sure, I'd be real pleased to see Katzie. Ain't seen her in -- oh, must be more'n five years."

"Seven -- it's been almost seven years since she's been out here." Harvey looked at Bela. "But it will be different from now on, I hope."

As they walked back to the house, Harvey talked about Tex.

"That man taught me everything I know about horses."

"I thought your father was a horseman."

"Oh, yes, he was." Harvey smiled crookedly. "He was also away a good part of the time when I was growing up. Between his law practice, his investments, and his work in the labor movement, I guess there wasn't much time left for me."

"In fact, both of my parents were away a lot -- my mother mostly with politics. Tex practically raised me. Would you believe he's seventy-five years old and still works a ten-hour-day?"

"He sounds like a wonderful man. But if you were so fond of him, why did you join the Forest Service instead of staying here?" As soon as the words were out, Bela realized she had made a faux pas, but it was too late.

Harvey laughed. "I see Katzie has been giving you my history."

"Oh, no, not really. She just --"

He shook his head. "It's o.k., I don't mind. I'm glad to have you know. Actually, it was partly because of Tex that I did it."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I guess I was always somewhat spoiled; you know, 'poor little rich kid.' After my parents were killed, I kind of cut loose; went a little wild. Got in with a gang of rough kids and got myself into a little trouble. Three of us broke into a grocery store one night

and stole some beer. Hell, I didn't even drink that stuff. I just did it for a lark.

"Anyway, we were caught, and the only reason we didn't go to jail was that we were all children of prominent families. That was when I first learned about the difference between justice for the rich and justice for the poor."

Bela nodded. "What did happen to you? You were an orphan."

"Ah, but that's where I was lucky. I had Tex."

"How did he handle it?"

Harvey grinned, shaking his head. "He gave me a choice: Become a Forest Ranger or go live with one of my parents' colleagues. He knew pretty well which one I'd pick."

"I'm surprised you didn't choose to live with Mrs. Katz. She probably would have been glad to have you."

Harvey shook his head. "No, that wouldn't have been good. Saul hadn't been dead long, and she had the two little girls to raise. She didn't need a hellion like me."

When they reached the house, Bela looked at the tiny gold watch that hung from a chain around her neck, one of the few heirlooms from the mother she had never known. Five o'clock! She couldn't believe they had been walking for nearly three hours. As they climbed the stairs, a deep sigh escaped her lips.

Harvey looked down at the tiny erect figure walking in front of him as they entered. "Are you tired? I'm sorry. I didn't realize how long we'd been out. Perhaps you'd like to lie down for a while before dinner."

"I'm not tired. I've enjoyed every minute. But I would like to freshen up a bit."

"Of course." He raised his voice. "Gladys!"

Gladys, her red hair in disarray, came ambling in wiping her hands on a kitchen towel, her ample figure a rippling testament to her cooking skill. "Yes, Harvey, whatcha want?"

The ease with which Harvey's employees addressed him impressed Bela. They're relaxed around him, and they obviously like him, she thought. He's kind.

"Would you show Bela and Katzie to their rooms and see that they have everything they need, please?"

"Sure thing," Gladys replied, grasping Bela's hand and leading her toward the stairway. "Come on with me, Honey."

Mrs. Katz came to the door of the library, her index finger marking her place in a book with red leather binding. "I'm already taken care of, thank you." She smiled at Gladys guiding Bela up the stairs as if she were a small child. "I see my Bela is in good hands. Did you give her the full Sun Ranch tour?"

"Yes, and she seemed to enjoy it, but I'm afraid I wore her out."

"Hah, don't be misled by her size. That little minute is as strong as an ox. You'd be surprised what she has been through."

"Tell me about her. All she's told me is that she lived in Japan for a few years as a child."

"That's right. Her father died there, from heart trouble, I think. Then she brought her younger brother and sister here -- all alone, with no adults, like a lot of us 'greenhorns.'"

While Bela was washing and changing upstairs, meanwhile stealing a few minutes to rest her feet from the long walk in high heeled shoes, Mrs. Katz recounted some of Bela's experiences: her courage during and after the Great Earthquake and Fire, her struggle to educate herself, the gradual conquering of her agoraphobia, even her childhood battle in Siberia with a swarm of bees, while cherry-picking with a friend.

"She made a joke of it, but I gather they were both pretty badly stung."

"It must have been pretty frightening, too, I imagine." Harvey shook his head, adding, "Lots of story material there, I suspect."

"Harvey, don't -- " she hesitated.

He chuckled. "Don't worry, Katzie, I won't sting her."

Following dinner, the three were gathered in the library. Harvey stood up as the kindling he had been attempting to light in the brick fireplace finally caught. They watched in silence as the log slowly ignited, sending embers up the flue.

Finally, Mrs. Katz cleared her throat. "Harvey, you seem to imply in your new book, *Jennings' Journey*, that the hero has become disillusioned with the labor movement."

"Ah, so you've been reading it, already."

"Well, not really -- just browsing. I found it on the table by the front window,"

"Yes, I just got the advance copies from the publisher. It'll be in the bookshops by mid-August." He reached into a carton on the floor near the brown leather wing-back chair on which Mrs. Katz was sitting, extracted two volumes, handing one to Mrs. Katz and the other to Bela, seated on an ottoman at Mrs. Katz' feet.

"But -- but, I thught you were in sympathy with the labor movement," Bela blurted, then caught her breath, shocked at her temerity.

"I am," Harvey nodded. "When you read the book you will see that Jennings' mission is to recapture the labor movement for the workers.

"He hates the bosses," he continued, his voice rising, "but he also fights the corrupt officials who make 'sweetheart contracts' with management -- deals in which dedicated local organizers are fired and 'blacklisted' in exchange for their own profit!" He stopped. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to make a speech, but if the book stops a few crooks --"

Bela was silent for a moment. She looked up. A vein in his forehead was pulsing. "Of course; I will read it. Thank you for allowing me to borrow it."

He shook his head. "No, no. It's yours."

"Oh, I -- th-thank you. You're very generous." She clutched the book to her breast in an unconscious gesture of appreciation.

He was calmer now. "I hope you enjoy it -- or at least find Jennings an interesting character. He's a bit like me in some ways."

Mrs. Katz stood up, stretching her arms over her head. "You know, it's really getting late, and you promised to take us down to the beach tomorrow."

"Right. You'll like it there. But the water's pretty cold, so we'll probably just sit on the sand and eat corned beef sandwiches and Gladys's great potato salad -- and drink good chianti, of course!"

Harvey crouched, pushing aside the glass screen, and skillfully tamped out the remains of fire. Sparks cascaded over and around the andirons and grate, infusing the air with the pungent aroma of burning pine.

XVI

A couple of months after the visit to Sun Ranch, Ari, now Executive Secretary of the regional office of the ILGWU, appeared one Wednesday evening as Bela was leaving the Russell Uniform factory.

"Ari, how nice to see you. What are you doing here?"

"Hello, Bela. It's been weeks. How are you?" Ari lifted his cap, brushing his unruly auburn locks with his other hand and replaced the cap. He exhaled heavily and said, "We need to talk. Can I drive you home?"

"May I."

"What? May you what?"

"You mean 'may you drive ...'"

"So you've become quite the grammar expert, with all your new education -- Or maybe it's the literary company you're keeping these days."

"ARI! How can you say such things to me!" She gasped; her hand shot to her mouth in the characteristic gesture. "Oh, how did you know?"

"Hell, Bela, it's all over town that Harvey Townsend has been escorting a young lady. You can't go out every Saturday night for six weeks in a row with someone as well-known as Harvey Townsend and not be noticed."

Bela felt her stomach contort as she realized that Ari probably felt betrayed. She had tried to convey her feelings to him, her perception of him as a dear friend. Now she realized that she had not behaved as a friend toward him.

She had told Tessie of hers and Harvey's growing love (if that was what it was). Of course, Katzie knew. She had even told her friend Ronia, yet, she had told Ari nothing -- not even about the weekend at Sun Ranch with Mrs. Katz. Why? Was she afraid of hurting him? But she had hurt him more by telling him nothing. Perhaps she was not sure of her feelings for Harvey -- or his for her?

Was she afraid Ari would disapprove the age difference? She could almost hear him say *He's ten years older than you -- a man of the world!*

"Bela, I --"

"Oh, Ari. I'm so sorry. I wasn't trying to hide anything from you. I just didn't know how --"

"No, Bela, *I'm* sorry. I was out of line." He reached toward her, then let his hand drop without touching her.

Bela shook her head. "*I* was wrong. He is doing some wgriting, using my early life in Siberia and Japan for background, but I should have told you. Can you ever forgive me?"

"We'll forgive each other, o.k.? Now, how about that ride?"

Over the chug of the engine, Bela shouted, "What did you want to talk about?"

"It's a little complicated. Can we talk over dinner?"

"Ari, I --"

"Business, Bela; it's business. And I promise -- no more wise cracks. O.k.?"

"O.k. I need to go home first and change, though."

Ari shook his head. "You don't need to change. We'll go to Keeler's Cafeteria -- If that's all right with you."

"Keeler's is fine. I love their corned beef and cabbage."

As they ate, Ari said, "What I want to talk to you about is the ILG wants to begin organizing Russell's."

Bela's eyes widened in surprise. "You - you mean a Union? They want to organize a union at Russells?"

"That's right."

"That would be wonderful." She shook her head. "But it won't be easy."

"No, it won't be. However, we'll give you all the help and support we can."

"When will you start?"

"We're starting now -- tonight. You're the key, Bela. It's going to be up to you to get people pulling together to improve conditions -- to teach them to fight for their rights."

"Me? Ari, I'm no good for that." She hesitated. "You know, I never told you, because I was ashamed. Remember that strike vote at Burana Cigar Factory, years ago? I voted against it -- I was scared I'd lose my job or get deported or something."

Ari smiled as he reached across the table on impulse and clasped her hand. "I know you did. You were a newcomer; you didn't know the language or the system. You had every reason to be scared. And that place was a rat hole."

"What would I have to do?" Her heavy brows drew together in a frown. "Ari, I don't know the first thing about organizing a union." But she began to feel excited, alive. "Do you really think I could do it?"

"Of course! You're the logical person. You know practically everybody there -- and they all seem to like you."

"Look -- We'll start slow. At first all you'll do is go around and talk to people. Try to get some idea how they feel about having a union -- What they think it could do for 'em. You know, the same kinds of things you girls talk about every day at lunch -- wages, maybe a shorter day."

"Women, Ari, not 'girls'. Some of them are old enough to be your mother."

"What? Oh, yeah, sure. You're right. I'm sorry. Anyway, at first, just try to get a feel for the kind of support there'd be. O.K.?"

"And for God's sake, be careful. Don't let Old Man Russell or that fink foreman, Graham, get wind of it, or you'll be out on your -- ear."

"I thought Mr. Graham and you were good friends. Didn't you once tell me he used to be active in the union?"

"'Used to be'. Since he got to be foreman, he's really turned against organized labor. You know how tight he and Russell are."

"I've never had any problems with him, Ari. In fact, he's always very nice to me -- to everybody he's in charge of."

"Well. I don't care how nice he's been. For God's sake, Bel! DON'T TRUST HIM!"

"Don't worry, I won't. I know whom to talk to and what questions to ask -- I think."

"You'll do fine, Bel." He squeezed her hand. "I just don't want you to put yourself at risk."

She smiled. "I promise I'll be careful." There was no stopping the thought that flashed through her mind: *Wait 'til Harvey hears about this.*

Ari looked at her a long time, remembering the frightened young girl he had first approached during the aborted attempt to organize the cigar factory. How different she is now, he thought.

"Katzie, guess what!" Bela squealed as she flung open the front door, eyes glowing, her heart beating wildly, only partly due to her dash up the stairs.

"What?" Mrs. Katz smiled as she removed her pince-nez and laid them carefully on the table beside her chair, amused that Bela had unconsciously adopted Harvey's name for her. "Where's Ari? Didn't he bring you home?"

"Yes, sure, but he had to go somewhere. Katzie, we're going to organize a union at Russell's. And you know what? I'M IT!! I'm gonna make it a union shop! ME!!"

The smile slowly left Mrs. Katz face. "Bela, hold on. What are you talking about? Calm down, and tell me what's going on."

Removing her hat, gloves and coat and throwing them on the sofa, Bela sat down on the ottoman at Mrs. Katz' feet. Taking a deep breath she quickly recounted the conversation with Ari.

Mrs. Katz shook her head in disbelief. "What's the matter with Ari? I'm surprised at him. Doesn't he know what he's letting you in for? It can be dangerous."

Bela shook her head. "He knows -- and *I* know. I know I can do it, Katzie. Anyway, somebody has to -- you know that. And I'm really the logical one. Don't worry, I can take care of myself." She stood up and placed her arms around Mrs. Katz, planting a kiss on the lined cheek. "You're my teacher. You taught me how important it is for workers to join together and support each other."

"Yes, I suppose so. But, Darling, be careful. Please." Mrs. Katz sighed. Her fledgeling was growing into an eagle.

XVII

"Tess, will you get the door, please?" Bela called from the kitchen. "I'm in the middle of dishing up soup."

"Who could it be?" Mrs. Katz wondered, wiping up Bela's spill. "Friday night, could be anybody -- even the Messiah," she joked..

"Bela, Hon, it's for yoo-oo!" The lilt in Tessie's voice told Bela all she needed.

Dropping the soup ladle, Bela dashed through the dining room, braked, and strolled nonchalantly into the living room to greet a smiling Harvey.

He took her outstretched hand, saying, "I'm sorry, I forgot this was your Friday night family dinner. I just happened to be in the neighborhood and wanted to tell you something."

Mrs. Katz called from the kitchen doorway. "Come. Eat with us. We're just starting."

Continuing to hold Bela's hand, Harvey walked with her into the dining room. "Are you sure? I don't want to intrude."

Mrs. Katz clucked her tongue, quickly setting a place next to Bela's as she talked. "Harvey Townsend, you know better. How could you ever be an intruder in this house?"

"Katzie, I love you. Thank you."

Tessie, still irrepressible despite the burdens of wife and mother, giggled and whispered to Victor, "Mama's not the only one he loves," A nudge from Victor and a scowl from Bela, who had overheard, barred any further comments from Tessie.

As they sat, Bela asked, "What did you want to tell me?"

Harvey looked around the table, hesitating. He felt the breathless anticipation as he read the same question in everyone's eyes. Realizing that no response would be even more awkward, he replied, "Princess Pat is due to drop her foal in a couple of weeks. Would you like to help?"

Bela gaped, surprised. "Aren't you going to have the Vet?"

"Of course, but I may have to assist him. It's a big job -- requires a lot of strength, if she can't do it all herself. And that could likely be the case with Pat. She's a high-strung girl. We'll need all the help we can get."

"Harvey, I don't know anything at all about delivering babies. I might do something wrong and hurt her." Everyone laughed as Bela drew her heavy brows together in a worried look.

Harvey placed his arm across her shoulder. "There's no way you could hurt her. All you'll need to do is hand things to me if I have to help Doc Byrnes."

Tessie couldn't resist. "Besides, Bel, it'll give you some experience for when you have your own babies."

Bela gave Tessie another withering look. "I'm not a horse." Then to Harvey, "I'll have to think about it. I'll let you know next week."

"Well, that's o.k., Bela. Don't worry about it. We can talk about it more tomorrow night if you want."

Bela, now totally embarrassed by this public discussion, regretted having asked Harvey, in the presence of others, what was on his mind, acutely aware that everyone had been listening avidly.

During the remainder of dinner, paying no heed to the buzz of conversation around her, her thoughts raced ahead.

Could she go? The organizing seemed to be going well -- at least as well as could be expected after only ten weeks. She had talked with all the operators and pressers, most of whom were enthusiastic about the idea of union protection, and the three doubters would probably go along with the majority. The only ones left to talk to were the cutters

-- five of them. But they would be the hardest to convince. They were the elite among the line workers -- the best paid and the best treated. For example, if they took off a half day to go to the doctor, Russell usually didn't dock them if it was a one time thing. And they got ten-

minute smoking breaks twice a day, which nobody else got. She had planned on spending the next few week-ends working on them, since she couldn't do much during the week. Most of the workers were so tired at the end of the day that they were usually in bed by nine or nine-thirty.

Should she go? What would people think? It would mean spending the night at Sun Ranch. Katzie would probably understand and even urge her to go, but what about all the others? Mary would have a fit, of course; but then Mary never seemed to approve anything she did. She was furious about Bela's union activities.

By the time dessert was served, Bela had made up her mind to go to Sun Ranch when Harvey called her.

"Welcome back, Bela," Tessie quipped from across the table, "you've been a hundred miles away."

Bela shrugged and smiled. Harvey squeezed her hand under the table.

Two weeks crawled by without a call from Harvey. Bela felt a lead weight in the pit of her stomach. Had she made a mistake agreeing to go? Was he repelled by her boldness? All the admonitions of a Victorian conscience, which she despised, flooded in. He had always called if he couldn't make their Saturday night meeting. That Friday night when he had come over unexpectedly and invited her, she had really thought he loved her. Now she felt confused and doubtful.

On Wednesday evening of the third week, as Bela made her way with heavy heart to the home of one of the cutters, she thought Princess Pat must have had her foal by now. Maybe it had happened so quickly that he hadn't had a chance to call. But she knew that was nonsense. He would have called anyway -- or *could* have.

On the way home, she flashed back to the discussion with the cutter, Joe Timmons. He was one of the toughest, and she had completely botched it by letting her preoccupation with Harvey give him the edge. It had ended with Joe saying, "Lady, go back to your cookin' and sewin' and get yerself a beau, and don't be gettin' involved in stuff that don't concern ya."

Instead of keeping her wits and pointing out that adequate wages and working conditions concerned both of them, in fact *all* of

them, she had blithered something like, "I'll talk to you another time, Joe," and left.

Bela felt a great weariness as she climbed the stairs to the house on Eighth Street.

When she opened the door Mrs. Katz called out, "Harvey just called. He wants you to call him right away. He said, 'as soon as she comes in, no matter what time it is'!" Her eyes twinkled as she watched Bela drop her coat on the floor and run to the phone.

Bela's heart pounded as she heard the local operator give Harvey's number to the operator in Carmel. She waited impatiently while the double buzz told her the phone was ringing at the other end. Then she heard Harvey's voice answer through the crackle of the long distance connection.

"Harvey, this is Bela." She heard her voice tremble.

"Bela! Darling! I'm so sorry I haven't called you. Aristo got hit by a wagon out on the road. He's going to be o.k., but it was touch and go for a while. All my time was taken up caring for him. And I really didn't want to tell you anything until I knew one way or the other if he'd make it."

"Oh, Harvey, I'm so sorry. Are you sure he's all right?"

"Yeah, sure. He might be left with a little limp, but he's recuperating nicely. He sends you his love."

Bela giggled and blushed. "He hardly knows me." She hesitated. "Harvey, how's Princess Pat? How's her baby?"

Harvey laughed. "She hasn't had her baby yet. Apparently we miscalculated slightly. It's a good thing, too; I couldn't have handled both her and Aristo.

"However -- it does look like this week-end will be a busy one. Doc says the foal is almost in position and will probably arrive Friday or Saturday. Can you come down Friday, after work? I can't leave here, but I can have Tex pick you up."

"No, Harvey. I mean yes. I mean I'll come, but I can take the train down, and Clarence can pick me up. I mean Tex." Excitement and relief combined to muddle Bela's efforts at coordinating her thoughts and words.

"Are you sure? I don't much like the idea of your traveling alone. It's a long way." Harvey sounded uneasy.

"I'll be fine. Besides, Tex should be there in case you need him."

As she hung up the telephone, Bela burst into laughter, partly amusement at her botched efforts at conversation, partly from pure joy. She ran to Mrs. Katz and dropped her head in her friend's lap.

"Katzie, Katzie! I love him so!"

Mrs. Katz stroked Bela's soft hair. "I know, Darling. I know." Her thoughts were mixed. This child must not be hurt, she thought.

Friday finally arrived. The day was interminable to Bela. At four o'clock she told Mr. Graham she was ill and had to go home.

"We can't have this kind of thing, Bela. You wanna get paid, you work -- the whole day -- 'til six. I'll let you go this time, but if it happens again, you lose a whole week."

Bela realized he knew about her organizing work and was letting her know he knew. His threat, however, only made her more determined to get the union going. And now that her heart was free again -- she felt now that Harvey loved her, too -- she would do it.

The trip to Carmel seemed to take forever. But the rhythm of the click-clack of the wheels on the rails was like a lullabye. She curled up in her seat in the nearly empty car and dozed.

Tex was waiting, hat in hand, as the conductor helped her down the steps. As Tex boosted her onto the seat of the buckboard she asked, "How is Aristo? Is he really going to be all right?"

"Yes, Ma'am. He's doin' just fine. Walkin' with hardly any limp, and now the Doc thinks even that will be gone soon."

"Has Princess Pat had her foal yet?"

"No, Ma'am, but it's sure gonna be any day, now."

Both were quiet for several minutes as Jerry, the gelding, clip-clopped his way along the rut-streaked road. Then Bela cleared her throat. "Tex, I wouldn't mind if you called me Bela. Ma'am sounds so formal and -- and old."

Tex touched the wide brim of his hat. "Yes, Ma'am." He shook his head. "I mean Bela." They both laughed and the awkwardness seemed to dissolve.

As they rode in silence, the beauty of the countryside, the aroma of new-mown hay piled in bales and shining golden in the light of a nearly full September moon, filled Bela with a mixture of peace

and excitement. Her life was so good now. She had found fulfillment in the work of trying to organize the workers at Russell's. Ari had been right in getting her involved. She was really good at it. She knew that, even though the obstacles she encountered were often frustrating. Like Joe Timmons and his pals. But she'd win them.

Thinking of Ari brought a twinge of remorse as she thought how different her feelings for Harvey were from what she felt for Ari. And how different from each other they were. Ari, although he was a dear friend and had been there when she needed him, was boisterous and fast-talking -- and totally involved with union activities, sometimes forgetting that anything else existed. Harvey, on the other hand, was quiet, soft-spoken, intellectual. He was gentle and considerate -- and handsome. She certainly knew now what Katzie had meant when she tried to define sex appeal for her. She felt a little thrill shoot through her as she fantasized lying next to Harvey -- as his wife, of course, she hastened to tell herself. God! What was she thinking! Harvey had never even hinted at marriage. Yet, she really felt that was where he was headed. Another quiver coursed through her.

Tex's voice cut in on her reverie. "Well, here we are, Ma'am -- Bela, I mean."

"Oh, I'm so sorry, Tex, I guess I was thinking about something. I didn't mean to be rude."

"Yes, Bela, Ma'am. I sure know'd you was thinkin' of something. I sure did." His grin made her blush.

"Welcome to Sun Ranch, Milady." Harvey, who'd come running out of the house when he heard the clatter of the old buckboard, lifted her off the seat and set her on her feet on the ground. Holding her as they walked along the path lined with late blooming roses, he said, "That settles it. No more rides in that corroded old wagon for you, Honey! I'm getting an automobile."

"But Harv, I can't drive one of them contraptions. I wouldn't know what to do first," Tex interposed.

"Don't worry. We'll both learn. The Hupmobile salesman told me they give a driving lesson with every sale."

Tex shook his head, disgusted. "Me, I trust a horse. At least they know where they're goin'."

Bela said, shyly, "Don't worry. I'll teach you both."

Eyebrows darting up in surprise, Harvey asked, "You? You know how to drive?"

"Yes, I do. Ari taught me."

"Ari -- of course." Harvey tried with poor success to hide the frown.

Wishing now that she'd kept still, Bela felt the need to defend her friend. "Ari sometimes lets me use his when I make calls for the union we're trying to organize. A lot of them are at night."

"Of course, Darling, I'm very grateful to him," Harvey replied, embarrassed and somewhat chastened.

Bela gazed at him with a mixture of surprise and amusement, as Aristo, a little slower but with tail wagging furiously, came limping up to welcome her.

XVIII

"Bela, Bela. Wake up."

"Wha--? What?" Bela sat up and rubbed her eyes. "What time is it?" The lamp beside her bed was on. Had she forgotten to turn it off?

"It's four o'clock in the morning." Gladys, her red hair hanging in braids at her shoulders, the green flannel robe tied awkwardly about her waist, placed a gentle hand on Bela's shoulder. "Harvey asked me to wake you up. He's with the Princess. Her time is on her and he couldn't leave. He says you don't have to come if you don't want to." Gladys grinned, displaying a gap the two incisors in her removeable bridge normally occupied. "But he says he'd be mighty happy if you could."

"Of course I'll come," Bela said, suddenly wide awake. Throwing back the blankets, she leaped out of bed, her feet scrambling for her slippers, kicking one under the bed in her haste.

"Here, let me help you." Gladys reached into the closet and removed the blouse and skirt Bela had worn the day before on her trip down from Oakland. She shook her head, frowning. "Is this all you brought?"

At Bela's embarrassed laugh, Gladys, contrite, flushed slightly. "Oh, they're very pretty," she said hastily. "I just meant it would be a cryin' shame to get them dirty in that nasty old barn. Let me get you something."

Within seconds, Gladys was back, her robe now unfastened and billowing behind her. "Here, put these on." She held out a blue and white plaid man's work shirt and faded overalls.

"They're Harvey's, but if you roll up the sleeves and pants and tie this around your waist, you'll look real cute." She handed the clothing to Bela, topped with the rope sash she had removed from her bathrobe.

Bela stared at the outfit. Then, reaching for it, she started to laugh. "I'm sorry," she chuckled, "but this takes me back to the Earthquake. My clothes were all lost, and the Red Cross gave me men's coveralls to wear." She shook her head as she began to pull on the overalls under her nightgown. "I guess I'm back to being a greenhorn immigrant."

"Me too," Gladys laughed, "I'm from Howth, which is roight near Dublin, Ireland, ye know." Bela was amused to hear Gladys lapse into heavier brogue. She misses her homeland, but I don't miss mine, she thought.

When Bela was dressed, she made her way in slippered feet to the barn area, having elected to ruin a pair of felt house slippers in preference to her high-heeled shoes.

"Oh, Bela, you're here. Just in time to see a precious new life enter this crazy world," Harvey said, breathless, his hands holding a huge white sheet. "Meet Doc Byrnes, the best Vet in the state and my close friend."

Bela nodded but said nothing as she tiptoed into the stall, her heart pounding. Initially, all she was aware of was the whinnying and panting of the stressed horse. Then she became conscious of the groaning and straining of a human.

Dr. Byrnes, his hands grasping a barely visible little head, beads of perspiration coursing down his cheeks and disappearing into his reddish-brown beard, was pulling against the mighty grip of the mare's body. Then a booming shout, "Here we go! One -- two -- three!" And the tiny animal was in his arms.

Crouching, he lay the newborn across his knees, and with skill and deftness of the consummate professional, he swiftly tied and snipped the final link between mother and child.

"Here, Harv," handing the foal to him, "you take care of your new princess, while I finish up with her mama."

"Come on, Bela, here's what we have to do." Gripping the slippery little creature with the sheet, Harvey picked a handful of straw from the bale standing against the wall with his free hand, and

began rubbing the baby vigorously. "We have to stand her on her feet like this and keep massaging her with clean straw until she stands by herself. Here, you try it."

Gingerly approaching, Bela reached for some straw and began rubbing. However, as soon as the foal sensed her more gentle hold, she lay down.

"No, no, you're too easy on her. You have to hold her very firmly and *make* her stand. She's very tired and she'll lie down if she thinks she can get away with it." Harvey helped Bela pick up the baby. He watched closely as she began to develop a rhythm in her rubdown.

"There," he said, "now you've got it. See how much stronger she's getting?"

Holding the soft, warm little body against her as she massaged, Bela could feel its rapid heart beat. Something within her stirred as the new life, quivering at first, began to grow stronger. Not being religious, Bela had never thought in terms of miracles; but now, in the presence of nature's greatest wonder, she knew both joy and awe.

"Good, she's probably strong enough for her first breakfast, now," Harvey said. "Let's walk her over to P.P., Honey. Is Pat ready for her daughter, Doc?"

"Just about. Let me give her tail a little brushing, and she'll be all set." Carefully brushing out the hairs on the mare's tail, he said, "You know, Harv, I was a little worried about how this girl would do with her first foaling, she's so highly bred, but she came through just fine." He gave the tail a final flick. "Let 'er at 'em!"

Harvey pointed at the horse's teat. "It's your show, Bela, lead her to it!"

"Okay, Little One, chow time; come and get it!" Bela proclaimed, carefully guiding the newcomer to its first meal, to shouts of laughter from both Harvey and Dr. Byrnes.

"God, Honey, you really catch on fast! We'll make a cowpoke out of you yet!" Turning to the Veterinarian, "Isn't she magnificent?"

Eyes twinkling, Dr. Byrnes nodded. "You did all right this time, Harv."

Cleaning up the remnants of the event that had taken place, Tex, who until now had not been heard from, added, "Yes, she's a fine lady, Harv; she sure is."

"Stop," Bela protested, laughing, "you're all going to make me very vain with your flattery." But inwardly she was pleased. It was important to her to be liked by the people who meant so much to Harvey. She knew they were the closest thing to family he had.

"Come on, Honey, Doc and Tex will finish up here. Let's go watch the sunrise. Oh --!" Harvey caught himself. "You're probably tired. We got you up so early. Maybe you'd like to go back to bed for a while."

"Oh, no! No! I'm wide awake -- and I'm glad you let me be part of it. I'll never forget it." She grabbed his hand and tugged. "Let's see the sun come up."

They walked out hand in hand, as Dr. Byrnes chuckled and Tex whistled softly.

Dear God, Bela thought, it's all happening so fast. Harvey looked down at her and smiled, almost as if reading her mind.

They came to the crest of a rise as the sun broke over the mountains to the east, casting halos round the cypress and Monterey pines clinging to the hillside opposite the valley. The stillness of the dawn was broken only by the plaintive protest of a whippoorwill, wakened by a sunbeam bursting in on its slumber.

"Shall we walk down toward the pond?" Harvey asked. Bela nodded. "What about your feet? Those slippers don't give you much protection."

"During the Great Earthquake and Fire, I ran for blocks in my bare feet, looking for my little brother and sister. I've got tough feet."

Harvey took her hand again, laughing. "Well, if it gets to be too much for them, I'll carry you. By the way, who's your couturiere?"

"My what?"

"Your dress designer. Who picked those lovely clothes you're wearing?"

Bela laughed. "Gladys, of course."

"Well you two had better be careful. You're liable to start a whole new fashion trend."

"Too late. The women at Can't Bust 'Em Overall factory have worn them at work for the past two years. They started back in 1912."

As they approached the little pond, they startled a pair of herons, who took off to the north, their majestic wings almost skimming the surface. A matronly duck, her brood of ducklings paddling furiously behind her, scolded the intruders as she set course for a more peaceful site. The pool flashed tiny jewels of light as the sun crept upward and giant shadows of peaks and trees slowly dwindled.

They sat silent, the water stilled to match the morning. A whirligig beetle performed its dervish dance near the bank where they perched, accompanied by the raucous cry of a blue jay in a nearby pine, its brilliant plumage blazing. Tiny silver minnows darted to and fro in the clear cool water.

"When I was a little guy," Harvey mused, "I'd fill a big jar with pond water and bring home some minnows. I'd carefully place them in a big fish bowl, feed them bits of vegetation from the pond, hoping to raise them as pets." He shook his head, smiling ruefully. "They always died."

He paused, remembering. "You know, it was Tex who taught me never to deprive a living wild thing of its natural habitat." He paused. "I think that's what really first got me interested in forestry."

"When I was a child in Siberia -- I guess I was about eight --," Bela said, eyes closed, mirroring Harvey's mood, "another girl and I went hunting for wild cherries in the woods near where we lived. We saw this thing that looked like a tangled basket hanging from a tree. Our containers were almost full, and I guess she thought it would provide us with space to bring home more fruit. Anyway, she grabbed for it and -- Oh, the bees! -- they chased us all the way home, buzzing, stinging." Her eyes widened as she spoke, while her soft laughter belied the trauma of the event. "Ever since then, whenever I eat cherries I remember what can result from disturbing nature's balance!"

"My God, Bela! What an awful experience! Were you badly hurt?"

She touched her cheek, as if reliving the pain. "Oh, my lips were puffed, and my eyes were swollen shut for a couple of days. But

you know, the neighbor who sometimes took care of us when my father was away -- my stepmother was already gone by then -- rubbed some wet dirt on the stings every few hours, and it took the discomfort away almost at once. And the swellings were down in less than a week." She cringed as a bee picked that moment to zoom by. "See, ever since then I duck when I hear a buzz nearby."

Harvey squeezed her shoulders. "We all do, Honey, that's simple survival."

A half hour went by as they leaned against the bank, knees upended, watching the multitude of birds glide, flutter and flit between the trees, listening to the chatter and song that made up the vocabularies of the winged communicants. A fat bullfrog squatted in the shade across the water, eying them like a dubious banker, voicing an occasional croak of disapproval. A bushy tailed squirrel spurted up and sat before them, waiting expectantly for a morsel to stash in its expanding winter cache. They laughed when, seeing there was no offering forthcoming, he abandoned them and scampered up the trunk of a huge oak standing almost at the water's edge.

"Are you cold?" Harvey asked. "We should have taken a blanket from the tack room behind the stalls."

Bela shook her head. "No, I'm fine. This flannel shirt of yours is really quite comfortable."

Harvey surveyed her with a critical eye. "It's very becoming to you. You can have it if you wish."

"Maybe I'll keep it as a souvenir," she said, hugging her knees with a contented sigh.

He continued to gaze at her, taking in the slender, agile form, the flashing almond-shaped black eyes, the turned-up nose and too large mouth that he longed to kiss. On impulse, he pulled out the comb holding her hair and watched the mass of black waves cascade down her back, nearly to her waist.

After a few moments, he said, "We really ought to get back and see how P.P. and her baby are doing. Are you up to walking back?" He held out his hand.

Ignoring it, Bela leaped up. "Of course." She took the comb he was still holding, but did not attempt to put her hair back up.

As they slowly climbed the hill toward the horse compound, Harvey said, taking her hand again, "Watch very carefully where you step. There are rattlesnakes in the area. We really need to get you a pair of knee high boots for walking around here. Especially in this high grass in back of the stalls, where there aren't many shadows. Snakes get active when the sun warms them."

They continued to walk in silence, absorbing the aromas of early Fall. Bela stooped to pick a spray of wild blue lupin; suddenly she shrieked, grabbing Harvey's arm and pointing at the ground a few feet in front of them.

Startled, Harvey thrust a protective arm about her, then began to laugh. "It's okay, Honey, that's just a little garter snake; they're harmless. In fact they're helpers because they eat crop destroying bugs." He gave her a squeeze. "But good girl for being alert."

Bela was still a bit dubious. "Are you sure it's harmless?"

"Yes, Darling, I'm sure. In fact, most snakes are harmless. The only poisonous ones around here are rattlers, and you can always recognize them because they give a warning with their rattles before they strike. So just always remember to look and listen."

Feeling somewhat foolish, Bela tried to recapture her dignity. "You know, our organizing is going extremely well. Even the cutters are beginning to capitulate." (She had recently learned the word "capitulate" and seized on this chance to use it.) "At least they've agreed to send a representative to our Wednesday night Organizing Committee meeting."

"Very good, Bela. Have you had any backlash from the boss?"

"Actually very minor." She told Harvey about the little run in with Mr. Graham around her leaving early the day before. "But I've heard nothing from Mr. Russell, the big boss."

"Well, just keep in mind that Russell is the one that really pulls the strings -- and be careful."

"Of course, I know that, and I try not to give them anything to hit me with." She smiled shyly. "That is, except for yesterday -- and today."

Harvey grinned, his blue eyes twinkling as he squeezed her again. "I'm glad you did, Honey."

The stall seemed dim after the bright sunlight. From a corner came Tex's gravel voice. "Mama and baby are both doin' fine, Harv, Bela. That little one can sure eat."

As her eyes accommodated to the gloom, Bela could see the foal, now dry, her coat a burnt chestnut like her mother's, nuzzling the fount of rich nourishment, sucking lustily. "Oh, Harvey, she's beautiful. What are you going to call her?"

"Well, I thought I'd -- Wait a minute!" He looked at Bela. "Hey, how would you like to name her?"

"I -- I don't know." She hesitated, touched. "She's your horse. You should name her. I'm sure you already have a name all picked out. No, Harvey. But thank you, anyway."

He nodded. "Well, I was going to name her Princess Penelope."

Bela giggled. "There you go with the ancient Greeks again. I love it, though, and we can call her Penney for short. It fits her perfectly with her color."

"Well actually, her mother's name is from the Latin. But you're right. At the time, I thought I was giving Patricia a Greek name. I didn't discover my mistake until she was eight months old."

"Hey, Harv," Tex broke in. "I got to go into town to pick up them supplies we ordered from Jacobsen's. They seem to be doin' okay, but I didn't want to leave before you got back."

"That's fine, we'll stay here. Okay with you, Bela?"

"Sure." She nodded.

"There's some grub and coffee over in the tack room. I'll be back in a couple of hours." Tex tipped his hat to Bela and left.

As Tex walked down toward Jerry's stall to hitch him up to the wagon parked at the end of the compound, Harvey asked, "Are you hungry, Dear? You've been up a long time."

Bela shook her head. "No, I hardly ever eat much breakfast, but you go ahead."

"Tex's idea of breakfast is a big bowl of grits. I'm afraid I'm not as eager to be a Texan as he is. But he makes terrific coffee. How about if I get us some?"

"Oh, that sounds fine. I could really use a cup of nice hot black coffee."

A minute later, he was back, carrying two cracked mugs filled with steaming brew. He handed one to Bela. She took a small sip, holding the cup with both hands, her black eyes fixed on Harvey's blue ones. He took the cup from her hands and carefully placed both mugs on a horizontal strut jutting from the side wall of the stall. He reached and took her in his arms. She resisted, then slowly she melded toward him as she felt herself begin to thrill to his clasp.

"Bela, my dearest." His voice was husky.

"Harvey, I can't. I -- "

"It's all right, Darling. It's all right." His fingers felt her soft skin under the rough flannel of the ridiculous shirt she was wearing.

"Bela. Oh, Bela."

His lips pressed hers. His tongue slowly explored the insides of her cheeks, her teeth.

She felt her resistance ebb, as she gradually yielded to her own yearning. They made love there in the barn, on the floor of straw, the infant horse staggering around them, nickering.

She felt a sudden stab of pain, then a strange wondrous delight she had never known before. Finally, the storm over, they lay quietly, holding each other.

XIX

I wonder if I look as different as I feel, Bela thought, as the taxi chugged off down Brush Street on Sunday afternoon. Will people be able to tell? She looked up at the jutting bay window of the old Victorian. Katzie probably will. She knows me so well.

"Katzie, I'm home," she called as she opened the door.

Mrs. Katz came through the kitchen door, wiping her hands on a dish towel.

"Well, how was it?" she asked.

"Wonderful. It's so beautiful there, Katzie. I love it."

"Yes, but what about the horse? Did she have the baby, yet? Isn't that what you went for?"

"Oh, yes," Bela flushed slightly. "She had a beautiful baby girl."

Mrs. Katz laughed. "*Mazel Tov!* Should I ask who she looks like?" Bela's blush had not been lost on her, but she chose to ignore it. Let the girl have her privacy, she thought.

"She looks just like her mother -- and we're going to name her Princess Penelope -- Penney."

"Hoo - hoo! Such a fancy name." Raising one eyebrow as the implication of Bela's reply struck her, "'We'? So who named her, you or Harvey?"

"Oh, Harvey -- of course! But I did help with her right after she was born." Bela suddenly felt defensive toward this woman she loved so well, and whom she knew loved her.

The tension eased as Mrs. Katz, sensing her discomfort, put her arms around Bela and kissed her. "It's good to have you home, Bela. It's lonesome here without you. Come, we'll have a glass of tea

and you'll tell me all about your visit. How's the dog? What's his name -- Arrest?"

"Aristo -- Aristophanes, really. He's getting better, but the poor thing limps with his front leg."

As the two women sat at the table drinking tea and nibbling honey cake, Mrs. Katz said, "So tell me all about it. Besides helping with the horses, did you have a good time?"

Bela described her visit in detail: the early rising, the overalls, the birth, Dr. Byrnes, the beauty of the setting; leaving out only their love making. Although she longed to confide all her feelings, she was too embarrassed to talk about it. She probably wouldn't even be able to tell Tess.

One Thursday evening in early February, about four months later, Bela and Mrs. Katz sat in the living room, absorbed in their own thoughts. Mrs. Katz now had only two roomers, both of whom worked nights, so Bela scarcely saw them. She understood they worked for the railroad, which made her think of Eugene Debs, the enduring Socialist candidate for President, and his struggles to organize the railroads. She had never met Debs, but Harvey had told her so much about him, she almost thought of him as a friend. In a sense he was, she thought, as she felt a kind of kinship with him in her own efforts to organize Russell's. She chuckled to herself at the difference in size between their aims. Still, her goal was no less gargantuan to her, and it took all her energy to work in the shop all day, attend meetings or talk to individual workers at night, and go out with Harvey on Saturday nights.

"We voted last night to strike if we don't get the Union Shop," Bela told Mrs. Katz.

"So what do you think is gonna happen?"

"Well, we're meeting with Mr. Russell and Graham Monday night, right after work, to present our demands: An eight-hour day with ten-minute breaks in the morning and afternoon, Saturday afternoons off, and a Un --" a deafening crash, followed by a heavy thud, interrupted her.

They stared dumbfounded at the shattered window. Bela stooped and picked up the object which had hurtled through the glass

and landed near her feet. It was a three-inch chunk of brick, a rumpled piece of paper tied to it with heavy twine. Hands trembling, she tore off the twine and read the crudely printed note:

GO BACK WERE YOU CAME
DIRTY JEW BITCH

Wordlessly handing the jagged sheet to Mrs. Katz, she walked toward the broken window, glass crunching under her feet.

"Bela, come back!! Get away from the window!!" Mrs. Katz screamed, clutching her sleeve.

Bela backed away, still too stunned to speak.

"Hah! Whoever did it can't even spell." Mrs. Katz's attempt at levity failed to lessen Bela's horror and dismay. "Come. Sit. Sit." The older woman took Bela's ice cold hands and led her to the ottoman. Seating herself, still holding Bela, she began rubbing her wrists.

"I'm all right, Katzie. I'm just shocked that such a thing can happen in this country. I thought we were through with all that when we left the old country."

"I'm afraid, Darling, we are never through with that kind of garbage."

"It's not the dirty names; I've been called plenty of things, but this -- this note is anti-Semitic. I can't imagine anyone here talking that way. Especially where I work."

"You're scaring people, and when they feel threatened some get ugly."

At eight o'clock the following morning, Bela strode into John Russell's office, ignoring the secretary's shrieked, "Hey, you can't go in there!"

Slamming the crumpled paper on the desk, her voice cold with suppressed rage, she said, "You won't stop me, and you sure won't stop the union!"

She stood, head high, trembling within, but her scant five feet symbolically towering over Russell, taking no account of Graham seated on a chair by the desk.

Russell glanced at the note, then picked it up. "Where did you get this?"

"Don't you know?"

"Of course I don't. Don't be ridiculous."

"It was tied to a brick that smashed a window in our house and landed at my feet -- lucky for me, not on my head."

"When? When did this happen?" Russell seemed genuinely surprised and concerned.

Somewhat mollified, Bela replied, "Last night around eight-thirty."

Russell came around from behind the desk and reached for Bela's shoulders. She jerked away.

He shook his head. "Bela, you're a nice girl and a good worker. Why don't you give up this crazy union stuff before you get hurt, and just do your job. You know, as smart as you are you might even get to be a forelady one day, if you do your job right."

"I told you, Mr. Russell. You can't stop the union, and your bribes don't interest me."

She turned on her heel and walked out, leaving the two men staring at the door.

"Hah! Let's see how that little Jew bitch wags her tail now." Graham rubbed his hands in glee.

Russell glared at him. "Graham, you're a fool. Now shut up!"

During the meeting with Russell on Thursday as planned, it became clear that he was unwilling to consider any of the demands presented by Bela and the small committee elected by the majority of Russell employees to negotiate on their behalf. Attempts by the committee to secure any kind of compromise were also ignored.

The strike, therefore, was called for the following Thursday, to allow Russell time to reconsider. Bela and her committee were anxious to avoid a strike if it was at all possible, in light of the hardship it would create for the strikers.

Russell was certain there would not be a walk-out, following his announcement on Wednesday afternoon: "Any worker who does not report for work on time tomorrow morning will be immediately dismissed with no appeal" There was also a rumor that Graham would see that they were blacklisted. While Bela had not told anyone, even Ari, about the frightening incident of the thrown brick, a rumor that

Bela had been threatened if there was a strike began to make the rounds. Bela decided that the best course was to ignore it, since she believed that either credence to or denial of the gossip would merely obscure the real strike issues.

On Thursday three people reported for work. Most of the rest congregated in front of the factory, where a picket line was quickly formed. Bela and Ari, with the help of the other strike committee members, had spent most of Wednesday night preparing signs, which they now handed out to some of the marchers: "On Strike," "Do Not Patronize," "Russells Unfair," "We Need Decent Working Conditions," etc. Since there were only enough signs for about one quarter of the pickets, when someone became tired of carrying, he or she would hand the sign to another person.

The line was quiet and orderly. As they marched, some people began singing. Soon all had joined in:

*When the union's inspiration through
the worker's blood shall run,*

*There can be no power greater anywhere
beneath the sun.*

*Yet what force on earth is weaker than the
feeble strength of one?*

But the union makes us strong.

*Solidarity forever!
Solidarity forever!
Solidarity forever,*

*For the union makes us strong." **

As Bela turned the curve to walk back in front of the factory, she saw Joe Timmons approaching. One of my failures, she thought. "Hello, Bela, got any more signs?"

* "Solidarity Forever," by Ralph Chaplin. An old labor song, sung to the tune of "Battle Hymn of the Republic"

"Joe, I thought you -- aren't you working?"

"Well, I guess I changed my mind. Hell! If you ain't afraid of gettin' canned why should I? I'm the best damn cutter in the business! Excuse my language, Bela, Ma'am."

"That's all right, Joe," Bela smiled. "Welcome to the cause. We're stronger because of you. Marian," she called, "get Joe a sign -- a big one!"

"By the way, Bela --" Joe said as the woman named Marian ran up and handed him a sign that said in bright red, "RUSSELL'S UNFAIR!" In smaller letters underneath was printed "Don't Buy Russell Uniforms."

" -- By the way, I wanna say -- I want ya to know we don't cotton to that stuff that was done to you the other night -- and we all think everybody that wants can come to America, and well -- and we're glad you came, and -- " the words petered out as Joe, unaccustomed to lengthy conversation, struggled to express what he and his friends felt.

"I know, Joe, but thanks for saying it." Bela held out her hand. Joe grasped and shook it, saying, "Don't be surprised to see the other two guys on the line tomorrow. We'll show that fink, Graham!"

And thus Bela knew with certainty, who had thrown the brick. So Ari had been right to warn her about Graham, and ironically in almost the same words that Joe Timmons had just used.

XX

The strike lasted five-and-a-half weeks. The hardship for the workers, particularly those with families, was devastating. Hunger was rampant.

"Thank God for our roomers," Brocha Katz remarked one day during the fourth week. "At least we're not starving, and we still have a roof over our heads."

"I'm so sorry, Katzie, I wish it could have been done differently, but Russell wouldn't budge an inch -- on anything."

"You think I don't know that? It's not us I worry about, it's those poor people who have babies to feed and nothing to fall back on. How are they holding out?"

Bela shook her head, her eyes reflecting sorrow and despair. "I'm afraid people are going to begin to break. I guess it's a matter of who goes down first, the workers or Russell."

She walked to the window, recently repaired by Ari. Watching a fruit peddler urge his tired mule along the street, her voice brightened slightly. "At least Russell isn't getting any new uniforms made, and Ari heard that some of the fabric manufacturers are beginning to press him for the money he owes them." She turned back to Mrs. Katz, eyes flashing. "But damn it, *his* children aren't starving!"

"Has there been any help from the ILG national office?"

"Ari was able to get a little. We used the money to buy milk for the children and some basic food -- no meat or anything like that. The National's got their problems, too.

"The tragedy would be if we lost the strike after all people have been through." Bela studied a scuff mark on her shoe. "We

could, you know. I'm surprised we've been able to hold out this long."

The picket line continued, but silent now, the marching slow and dirge-like. Gone were the singing, the laughter. The aura of gloom was almost palpable as strikers, listlessly holding their signs, trudged back and forth in front of Russell's Uniform Factory.

On the evening of Thursday, March 18, 1915, five weeks to the day after the strike began, Bela received a telephone call.

"Bela, this is John Russell. Will you and your comrade, Ari Abramovitz, meet me in my office at eight tomorrow morning?"

His use of the word "comrade," with its inference of radicalism, was not lost on Bela, but she was too excited to make it an issue.

"Yes, we'll be there." She immediately hung up and rang Ari.

"Ari, we won! I think we've won!! He just called. He wants us there tomorrow morning. Eight o'clock tomorrow morning!"

"Bela, calm down. Who called? Russell? Where?" Ari, with his wider experience, was less enthusiastic. "It could be anything -- He may just want to try to talk us into calling off the strike. You know how discouraged and hurting everybody is. He probably knows, too."

"I don't think so, Ari. Anyway, that's not going to happen -- at least I hope not."

The night seemed endless to Bela as sleep eluded her. Exhausted with tossing, flipping and punching her pillow, finally becoming ensnared in a tangle of blankets, sheet, and nightgown, she rose at four o'clock and went into the bathroom. She was glad she had thought to light the boiler before going to bed. Sitting on the toilet lid while the tub filled, she rehearsed what she thought would happen at the meeting with Russell. She wanted to be prepared to respond to whatever he might say or do. She knew there would have to be compromise, but she wanted to bring back a package to the workers that will have made all their sacrifice worthwhile.

As she lay with all but her head immersed in the hot water, the ache and fatigue of a night of insomnia gradually dissipated. She

closed her eyes, letting the warmth enfold her as the tension slowly released its grip.

One hour later, the water now cooled, she stepped out of the tub and reached for the towel. Wrapping it around her body, she rubbed an opening in the steam-clouded mirror over the hand basin and looked at her flushed features. Hm'mm, not too bad, she thought. Evidently the relaxing bath had helped. Her eyes had cleared, and the puffiness was almost gone. Russell probably couldn't tell how anxious she was, and that was important; she wanted to come across strong and confident.

She dressed slowly; there was still plenty of time. Some face powder, the only cosmetic she ever allowed herself, helped cover the little bit of blotchiness left from her sleepless night. In the kitchen, moving slowly and carefully so as not to wake Mrs. Katz, she fixed herself some orange juice, two soft boiled eggs, a piece of toast, and coffee. This was more breakfast than she had eaten at any time in the past six years, but she wanted to be well-fortified for the meeting. Besides, it kept her busy and helped fill the time. She had stifled an urge to telephone Harvey. With no wages coming in, they really couldn't afford even local calls, let alone long distance. She'd talk to him tonight, when he made his regular nightly call to her.

As she tiptoed out the door at seven-thirty, she felt ready for whatever Russell might throw at her. Halfway down the stairs, she heard the "oo-ooga" of an automobile horn and spied Ari parked at the curbside, waving to her.

"Ari! How long have you been waiting?"

"Not too long. About ten minutes. I didn't want to ring the bell. I was afraid I'd wake Mrs. Katz."

"You didn't say anything about picking me up when I called you last night, so I figured you weren't going to."

Ari grinned sheepishly. "I guess I was so nervous about the meeting that it completely slipped my mind. Sorry."

On impulse, Bela placed her hand on Ari's arm. "Thank you, Ari. You're a dear friend."

He winked at her as he adjusted the spark, released the brake and accelerated into the road. To avoid having to crank up again, he had kept the engine running as he sat waiting.

"We've got some time, yet," Ari said as he steered along Twelfth Street toward San Pablo, "how about a cup of coffee?"

Bela shook her head. "No, thanks, I've already had two cups. My nerves can't take any more."

"Look, Bel, don't let them bully you. Russell wouldn't have called if they weren't feeling pinched. Besides, I'll be right there with you."

Bela was inwardly amused at Ari's switch from last night's pessimism, but she took care not to show it. She knew he was trying to bolster her, and she was grateful for his support.

They drove the remainder of the short trip talking about inconsequentials. As they pulled up to the curb, some of the pickets were already treading their beat.

"My God," Ari said, "what time do they get here?"

"Early," Bela boasted. "You'll never ever find a more dedicated bunch of workers. They really want the union."

As they climbed the stairs, a few people called to Bela and waved. In the mystifying way of such news, word of the meeting with Russell had already made the rounds.

"Good luck, Bela!"

"Don't let Ole Man Russell getcha!"

"Go get 'em, Girl!"

"Solidarity Forever!"

Bela laughed and waved back, trying hard to mask her concern and appear optimistic.

Entering Russell's office, Bela and Ari were both taken aback as he announced without preamble, "No Saturdays off; no closed shop; three cents more an hour, not ten cents; and --" eyes narrowing -- "smoking breaks for men only. Ladies don't smoke."

Bela and Ari said nothing, as Ari picked up two chairs and placed them in front of the desk. Neither of them sat down.

"Well?" Graham, standing against the wall behind Russell, almost bellowed.

Looking directly at Russell, disregarding Graham, Bela said calmly, "We will negotiate only with you, Mr. Russell."

"Graham is my foreman."

"I'm aware of that, but our contract will be with you."

"In that case, you can tell Abramovitz to leave, too."

"No, Mr. Abramovitz is here on behalf of the International, and since they will have to approve the local contract, he will stay." Bela's heart was pounding, but she kept her voice even and her face impassive.

Russell's fingers drummed a tattoo on the scratched desk as he stared first at Bela then at a nodding Ari. Finally, he turned to Graham. "All right, you can leave."

"But -- " Graham protested, not moving. "But you said -- I thought -- "

"Please leave," Russell repeated.

"Look, John, that's not what --" Graham seemed confused as he looked at Bela standing quietly in front of the desk, then back at Russell. Moving toward the desk, he put up his hand, finger pointing toward the ceiling, as if he were about to deliver a lecture.

"Damn it, Graham! I said beat it!"

The foreman left, slamming the office door. Russell turned to Bela and Ari, still standing at the desk. "Well, sit down. We might as well get started."

They sat down, but neither said anything.

"You heard my terms. Take 'em or leave 'em." Russell's voice had an uneasy edge.

Bela shook her head. "They're not acceptable." She resisted the temptation to look at Ari.

"What do you mean 'not acceptable'?"

"First of all, we cannot consider any agreement that discriminates. All our workers have to have the same benefits."

"Oh, so that's it. You're one of those -- those women's rights people -- those Bloomer Girls -- or whatever they call 'em nowadays. Next you'll be talking about voting." He shook his head in disgust.

Bela smiled for the first time. "Possibly," she said, "but right now we have union business to discuss." She could feel her confidence grow with each word.

XXI

"Well, the strike is over." Bela felt the elation and high energy which had sustained her through the hours of argument, threats of lock-out, counter-threats of cessation of negotiations, and final compromise begin to fall away as fatigue overtook her.

"Who won?" Mrs. Katz prodded anxiously, as Bela removed her gloves, unbuttoned and kicked off her shoes, then sat down at her usual spot on the ottoman in front of Mrs. Katz.

Bela studied her stockinged feet, wiggling her toes to relax them, and shook her head. "I don't know. I guess we did. We didn't win all our demands, and the agreement still has to be presented to the union membership for approval, but ..." Suddenly she began to laugh. "Did you hear what I said? 'Union membership!' We're a Union -- with a capital 'U'!" She jumped up and hugged the older woman. "Oh, Katzie, what a terrible and wonderful day. Wait 'til I tell you!"

"All right, come. I've got the hot water on for tea. Are you hungry?"

"Starved. But first I've got to call Harvey."

"Oy! I almost forgot. He called about seven o'clock. He thought you'd be home by then. He had to go to a meeting of his own -- I dunno -- something with the government, I think he said."

"Government?" Bela was puzzled.

Mrs. Katz shrugged. "Who knows? Anyway, he's coming tomorrow night for dinner."

"For dinner? Here? Okay, fine -- if it's not too much trouble for you."

The twinkle in Mrs. Katz eyes betrayed her thought as she said, "No trouble. Then, if you want, you can go out afterward -- maybe to a moving picture show."

Bela countered with a chuckle, "Or maybe we can stay here and keep you company -- and talk about the Union."

"So come now. I'll fix you a bite, and you can tell me all about the negotiations and how you twisted that *momser* Russell's tail." She placed her ample arm around Bela's slender waist and led her into the kitchen.

At six o'clock sharp on Friday evening, the churning ring of the doorbell announced Harvey's arrival.

Reaching to kiss him as he stepped through the entrance, Bela felt a bulge in his coat pocket. She looked down and saw movement.

"Harvey, what's that?"

"What's what?"

"What's that in your pocket?" she asked, pointing. "It moved."

"Oh, that." Smiling, he reached into his pocket and pulled out what appeared to be a ball of white cotton.

"Mew! Mew!" A sleepy looking kitten stretched its legs as he placed it in a surprised Bela's eager hands.

"Oh, Harvey. He's adorable!" she exclaimed, cuddling the tiny creature to her breast. "Is he for me?"

Placing his arm around her shoulder, Harvey walked her to the sofa. "He is that. Miz 'Iggins said to take good care of her only son." Miz 'Iggins was really Gladys's cat. She produced one kitten every six months without fail, usually a female. However, six weeks ago she had startled everyone by having a litter of three, two black and white females and the now struggling fragment of fluff clambering toward Bela's shoulder.

"Ouch!" Bela squealed. "He's digging right through me."

"Careful, Honey, those claws are sharp. What do you want to call him?"

"Hm'mm. I don't know. Maybe an Irish name, in honor of Gladys. O'Reilly?"

"Sounds fine. Gladys will be pleased." Harvey paused, clearing his throat. "O'Reilly can keep you company while I'm gone."

"What? What do you mean 'gone'?"

"Well, I'm going to Europe for a few weeks."

Bela set the kitten on the floor. "Harvey, you can't go. There's a war going on there. They're warning people not to go." The tremor in her voice betrayed her alarm.

"Darling, that's why I'm going. I have to go. I'm being sent as an observer by the State Department."

"Harvey! You're lying! The State Department would *never* send you, they consider you a radical."

"All right, all right. I've been commissioned to write a series of articles on the war by *The Socialist Voice*. I had to get permission from the State Department to go, and believe me, that was no picnic. I've spent the last six weeks struggling with the damn bureaucrats."

Bela stood up, hands on her hips, tears of rage, pain and fear spilling down her cheeks. "Six weeks! And you never even told me! You never said a word!"

Harvey spread his hands in dismay. "How could I? You had enough on your hands with the strike. And I knew you'd be upset."

"Oh, Harvey." Bela began to cry. "I'll never see you again. You'll be killed.

I know you'll be killed."

He stood up and took her in his arms. "Oh, my," he said, as she sobbed against his chest, "I'm not going to be killed. I'll be fine. Come on, Honey, let's sit down and talk." He led her back to the sofa.

Her anguished sobs quieted as they sat together while he held her. Finally, as only convulsive sighs were coming from her heaving breast, he said softly, "I'm not going as a soldier; we're not in the war. I'm only going to observe and write about it, so that our people know what's really going on, without all the propaganda." He took a clean handkerchief out of the breast pocket of his coat and wiped her eyes. Then, holding it to her nose, he said gently, "Blow."

Blowing her nose twice, Bela laughed through the tears. "Oh, Harvey, I love you so. Promise you'll be careful. Please."

"I promise." He brushed back a strand of hair that had fallen on her forehead and kissed the spot where it had been. "I love you, too, Darling, and I won't let myself get hurt because I know that would hurt you."

Bela looked up into his eyes, suddenly angry again. "Damn it, Harvey! Why did you tell me you were being sent by the government? Why couldn't you just tell me the truth?"

"I know. That was stupid. All day I've been trying to think of how to tell you.

I just had some crazy idea that it would be easier on you if you thought it was official."

"No, Harvey," she responded fiercely, "that's not why! You thought it would be easier on *you*! You thought you could avoid a scene!" She choked, chest heaving. "Well you didn't, did you!"

He smiled ruefully. "No, I guess I didn't. I'm sorry I made you angry."

"The truth, Harvey. It must always be the truth. I can't live with anything else."

He pressed her against him again, whispering into her ear, "I know, Darling, I know."

Mrs. Katz, who had quietly slipped from the room when the scene began, returned. "Come, children, dinner's ready. But first, Bela, you better take care of your kitty. I chopped up some chicken for him, and you can put some milk in a saucer. Oh, and by the way, you better put some sand in a box and start teaching him to use it."

Bela nodded, her nose and eyes still red, her eyelids puffed.

XXII

Harvey's train, bound for New York, left promptly at three p.m. on Friday, April 23, 1915. Bela stood on the station platform, waving until the train had turned a curve and was no longer in sight. She knew he couldn't see her, of course, but she continued to wave. For a moment she had an odd sensation of having seen her father leave on a train, but that couldn't be. A dream, maybe? Then the feeling passed.

Harvey had wanted to take a ship from San Francisco through the newly completed Panama Canal, but Bela had pushed for the overland train route, which she was convinced was safer. As she walked slowly back to Sixteenth Street to try to catch a cab, her mind flashed to the argument they had had concerning the trip. It was really more like a quarrel, she realized, and it had gone on for several days.

"I want to see why so many men were sacrificed to yellow fever and accidents," he had said. "Was it really to make a short cut to the Caribbean -- or just another excuse for American imperialism?"

"I don't understand why you have to go that way since you already seem to know the answer," Bela had said.

The biting sarcasm in her words took him by surprise.

"Don't be ridiculous!" he had shouted. "Besides, I don't know when I'll get another chance to see it -- and I want the experience of going through those locks. I've heard it's quite something."

"Don't YOU be ridiculous! You're already risking your life by going to a war you have no part in. Stop trying to be Tom Sawyer."

"Bela! How -- You -- ! He had choked over the words as anger threatened to make him lose control. He had charged from the

room, slamming the door. But in a few minutes he was back, though still unchastened and adamant.

"Bela, listen to me, for God's sake. You're in more danger walking down stairs in that stupid long skirt that could trip you, than I would be going through the Canal! There is nothing dangerous about it. You're so smart -- Use your head, Damn it!"

They had fought for a week, neither giving ground. In the end, however, she had won. And she was not sorry.

He had been able to book passage on a British ship out of New York for Saturday, May 1. He would have a day and night in New York to spend with friends, and he would be on the water several days less than if he had left from San Francisco by ship. And at least it alleviated the uncertainty she felt about those locks, or whatever they were, that carried ships through the Canal from the Bay of Panama to the Caribbean Sea. She had read about them and they certainly sounded dangerous to her. She'd felt a momentary tightening in her stomach as she remembered her own trip across the ocean with Hannah and Walter so many years ago.

The time went more quickly than Bela expected, with organizational demands filling her days. They squabbled about what permanent offices there would be, and who would hold them. Bela had been studying parliamentary procedure and tried to explain it to the members of the fledgeling union, but democratic process was hard for many of the workers, recent immigrants with no experience in exercising the right of franchise.

Joe Timmons decided to run for President, but he was not interested in either organization or business tasks.

"I'll run the meetings," he told Bela. "You can take care of collecting dues and all that other stuff,"

"Joe just wants to be a big shot," Bela said to Ari at dinner the night after Harvey left for New York. They were meeting to discuss setting up the structure of the Local. "He doesn't really care anything about the Union."

"You're absolutely right, Bel," Ari replied, crushing out his cigarette. Hesitating, he reached for her hand, but this time she did not pull away. "You've worked and sacrificed, and even damned near got

yourself killed trying to make it happen." He paused again. "But is it worth putting all you've accomplished at risk, fighting him? Everybody's gonna know who's doing the real work."

"I suppose so." Bela's voice was quiet as she perceived herself giving in. "I guess it doesn't matter who sits on the Chair, so long as the Union grows."

But she felt the rage within her swell as she thought, *If I were a man, nobody would dream of asking me to step aside for somebody who hasn't done a damn thing!*

They finished their dinner in silence. Finally, Ari asked, "Do you think you'll hear from Harvey before he boards the ship? I mean a telegram?"

"I don't know. I hope so."

"Sure you will."

Bela permitted herself a crooked smile. "We had a little tiff before he left."

"What? Over the Canal?"

"How did you know?"

He chuckled. "I know you, Bel."

"He finally agreed with me, but --" she looked toward the street and sighed. "I hope it wasn't a hollow victory. He wasn't very happy." She threw down her napkin. "Damn! I hate the whole idea of his going over there! It scares me!"

"When does the ship get to London?"

"Not London, Liverpool. May 8, I think. Or maybe May 7. I'm not sure. I'll have to check."

"Oh, Ari, since this whole thing started, I can't even think straight. I don't know what's wrong with me."

"You'll feel better after you hear from him. What's the name of the ship? Maybe you can send him a wireless."

Bela smiled at Ari's efforts to cheer her. "Thanks, Ari. You really are my dearest friend. Maybe I will. I'll see. Oh, its name is *Lusitania*, or something like that. I really wish he'd take an American ship, but I'm afraid I've already pushed too hard. I guess I can't have everything my way!"

XXIII

The party was going strong. The blue smoke was so thick, it burned Harvey's eyes and throat, but he didn't care. He was with friends from college days, the beer and liquor were flowing, and they had just finished singing *Godiamus Igatur* for the third or fourth time. He'd lost count. His brain felt a bit fuddled, but it was wonderful -- like being back at Rosie's saloon with his Harvard buddies after putting *The Crimson* to bed, when he was editor during his senior year.

He emptied his glass. Someone promptly handed him another. He shook his head, then reconsidered. He shrugged. "Oh, what the hell. I'm going off to war, aren't I?" He giggled at his own cleverness.

He half listened to bits and pieces of dialogue as the floor tipped somewhat. He felt a slight distancing, like he was not quite there. Well, I'll be damned, he thought, I'm drunk.

A snatch of conversation reached him from across the room. "...the Jews. They're seizing control of all ..."

I'll show those brainless academic bigots, Harvey told himself. Raising his hand, he staggered toward the group in the corner.

"Shcuze me, you bashtards -- Shtop -- " He was having difficulty talking. Finally, words came, though not those he had intended, as he bellowed, "You are shpeaking of the love I woman!"

He swayed slightly, hiccupped, and fell forward.

Harvey awoke with a jolt. "My God, what time is it?" He fumbled in his vest pocket for his watch. His head was splitting. Nausea resonated through his stomach. He had trouble focusing his eyes.

"Relax, Harv, you've got plenty of time," George Holcombe, his ex-roommate and still best friend, reassured him.

"One o'clock! In the afternoon? Dear God, is it really one o'clock?" Harvey leaped off the couch and nearly collapsed as another wave of nausea struck. He sat down, moaning, holding his middle with one hand and his head with the other.

"Got a bit of a hangover, friend?" George asked, not without sympathy.

Harvey started to nod, then grabbed his head again as the movement triggered more torture. "Worse yet, I've missed my ship. I can't believe this."

"Not to worry, Harv. You've got two hours. You'll make it."

Harvey shook his head, enduring the agony. "No! No! It's gone. It left -- at ten this morning!" He groaned in anguish. "Oh God, oh God! I missed my ship! I missed my ship!!

George stared open mouthed. "No! You told me it left at three."

Harvey covered his face. "No, I said my *train* left Oakland at three. My ship leaves -- left -- at ten!"

"Harv, I distinctly recall your saying your train left at ten and your ship at three. In fact, you were quite insistent about it."

Harvey moaned again. "I was so damn drunk! Why? I *never* drink."

"All right, Buddy, while you take a shower and drink some of this orange juice, I'll find out when the next ship leaves for Europe. With your status in the literary world and my Dad's judgeship, we might be able to get you on it." Handing Harvey the glass of juice he had just poured, he reached for the telephone. "Hello, Operator, get me the number of Cook's Travel Company, quickly please."

As Harvey, feeling slightly recovered, stepped out of the bathroom drying his hair, another towel knotted around his waist, George announced, "O.k., my friend, your guardian angel, George, has saved your hide, just like in the old days, in PoliSci."

"What? What?!" Harvey demanded, sharp points of light stabbing his eyeballs.

"You have a lower bunk on an oil tanker headed for Sweden, with a stop in Richmond, outside London. It leaves at four-forty and it's almost three now, so you better move it. The Chief Engineer was

kind enough to agree to share his bed with you in exchange for getting a "Drunk and Disorderly" fine canceled by dear old Dad. It may not be first class, but it will get you to England only two days later than the *Lusitania*."

A little over an hour later, Harvey stood on the dock ready to board *The Golden Eagle*, an American tanker.

"Maybe it should be called 'The Rusty Ostrich,'" George remarked sardonically, surveying the disreputable looking vessel.

"Hey, Dear Friend, it looks beautiful to me. Thanks for saving my job -- and my hide." Harvey embraced George and started toward the gangplank. "Oh, George, I almost forgot. I'd better let Bela know I'm on a different ship. Will you do me one more favor?"

"Sure, Pal. I'll take care of it. Just relax and enjoy your luxurious accommodations."

"Thanks. Just wire her the name of the tanker and tell her I'll explain in a letter as soon as I arrive in England."

Harvey walked up the ramp into the *Golden Eagle*, waving as he stepped onto a surprisingly clean deck. His head still ached, but his stomach had settled down to a low rumble as he headed below decks toward the Chief Engineer's quarters.

George raised his hand in a last salute to Harvey, turned and walked back toward the street. He hailed a cab, gave the driver his parents' address and settled back for the ride -- and promptly forgot the telegraph office.

XXIV

Saturday, May 8, 1915 would be the biggest night in Walter's young life. He was to play two Nocturnes and a Polonaise at an All-Chopin Program sponsored by the Music Society of Oakland. The excitement in the Kransky family was unbounded. Not only was he being paid to perform, but, more important, he would share the evening with two musicians of national prominence, a rare opportunity for a seventeen-year-old.

When he had telephoned Bela to tell her about it on Tuesday, she immediately felt a pang of guilt. She had scarcely seen her brother and sister in recent months, what with the demands of her union work and the time spent with Harvey. She felt even more conscience stricken at the grace with which Walter responded to her embarrassed explanations.

"Hey, Sis, you, of all people, have nothing to apologize for. Hannah and I owe *you*! We wouldn't even be here if not for you."

Bela couldn't believe this was her baby brother talking. He's so grown up, she thought. A sudden vision of Walter in a soldier's uniform made her gasp in fear.

"Sis! What's wrong? Are you sick?"

"No, Honey, I'm fine. I'm just excited about the concert. How did you get on?"

"Signor di Grosso, naturally," he giggled. "I guess his being on the Board of Directors of the Music Society doesn't hurt."

"Don't be so modest, Darling. You're a wonderful pianist, and you know it. And if you don't," she chastised, "you should know that

Signor di Grosso is too much of a professional to present you, if you didn't deserve it."

Now here it was Friday. She was glad she had picked up the concert tickets for herself and Katzie yesterday, because today would be busy, what with dues collections after a full day of work at Russell's.

The watch pinned to her blouse said four o'clock. She loved that watch. Harvey had given it to her for her twenty-eighth birthday. He told her it was to replace the one that had belonged to her mother, which had finally stopped running. He kissed her on the tip of her nose as he pinned it on, saying he hoped it would last as long as her mother's had. She sighed. That was only two weeks ago, shortly before he left for New York, but it seemed like months since she had seen him.

They had made love the night before he left, but it hadn't been very good for either of them. She simply couldn't get her mind off the nightmare image of Harvey surrounded by guns and exploding shells.

At least I exercised some self control by not sending a wireless to the ship, she told herself. I've nagged him enough, but I'll make it up to him. Beaming happily, she envisioned their first embrace on his return.

"Whatcha smilin' about?" Her old friend Ronia, operating the machine next to hers, startled her out of her reverie. (Ronia had recently begun working at Russells.)

Bela sighed. "Just wishing Harvey's trip was over and he was back in the U.S."

"Hey, look, there's your friend Ari, just came in."

Bela looked around. "Where?"

"Over there. Talking to Old Man Russell."

Bela saw Mr. Russell look over in her direction, shake his head slowly, then look back toward Ari and nod.

Bela was puzzled as Ari walked toward her. Was there a problem with the union? she wondered.

He placed his hand on her shoulder. "Bela, Honey, get your things and come with me." His expression was solemn.

"Ari, don't be ridiculous. I've got two more hours."

"It's all right, Bel. Russell said it's o.k. Come, let's get your hat and coat." She stood up slowly.

The room was suddenly quiet, as machines stopped. A hum of whispers spread through the room as Ari held Bela's arm, guiding her through the door.

Outside, the May sun shone brightly as a tiny English sparrow chirped at them from an overhead wire.

"Ari, what on Earth is going on? Would you tell me, please?"

"Come on, let's get in the machine." He walked her briskly toward the car parked in front of Russell's.

"O.k., but don't keep me in suspense."

"No, Bel, I'm not."

He climbed in beside her, placed his hands on the steering wheel, then in his lap. He cleared his throat.

"Ari, what is it? Is something bothering you?" Her heart skipped a beat as a sense of foreboding suddenly touched her. "Ari, what's wrong?"

"You haven't seen the papers today, have you?"

Her breath caught in her throat. She shook her head, unable to speak.

He placed his arm gently around her shoulder as he said quietly, "Bela, Honey, the *Lusitania* was hit by a German sub."

Bela's anguished howl could be heard inside Russell's Uniform Factory.

Ari held her tightly as, beating his chest with her fists, she shrieked, "No!! No!! No!! No-oo-o!!!"

"Bela, wait! Wait! See here, it says there are survivors! Look!" He opened the newspaper he had been carrying under his arm and held it up for her to see. But what she saw was a banner in huge black letters:

LUSITANIA TORPEDOED

"Harvey!! Harvee-y!!!" Her agonized sobs tore through Ari as he cradled her. Removing her hat, he brushed back the hair from her perspiring forehead.

"How is she?" Ari asked as Mrs. Katz tiptoed into the kitchen where he sat, newspapers spread out on the table in front of him.

"Well, she's asleep, poor darling. I guess the stuff Dr. Siegel gave her is finally taking effect."

"His name isn't listed among the survivors," Ari said, "but it's not among the dead either -- or the missing."

"But the lists aren't complete, are they?"

Ari shook his head. "Hopefully we'll know something by tomorrow. I assume he gave her name as next of kin, didn't he?"

"I don't know. Maybe he gave Tex?"

"Tex?"

"You know, Clarence Field, the man who takes care of the horses. He's been like a father to Harvey. Raised him after the parents got killed."

"Let's call him."

But Tex hadn't heard anything, either.

"I guess we just wait -- and hope," Ari sighed. "Look, I'm going to leave now and let us all get some rest. I'll stop by first thing in the morning."

"It's totally hopeless. There just seems to be no way to get anything specific from Cunard Lines. They're in chaos. And the travel agencies are no better." Ari had been trying since early Saturday morning to get information about passengers. It was now 9:30 in the evening, which made it about 5:30 Sunday morning off the coast of Ireland, where the ship had gone down. It was two days since the submarine attacked.

"What about the papers? Would they know something?" Tex had come up from Carmel around noon and was sitting out the vigil with Ari and Mrs. Katz. Bela was still sleeping off the sedative administered by the doctor yesterday evening.

"All they know is that his name is not on any of the official lists that Cunard has given them. But everybody admits they're incomplete."

"Did the papers you called agree not to blast his name in the headlines, when you asked them?" Mrs. Katz asked, more concerned about the effect on Bela than any possible undesired publicity for Harvey -- That is if he's alive, she thought.

Ari snorted. "Huh! They don't give a damn about a Socialist writer when they're preoccupied with trying to account for all the big financiers who are missing."

"Have you heard? Is Harvey all right?" Bela staggered in, her face swollen.

Ari jumped up and caught her, guiding her to a chair.

"Here, Darling, have some coffee. Eat something." Mrs. Katz' usually firm hand spilled hot liquid as she set the cup down in front of Bela.

Bela ignored the coffee. "He's dead, isn't he? I know he's dead." The tears welled up as she covered her face with trembling hands.

"No, Bel, we don't know anything yet except that he's definitely not listed as dead." Ari tried to sound reassuring. "They don't have all of the names of people who've been rescued, and there are more being added as the boats come in."

Bela suddenly noticed Tex. "Oh, Tex," she began to cry again, "have you heard anything from Harvey? Maybe they'll let you know."

"No, Bela, I ain't heard, but Gladys will let us know immediately if anything comes in there."

O'Reilly chose that moment to leap onto Bela's lap, which brought more tears. "This is all I have left." Closing her eyes, she hugged the kitten to her breast.

Ari, Tex, and Mrs. Katz exchanged grave looks.

Bela suddenly wailed, "Oh, God! The concert. Poor Walter. I forgot his concert!"

"The concert was cancelled," Mrs. Katz said, deciding not to add the reason -- the ship disaster.

"Poor Walter. His big night," Bela moaned in grief, both for her brother and her lover.

XXV

Word of the U-Boat attack spread quickly on *The Golden Eagle*. Although it was a non-combatant ship destined for a neutral port, defensive maneuvers were immediately initiated as all on board, Harvey included, were placed on alert. Harvey's first impulse was to contact Bela, to reassure her, but the ship's radio, the only means of communication on the tanker, was needed for security. Anyway, he realized, George telegraphed her so she knows I'm o.k.

He felt an overwhelming relief at having overslept, missing the *Lusitania*, and marveled at the irony of a fate that decides whether a man lives or dies at a particular moment in time. He chuckled to himself as he thought, *Don't get superstitious, Old Man, 'twas no fate, but mere coincidence!* He knew full well that he could have been floating around in the water at this very moment -- or worse. He shivered involuntarily.

As the *Golden Eagle* slowly made its way toward its first stop, outside of London, all eyes constantly swept the gray-green waters for signs of submarines.

Once one of the seamen shouted, "Periscope to starboard!"

All hands came immediately to stations. Although it was a neutral ship, the tanker was armed for self protection and guns were made ready to fire. As he watched the guns being loaded and aimed, Harvey thought, *This is it! War!* His heart beat a tattoo against his rib cage as he felt a mixture of fear and excited anticipation. Until now, the trip had been monotonous and boring, as he struggled to find something of moment to liven the first of the series of articles he was

writing for *The Voice*. Well, now he had it, for sure. That is, if he lived to send it.

Then, as suddenly as it had begun, the alert was over. The "periscope" turned out to be one of a pod of whales migrating north for the summer, its dorsal fin scutting the surface of a somewhat choppy sea. Harvey felt a mixture of relief and disappointment. At least he had the introduction to the series:

*"Today we knew what it was like to be at war.
We were attacked -- by a whale wending its way to
the peace and tranquility of the Arctic Circle."*

He read it again, yanked it from the typewriter, crumpled and tossed it into the wastebasket, where it nestled in with a dozen other balled up sheets.

He sat for several minutes, head in hands, waiting for the tautness to drain from his body. Finally, he decided to forget the humor and play it straight, describing the expectation of attack, the warlike readiness, and above all, the fear shared by every man aboard, from the captain down. Yes, that was it, and the almost hysterical laughter when the sighting was identified as a whale was the perfect counterpoint to the tension of the previous moments.

XXVI

Sunday passed with no word regarding Harvey. The newspapers were full of the sinking, and since a number of prominent Americans had been aboard the *Lusitania*, there were pages of biographies and obituaries. They had also begun listing those who were known to have gone down, those who were rescued, and the missing, which changed hourly as more information was received. The fact that Harvey's name did not appear on any of the lists gave Bela and Mrs. Katz no reassurance.

Ari, however, was beginning to wonder. It struck him as odd that a prominent author like Harvey Townsend, and a local man to boot, had not been featured in a headline, let alone listed. On Monday morning he decided to go to the Cunard offices in San Francisco and remain there until some information was forthcoming.

The offices were still in chaos, with hundreds of people milling about, demanding assistance. But Ari remained steadfast, and gradually the line he had chosen moved toward a desk. The poor guy looks on the verge of collapse, he thought, watching the bedraggled clerk in shirtsleeves, starched collar awry, attempting to handle the shouting, unruly crowd with remarkable patience.

"I hope he holds up until I get to him!" Ari murmured partly to himself and partly to the woman standing in front of him.

As she turned back toward him, Ari mentally kicked himself. She had obviously been crying. She nodded and dabbed her eyes with a soggy handkerchief. "My parents were on that ship -- Their first vacation in twenty years."

Ari nodded, not sure what to say.

"Now they're missing." Her voice rose somewhat, as she struggled to extort a glimmer of hope. "They may have reached land, though, and just haven't been found yet. My father's a strong swimmer, and he would be able to help my mother -- maybe." Her voice broke again on the last word.

As he listened to the young woman, who couldn't have been more than seventeen, the full impact of the disaster struck Ari. It occurred to him that this girl was about the same age as Bela when she was left orphaned and forced to travel half way across the world with her little brother and sister. He suddenly felt overwhelmed with grief for everyone here and for all the men, women, and children stricken by the impact of the war.

We're not going to be able to stay out of it, he thought. In some ways we're already in it.

Occupied with his thoughts as he half listened to the young woman in front of him describe the bon voyage party for her parents, he hadn't noticed how far the line had moved. There were now only two people ahead of him. Then it was just the young woman.

"I'm sorry, Ma'am, Mr. and Mrs. Grover Perkins are still listed as missing. Check with us again tomorrow." The Cunard man sighed as he ran his hand through his hair.

In a hoarse croak he asked Ari, barely glancing up, "Yes, sir. Name please?"

"Harvey Townsend."

The clerk picked up a sheaf of papers, glanced through it, appeared about to set it aside, changed his mind and reread each page more carefully as Ari waited, fighting waning patience. The man picked up two more sets of papers and went through the same routine. He shook his head.

"What was that name, again?"

"Townsend. Harvey Townsend."

"How do you spell the last name?"

"T-o-w-n-s-e-n-d."

He looked through each set of papers once more. "Just a minute, please." The agent stood up and walked away from the desk, disappearing through a door at the back of the room. He returned about two minutes later, carrying another packet of papers.

After carefully scanning the new list, shaking his head slowly, he looked up. "Mr. Harvey Townsend is not on the *Lusitania* Passenger List."

Ari experienced a momentary elation, quickly replaced by confusion. "He has to be. That was the ship he was scheduled to go to Europe on. Check it again."

Clutching the last packet and shaking it in front of Ari, as he rapped it with the fingers of his other hand, the Cunard representative raised his voice slightly. "Mister, this is the Passenger Manifest for the *Lusitania*. Your friend's name is NOT on it. There's no way he could have been on that ship." Under his breath he added, "You should be thankful."

Ari was bewildered. "What do you advise me to do?"

"Just a second. Let me check something." The clerk disappeared again, returning quickly with what looked like a ledger. After leafing through it, he looked up, grinning slightly for the first time. "Well, Harvey Townsend had a Second Class ticket on the *Lusitania* all right, but he failed to show. In other words, he missed the boat!"

"You're sure?" Ari's heart was thumping wildly.

"Yep. Happens sometimes. He picked a good one to miss." The fellow knew he shouldn't say something so disloyal to Cunard, but it felt good to be able to give somebody good news for a change.

"Thanks." Ari walked out of the Cunard office, hailed a cab and directed it to the Ferry building. He headed back to Oakland to give Bela the happy news.

"Bela, you have to eat something." Tessie had come Sunday afternoon as soon as she had been able to arrange care for the children. Now it was Monday evening as, in desperation, she held a forkful of noodle pudding to Bela's trembling lips.

Bela shook her head. "Tess, I can't. I know you mean well, but I just can't eat right now."

"I understand, Darling, but you've hardly eaten anything in two days. You have to keep up your strength. It's not going to help Harvey for you to get sick."

As tears welled up in Bela's swollen red-rimmed eyes again, Tessie bit her lip, furious at herself for the unthinking cliché. She

wished she could ease her friend's pain, knowing full well that she couldn't.

Seeming to read her thoughts, Bela put a hand on Tessie's. "It's all right, Tess. Just having you here helps." They embraced each other, both women sobbing.

The doorbell jangled. Bela leaped up, but Tessie was at the door first. "Oh, Ari. Did you find out anything?" she asked.

Striding past her with a shout, "YES!" Ari grasped Bela's shoulders and sat her down on the sofa. During the long trip back from San Francisco, Ari had mulled over how he should tell Bela what he had learned. He had finally decided to tell her immediately, without preamble.

"Bel, Honey, Harvey missed the ship. He's safe!"

"Wha-what? Are you sure? He's alive? He's all right? How do you know?" Bela paled, stunned, then she began to weep hysterically. A moment later, she was laughing, then crying, unable to control the flood of emotions that engulfed her.

Alarmed, both Ari and Tessie held her. Mrs. Katz came rushing in from the kitchen. "What happened? What did you hear? They found him?"

XXVII

As Ari related the events of the day, Bela's relief slowly turned to anger, then to rage. "That BASTARD!!"

"Bela! I never heard you use such language!" Even the enlightened, liberal ideologue, Brocha Katz, was shocked, more however at Bela's reaction than her profanity.

"Why didn't he let me know? He knew I was worried. Look what he put me through. That's it! We're finished!" She began pacing rapidly across the room from wall to wall.

"Hey! Hold on, Bel. There could be lots of reasons why you haven't heard from him. He could be on a ship without a wireless; or he may have written a letter. You'll see. After all, it takes a week, you know." Ari would love to see Harvey, the man he considered his rival for Bela's love, lose out, but his sense of fairness couldn't let it happen this way.

"No!" Bela shook her head so hard that hairpins flew in every direction as strands of black hair fell about her eyes and back. "That's no excuse. Whatever happened, he could have sent a telegram before he boarded another ship -- if he did."

"Oh, Bela, you don't mean that," Tessie pleaded.

"Yes, I do. If he really loved me, he wouldn't let me suffer like this. I'll never trust him again! Ever!"

"Bela, Darling, that's not fair. He didn't know the *Lusitania* was gonna be sunk." Mrs. Katz knew that reasoning with Bela when she was upset was futile, and she had never seen her this overwrought; but she had to try.

Bela sat down on the sofa, suddenly exhausted. "I'm going to bed." She stood up, turned and strode from the room, no longer able to hide the tears.

After Bela left, everyone in the room was silent for several minutes. No one seemed to know what to say.

"What do you think happened?" Mrs. Katz was the first to speak.

Ari shrugged. "Who knows? It could be anything, I suppose."

"Well, I think he should have let Bela know he'd be on a different ship. That's just simple consideration. I don't know what I'd do, if Victor did something like that." Tessie looked at her mother who was nodding agreement.

"You know," Ari said soberly, "we're all assuming that Harvey simply overslept or something and missed the ship. And of course, if that's true, he is one lucky fellow."

Mrs. Katz looked at him in alarm. "What do you mean 'if that's true'?"

Ari hesitated. "Well -- you know. New York's a big place. Lots of things could happen there."

"You mean he could be hurt -- or something?" Tessie's eye's widened, the frown quickly transformed into lines of worry.

"I'm going to call Tex. Maybe he's heard from Harvey by now." Tex had left around noon, promising to be back after he'd taken care of the horses. Mrs. Katz moved toward the telephone.

"Ma, he's probably either on his way back here -- or maybe resting." Tessie reached for the hand holding the receiver.

"Then maybe Gladys knows."

Tessie placed an arm around her mother's shoulder. "Come on, Ma, wouldn't he call Bel first?"

Mrs. Katz nodded, sighing. "I guess you're right, Honey."

The waning daylight faded to night. No one had spoken for the last hour. Finally Ari rose. "Look, I have some Union business that I really can't put off any longer. I'll be working at home. Call me if you hear anything. Even if it's four o'clock in the morning." He walked slowly to the door. "Remember, call me, any time," he waved to Tessie and Brocha as they stood on the door stoop. "I'll stop by in the morning."

"Maybe you should go, too," Mrs. Katz said to her daughter. "It'll be late when you get home."

"It's all right, Ma, I can stay. The kids are with Victor's mother. She'll keep them as long as I need." A crooked little smile touched Tessie's lips. "If it weren't for the situation, it would be a relief to be away from them for a little while."

Her mother nodded. "You need a vacation, Tessie Darling." They walked back into the house arm-in-arm.

XXVIII

It was now three days since Ari had learned that Harvey was not on the *Lusitania*. "I'm really worried about Bela. She just goes around the house tight-lipped, with hardly even a 'hello' to anybody." Mrs. Katz handed a dish to Tessie. "Here. Wipe."

"What do you think happened?" Tessie asked, setting the plate on top of the pile in the cupboard.

When her mother remained silent, Tessie pressed, "Ma, come on. You've got something on your mind. What is it?"

Mrs. Katz shrugged. "Who knows? Could be anything. Maybe Bela will hear from him soon."

"You don't think anything bad happened to him, do you, Mama?" Tessie's tone was an observation rather than an expression of concern. "What is it? What are you thinking?"

Slowly wiping the sink with the damp dish cloth, Mrs. Katz sighed. Looking around, she whispered, "I don't want Bela should hear. She's upset enough."

"Ma, what?"

She sighed again. "God forgive me if I'm wrong and he's lying somewhere in a hospital." She took Tessie's arm and guided her to the kitchen table. "Sit, Honey."

They both sat. Tessie waited. You know," Mrs. Katz began, "I've known Harvey all his life, and I love him very much. I loved his mother and father, too. In fact, they were your Papa's and my best friends. But they were not very responsible people."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, you know, to hear Harvey tell it Tex only took over raising him after they were killed, but that's not true. Tex took care of

him from the time he was a baby, while Jesse and Helen Townsend were busy running around the country for the Movement."

"So what are you thinking, Ma?"

"I'm thinking maybe Harvey is a little bit irresponsible, too." She shook her head. "In fact, I know he is. It's been the one thing that has worried me about Bela being in love with him." She thought back to Bela and Harvey's first meeting. "I told him to be careful with her. I was afraid he could hurt her without meaning to."

"Oh, Ma, don't worry about Bel. Sure she's upset right now, but you know how strong she is."

Mrs. Katz nodded. "Yes, she's tough, all right. When you think what that little mite has been through in her life, she --"

The sound of the doorbell jarred through the house. The two women stared at each other.

"Well, answer it!" Mrs. Katz shouted.

Tessie ran toward the door, but Bela was already there.

"I have a cablegram for Miss Kransky, Miss Bela Kransky."

"That's me!" Bela grabbed the yellow envelope and started to shut the door.

"Wait, Bel. You go ahead. I'll take care of the boy." Tessie ran to her purse and withdrew a dime, which she handed to the messenger.

"Thanks, Ma'am." The boy touched his cap and ran down the stairs, hopped onto his bicycle and disappeared into the night, as Bela tore open the envelope and read the wire. She held it for a moment, read it again, crumpled it into a tight ball and threw it at Tessie.

Dumbfounded, Tessie stared.

"Well, go ahead! Read it!" Bela cried, stalking from the room.

Tessie picked up the missile and slowly unfolded it, smoothing out the wrinkles. She read it and handed it to Mrs. Katz, who had followed Tessie into the front room.

Mrs. Katz read:

"DUMB LUCK STOP BUT WE'RE NOT COMPLAINING
ARE WE STOP LETTER FOLLOWING STOP LOVE YOU
[SIGNED] HARVEY"

"Thank God, at least he's all right."

"Not only that, Mama, don't you see? It sounds like he assumes she knew. He probably sent her a wire when he missed the boat, but she's so mad right now, she can't see it."

"So what could have happened to it?"

"Who knows, Ma, maybe with all the load, they just didn't get it out -- or sent it to the wrong place or something."

"Go talk to her, Honey."

Tessie shook her head. "I dunno, Ma, she's pretty mad, still. I'd rather let her simmer down a little and think about it, first."

Mrs. Katz nodded. "I guess you're right. She'll probably realize it herself, once she calms down."

XXIX

But Bela did not calm down; at least her anger and hurt toward Harvey did not dissipate. When his letter arrived the following Monday, ten days after the disaster, she left it lying unopened on the sideboard. Mrs. Katz had placed it there after Bela refused to take it from her extended hand or to even glance at it.

Tessie had returned home to her family on Sunday, and Bela was back at Russell's. She filled her evenings with Union activities and avoided any discussion of Harvey. An uneasy quiet settled on the household. Arriving an average of every other day, postmarked first from various parts of England and later from France, letters from Harvey continued to pile up unread on the sideboard.

Finally, almost three weeks following his first letter, another cablegram arrived. When Bela refused to open it, Mrs. Katz snatched it from her hand and tore it open. She read loudly:

"DID YOU GET MY LETTERS STOP ARE YOU ILL STOP
LETTER EXPLAINING SHOULD HAVE ARRIVED STOP
PLEASE CABLE STOP AM VERY WORRIED
ALL MY LOVE
[SIGNED] HARVEY"

Bela stood silent, hands clenched, her small breasts heaving. Exasperated, Mrs. Katz shouted, "How can you do this? You're not only hurting him, you're tearing yourself up!" Then, more softly, "Bela, Darling, this is not you. You know you love him, or you wouldn't be so hurt and angry." She placed her hands gently on Bela's shoulders and led her to her favorite seat, the ottoman.

As Mrs. Katz took her seat, Bela placed her head on Mrs. Katz's lap and began to cry. "Oh, Katzie, I'm sorry. I've been a beast."

Mrs. Katz smiled as she stroked Bela's hair. "Well, things are going to be all right now."

"What do you mean? How do you know?"

Mrs. Katz laughed. "Because you just called me 'Katzie' for the first time since this whole thing happened!"

The two women hugged each other, laughing and crying in concert.

They sat thus, neither saying anything, for the better part of an hour. Finally, Mrs. Katz carefully lifted Bela's head from her lap.

"Well, I'm going to bed. And please," tweaking Bela's cheek, "read your own mail. These old eyes aren't very strong, you know."

Bela nodded and reached for the pile of letters. She would start at the bottom, with the first one, and work her way forward. It was in the second letter that Harvey indicated that he had figured out what had very likely happened -- that George had either forgotten to wire Bela or had not realized how important it was. He knew she must be angry after being so frightened when she thought he was on the *Lusitania*. He felt like an idiot for having drunk so much the night before, when he wasn't used to liquor, but he was also concerned that she might be ill or that she had met with an accident. By the fifth letter, he was frantic. That was when he sent the second cablegram.

It was four o'clock in the morning, when Bela got to the last letter. Her eyes almost closing, fighting her body's demand for sleep, she slowly tore the flap off the envelope. Her guilt over the unfair treatment she now knew she had shown Harvey would not let her rest until she had read them all. But despite the lateness of the hour, she had something else to do first.

She stood up slowly, the muscles in her back and legs throbbing with fatigue. She walked slowly to the telephone and placed the receiver to her ear. "Hello, Operator, I want to send a Transatlantic Cable to Harvey L. Townsend, Pension de la Voix, Chateau-Thierry, France."

Feeling somewhat buoyed after the lengthy (and expensive) message of apology to Harvey, Bela picked up the letter she had opened, curled up in Mrs. Katz' armchair and began to read:

My dearest Bela,

There has been no response from you, and I am in despair. Is there no way I can make up to you for terrible wrong I have done you? Is there no way I can convince you of my remorse at having caused you pain? How ironic that I, whose living comes from words, cannot find the route to your forgiveness. At the very least, my love, let me know if you are all right. I pray that I am correct in assuming that Katzie or Tex would have let me know if you were not.

As you know from my previous letters (if you've read them), I met three British soldiers who have been a lot of help to me, particularly with background on the war and in sharing their experiences. But the past two days have left a more compelling impact on me than anything I've seen. I spent yesterday and most of today (it's now two a.m. here) with an eighteen-year-old youngster from Wales. At first I could barely understand him. He spoke a mixture of Celtic and Cockney, but after a couple of hours we were communicating like two old friends who grew up in the same village.

You'd love him, Bel. He is sensitive, intelligent, lonely, scared. He's only about ten months older than your brother, Walter, and he plays the violin. He also has a lovely tenor singing voice, and he sang a couple of Welsh folk songs for me. His hair is still bleached from the summer sun at home. His father is a coal miner, but he's forbidden Olwyn (his real name) to follow in his footsteps. He wants the boy to have a better life than he did. But will he?

Two weeks ago, he had both legs amputated. He was struck by mortar fire, and shrapnel shattered the bone just below the knee in his right leg and the mid-thigh in his left. They're going to try to fit him with artificial legs when there is sufficient healing -- if they can. At least he can still play his violin and sing.

I can't wait to get home to you, my love. I've had all I want of war and death and maimed children -- yes, children -- barely out of grade school. I need the peace and comfort of your gentle arms and the sweet passion of our love to heal the wounds of what I've seen. It's selfish of me, I know, but that's how it is now.

I expect to leave France in a week, which should bring me home in about three weeks: one week for the ocean crossing and one more for the transcontinental rail trip.

Give O'Reilly an Irish 'Meow' and tickle his whiskers for me.

*All my love,
Harvey"*

Bela sat for several minutes gazing at the peach, scarlet, and purple streamers cast by the rising sun. She folded the letter and put it with the others. The terrible grief she felt for the boy Olwyn, who was so much like Walter, lay heavy within her, but she couldn't cry. She was suddenly ashamed of her willful self-pity. She stood and walked quietly to her room, trying not to waken Katzie.

Suddenly Bela wanted very much for Harvey to be home, to hold her in his arms, to comfort and reassure her, to tell her that there would be no war for America, that the war in Europe would soon be over, and that Walter would be safe. She felt her throat constrict as tears blurred her vision. She fell into an exhausted sleep.

XXX

Harvey's return was observed quietly. The tragedy of the ship disaster in which over a thousand people lost their lives, coupled with the ravages of war Harvey had seen in his six weeks in France, overshadowed any real festivity.

"So, we'll make our Friday night dinner on Thursday this time, okay?" Standing in the kitchen door, Mrs. Katz looked hopefully at Harvey as he moved his valise to the wall. He had arrived at the Oakland train depot too weary for the trip to Carmel that night. At Mrs. Katz's insistence, he agreed to spend the night in Oakland and go on to Sun Ranch in the morning.

He reached out his arms, smiling. "Thank God, Katzie, you'll never change." He hugged her tightly. "Yes, it's okay; it's fine."

Bela stood near Harvey, wanting to hold him, to be held, but unable to move. There is a terrible gulf between us, she thought, and I created most of it; but I am still so angry. Finally she said, "Harvey, I know how tired you must be. Why don't you go lie down 'til dinner time. Agnes and Levi are probably already on their way from San Francisco and Tessie and Victor and the kids will be here in about an hour."

Harvey chuckled. "Well, I see Katzie's question was strictly a formality."

"Please, Harvey, go lie down. I'll call Ari."

"Ari?"

"It's thanks to Ari's efforts that we found out you were safe!" she said, striving to suppress her pique. More gently, she added, "Go on, Harv, you can lie down in my room." She blushed. "Katzie had

the handyman bring up Tessie's old bed from the basement, when he came to fix the sink yesterday."

Saying nothing but with a crooked little smile, Harvey stepped into Bela's room and lay down. In a moment, he was asleep.

"Bela, phone and invite your sister and brother, too," Mrs. Katz called from the kitchen.

"Yes, I was going to. Walter, especially, is very anxious to talk to Harvey."

After dinner ten people sat around the dining room table, while Tessie's children played quietly in the living room. Harvey, first reluctant to talk about his European experiences, warmed to the concern and interest of the others. He ended up filling the next two-and-a-half hours with disturbing details of what he had seen and undergone, never able to be the detached journalist.

"Do you think we're gonna get in it?" Walter asked at one point.

"I think it's inevitable," Harvey replied, to Bela's dismay, although she knew he was probably right.

"Thanks again for a wonderful evening, Mrs. Katz," Ari said as he stood on the stoop, his crisp curls turned a deep bronze by the light from the living room. "It was very nice of you to include me,"

"'Include' you? You *are* included. You're part of the family."

"Come on, Ari, your passengers are waiting!" Tessie called from the sidewalk.

"Can you move over, please?" Hannah pleaded, as she crowded into the back seat of Ari's automobile, next to Tessie, Victor, and their two children.

Ari grinned. "I better go; my `fare' is getting impatient."

"My daughter has no manners," Mrs. Katz giggled.

"Hannah," Ari called, skipping down the stairs two at a time, "sit in front with Walter and me. You'll be more comfortable."

The sudden silence after everyone had left seemed to create an uneasy void.

"I'm going to bed," Mrs. Katz announced. "Goodnight, Kids. Don't worry about disturbing me, if you two want to stay up for a

while and talk." She covered a mighty yawn with her hand as she left the room.

Bela really laughed for the first time since Harvey had arrived. "Subtlety has never been one of Katzie's problems."

Harvey, stepping toward the sofa, held out an arm to Bela. "Come here and sit down, Darling, we do have to talk."

Uncertain whether to sit on the sofa or elsewhere, Bela hesitated. Harvey reached for her. Then he was holding her tightly, their bodies pressed together as she felt herself melt into him. His mouth sought hers. Suddenly she pushed at his chest and wriggled free.

"NO!" She strode several steps backward, falling into Mrs. Katz's chair. "I'll sit here. You stay on the couch. Then we'll talk."

Harvey sat back down on the sofa. Leaning forward, hands dangling between his knees, staring at the floor, he said in a subdued voice, "I see you're still angry. I know you were pretty worried about me. I'm sorry to have caused you so much pain."

Bela said nothing.

"I guess I made a lot of trouble for everyone."

Still Bela did not reply.

Harvey raised his eyes. "Look, George really messed up! He was supposed to send you a telegram. When I finally found out he didn't, I was furious, and I let him have it! I told him I'd never trust him to do me a favor again! Some friend he turned out to be."

Bela stared at Harvey in amazement. "You really don't know, do you?"

"Know what?"

"What I'm concerned about."

Harvey was confused. "What *are* you concerned about?"

Bela hesitated. She wasn't certain herself what troubled her so deeply -- or at least how to explain it. She closed her eyes. "Harvey, we've slid into this relationship, we've made love with each other, we've kind of assumed we would eventually get married -- at least I have, or I don't think we would ever have become as intimate as we have -- and I don't mean just sex -- although that, too." She stopped, wondering where she was going with this.

"Darling, of course we're going to be married!" He moved toward her.

"No! Wait! Let me finish. You have to understand what I expect from marriage -- for both of us. I tried to tell you in a way before you left for Europe. At least I tried to tell you what was most important to me. Remember how upset I was when you told me some silly tale about working for the State Department instead of the truth? Remember that, Harvey?"

"But, Darling, I have told you the truth. George was supposed to let you know what ship I was on and when I'd arrive in England. He just forgot."

"He forgot -- but it was your problem. Damn it, Harvey! It all boils down to -- *trust* -- and-and responsibility. I need to trust that the person I marry will not cause me pain -- that he will accept responsibility for not hurting me -- for doing what he has to do.

"And you have the right to expect the same from me." She exhaled and sobbed, unsure if she had said what she meant to say, but unable to continue. "Oh God, I can't explain it!"

Harvey took her in his arms. "Dearest Bela, I will never lie to you or hide anything from you -- and I would never ever knowingly inflict pain on you, any more than you would deliberately hurt me. But Darling, sometimes it's going to happen, simply because we're human -- and we make mistakes."

"Oh Harvey!" She held tightly to him.

"Our love for each other will always see us through, my Dear One," he murmured as he pressed his lips on hers. This time she did not pull away.

He led her into her bedroom. The extra bed could have remained in the basement.

XXXI

The wedding date was set. Bela and Harvey would be married on the first Sunday in October. They had decided to keep it simple, with just a few of their closest friends and Bela's family in attendance.

"I know Mary's going to be upset," Bela told Harvey as they sat in the Katz living room after dinner one Friday night in the middle of August, "but there's no way I would consider having anyone except Katie give me away."

"Darling, it's our wedding, and no one else has any say in the matter." Harvey paused. "You know, that whole business of 'giving the bride away' strikes me as absurd. You're not a slave or a piece of property to be given to *anyone* -- including me."

Bela nodded. "It's just a ritual -- but actually, that's where it comes from -- it's not very long ago that women were considered chattel."

"In some places they still are -- And they pay the groom a 'bride price' or dowry -- But here I am willing to take you off their hands free of charge."

"And what a bargain you're getting."

"Indeed I am!" Harvey grabbed her at the waist, lifted her above his head and whirled her around.

"Harvey Townsend, put me down!" she squealed, grabbing onto his shoulders and kicking her feet against the empty air.

He set her down but held her as both of them giggled, breathless.

"You know, I have an idea," Bela said a few moments later, still panting.

"And what is that, My Love?" Harvey asked, continuing to hold her.

"Why don't we eliminate the 'give away' business all together?"

"Spoken like a true advocate of the rights of women, Darling. And it would certainly solve our dilemma."

When they told Mrs. Katz later that evening of their decision to write their own ceremony, an unheard of flouting of convention, and eliminate the "giving away" custom, her support was unequivocally enthusiastic. "I think that's a wonderful idea," she exclaimed, clapping her hands. "What better way could there be to express the depth of your love than with words that come from your own heart!" Her eyes twinkled as she added, "Especially when one of you is a writer."

Bela looked serious as she muttered, "I'll be thankful if Mary is half as agreeable."

As it turned out, Mary's reaction was nowhere near as negative as Bela had feared. "Well, I'm not surprised," she said, with a crooked grin. "You're a modern woman, and in America, I suppose, a modern woman does what she pleases."

Hannah, however, was less receptive. "Bela, how could you? What will everybody think?" Now nineteen, she was deeply concerned with impressing her friends and was acquiring a rigid system of values. This was a source of concern and irritation to Bela, but she wisely kept her counsel. Maybe, she thought, she needs to be this way to counteract my influence and develop her own personality.

Although Hannah was convinced that what Bela was doing was wrong and would embarrass them all, she finally agreed to be maid of honor. Bela knew that she had Walter to thank for this, at least in part.

"It would be an honor," he had replied to Harvey's request that he be best man. "And don't worry about Hannah," he assured Bela. "She'll be glad to be your attendant when I remind her that she'll get to wear a beautiful new dress!"

Bela continued to marvel at the maturity of this eighteen-year-old brother of hers.

"We still haven't dealt with the central issue," Harvey reminded Bela one September evening as they sat listening to the recently acquired gramophone, a gift from the two of them to Mrs. Katz for her sixtieth birthday.

With diminishing eyesight, Mrs. Katz was now able to read only large print, and that only for limited periods. They had hoped the phonograph, in view of her love of opera, would serve to provide a new source of entertainment for her

"I know," Bela said, standing up to crank the machine, "I guess we've both been avoiding it; and now we've only got a little more than three weeks."

"Do you want a rabbi, Darling?" Harvey asked. "It's fine with me if you do. I've no religious preference of my own, you know."

Bela was silent as she wound the Victrola. She set the needle on the disc and stood for a moment, rubbing the rich mahogany of the cabinet with the sleeve of her blouse.

Becoming aware of what she was doing, she brushed the back of the sleeve as she sat back down on the sofa with Harvey. She sighed. "I've only been inside a synagogue twice since I came to this country. Once after the Earthquake, when I had recovered from pneumonia, to thank God and to pray for the dead. It was what's called a *Yiskor* Service. And the other time was when Walter made his Bar Mitzvah."

Harvey placed his arm around her shoulder but said nothing, allowing her to make the decision.

"I want to be fair to both of us," she continued. "Do you think maybe we should talk to someone?"

"Who?"

"A rabbi, maybe? It would have to be a Reform rabbi, because I don't think any of the others -- you know, Orthodox or Conservative -- would perform a wedding with a Gentile -- a non-Jew."

Harvey grinned. "I know what a Gentile is, Darling -- a *goy*. Besides, I could convert. I would be perfectly agreeable," He kissed her on the end of her nose, as he added, "then I wouldn't be a *sheygetz* any more."

Bela was serious. "I don't know, Harv. It's not that simple. It's not something you can do in three weeks. You have to do a lot of

studying -- you know -- to learn about Judaism. And -- and there are other things -- ceremonies -- and --"

"Darling, I know about the ceremonies and rituals. Most of that portion is already taken care of." He chuckled. "Remember, I had progressive parents."

"I know, Dearest, but there's a lot to consider; and I couldn't ask you to do it just for me. And even the most liberal Reform Rabbi would not participate in conversion with someone he believed was doing it only to please somebody else."

"All right, Honey -- whatever you want to do. In any event I can always go through conversion after we're married."

Bela smiled. "Maybe we should talk to Katzie about whom to have perform the ceremony. She's so wise, and she knows us both so well."

"Good idea."

Bela gasped as another thought struck her. "Harvey! I'm sure a rabbi would not go along with doing the service we've written. It's too secular."

"How do you mean? It's really not that different than a traditional one. We pledge our love for all eternity." He chuckled. "That's even better than 'until death us do part.' And we substitute 'respect' for 'obey' and omit the word 'God' as we take our vows before family and friends."

Bela shook her head. "Dearest Harvey, despite your worldliness and sophistication, it's obvious that you haven't had much contact with religion -- not that I have, either."

Harvey threw back his head with a hearty laugh. "Can't expect a clergyman to leave out God, eh?"

"Right. So we talk to Katzie, o.k.? Maybe she'll know of somebody."

And of course, Katzie did. "I was hoping you'd ask me. You know, I belong to the *Arbeiter Ring*-- the Workmen's Circle-- here in Oakland. It's a Jewish, Socialist, fraternal, labor organization -- a little bit like the Elks, only not. Anyway, we have in our group a Judge. He can perform a marriage. Maybe I could ask him, if you want."

"Oh, Katzie, would you?" Bela was ecstatic. "Oh, Harvey, that would solve our problem, wouldn't it?"

"If he agrees, it surely would, Darling."

"Don't worry, he'll agree. He'll be happy we asked him."

Bela and Harvey laughed at Mrs. Katz's characteristic self assurance. At noon the following day, Mrs. Katz announced, "Judge Martin Levy will be very pleased to officiate at the wedding of Miss Bela Kransky and Mr. Harvey Lincoln Townsend."

She refrained from quoting Judge Levy's actual words: "I do not know these kids, and I'm not sure that I approve an inter-faith marriage. But for you, Brocha, I would do anything!"

"Well, Lover and Husband-to-be, I guess there's nothing to stop us from getting married now, is there?"

"Not a thing, My Love; not a thing."

But they were wrong.

XXXII

Bela desperately wanted the wedding held at Sun Ranch.

"It's such a beautiful setting, Darling. I know it's silly, but I keep picturing myself walking down the path between those beautiful rose trees, with Ronia singing *Because*. She has a lovely voice, you know."

"Well, the only problem I can see," Harvey pointed out, "is transportation. How on earth do we get nineteen people out there?"

Discussion around where to hold the wedding stretched over the next two-and-a-half weeks:

"Maybe we should just have Hannah, your brother and Mary, and of course Katzie at the ranch for the ceremony, and then have a dinner reception at Katzie's later in the day," Harvey ventured. "I could probably manage to squeeze them into my machine -- with difficulty."

"Absolutely not!" Bela replied with some asperity. "It would ruin everything if we couldn't have Ronia sing, and Ari has been my friend through all the years. How could I even consider not asking him to witness the ceremony." It was a statement, not a question.

"Is there *anyone* you could consider just inviting to the reception?"

"NO!"

The tension between Bela and Harvey increased as each idea added to the frustration, and the day of the wedding drew closer. There were now eight days to go, and the issue had not been resolved.

"Darling," Harvey continued, "we're simply going to have to settle this thing tonight. Everyone has to be told, and Gladys has to know what to do in terms of preparation."

"Katzie has to know, too. After all, she is doing just as much of the work as Gladys. How is it that you're not worrying about her?"

"That's exactly it, Bel. I *am* worried -- about the whole thing. We don't seem to be getting anywhere."

Mrs. Katz, elbows akimbo, hands on hips, the eternal dish towel in her hand, entered from the kitchen. "I hate to be a buttinsky, but I don't know what's the matter with you two." She shook her head in disgust. "You act like you don't want to get married. You better get this thing straightened out one way or the other, or you'll end up in one place and the rest of us someplace else!" She turned on her heel and strode back to the kitchen, clucking her tongue.

Bela and Harvey stared after her. "Oo-oo!" Bela whispered, "I've never seen her so mad."

"She's not mad," Harvey chuckled, "she's just adamant. But she's right, you know." He placed his arm around her shoulder. "I guess you're pretty exhausted."

"I'm sorry, Harvey, I am a little tired."

"It's not surprising, working all week and trying to complete all the wedding arrangements, too. Well, you're not working next week, so regardless of where we decide to get married, you'll come out to the Ranch and relax. We'll go riding and just have fun. O.k.?"

Bela nodded. "O.k."

Neither spoke for a minute; then "Wait a minute!" Harvey exclaimed. "I think I have the solution."

"What?"

"How does this sound? Ari can bring Katzie, Tess and Victor, and their two kids. It'll be a little crowded but one of the kids can sit on Momma's or Poppa's lap. And Agnes and Levi can drive Ronia, Joe Timmons, and your other friend from work. What's her name? Millie?"

"Yes! Yes!" Bela squeaked, almost losing her voice in eagerness.

"And the *piece de resistance* -- I will get up early Sunday morning on the Third Day of October, in the year One Thousand Nine Hundred and Fifteen, our very own Nuptial Day," he bowed deeply,

"drive into San Francisco and pick up Mary, Fred, Hannah and Walter. How does *that* sound, Milady? I am assuming, of course, that Judge Levy will drive himself."

"Oh Harvey, it sounds wonderful. Why ever didn't I think of that -- or you, before now?"

"Because -- because, My Lovely Bride, we've both got pre-wedding jitters and we're not thinking very clearly."

"Oh-oh! What about your forgetful friend, George?"

"I'll do almost anything to make our wedding a social success, Darling," Harvey joked, "except drive to New York to pick up George."

"Silly! You know what I mean. How will he get here from the train depot?"

"No problem. I'll call him tonight and tell him to get a ticket to Carmel, and he'll just transfer trains at the 16th Street Station when he arrives in Oakland from New York. Don't worry about George. He gets around."

"Except to telegraph stations," Bela quipped.

"Now, now, Woman, don't be saucy. He did apologize, and I'm sure he's kicked himself more than once for that oversight."

"I'm sorry. That was mean of me."

"Hold on there, Little Mighty One!" Harvey shouted, laughing, as Bela hugged him tightly enough to nearly cut off his air. "You'll mash me! Then what will you do for a husband!"

"Harvey, wait! You may not have to drive to San Francisco, at all. Mary told me that Fred's father is getting a new automobile and giving them his old touring car. Let me find out."

"Great. Anyway, now you can telephone everybody and tell them where the wedding to which they were invited over a month ago is going to be held."

Bela giggled. "I guess it's a good thing we're not having a formal wedding. This would be a hell of a time to be mailing printed invitations. Oh Harv, I'm so happy!"

The days went quickly. Before they realized it, September had come to an end.

"Darling, do you realize this is the last day of September? Three more days and I will be Mrs. Harvey Lincoln Townsend. I'm

so glad we were able to work out having the wedding here, aren't you?

"By the way -- Why *did* your parents name you Lincoln?" she finally had a chance to ask. "Are you named after someone?"

Harvey reached across the breakfast table and tickled Bela's cheek. "Of course I was named after somebody, you adorable little nymph."

Bela laughed as she picked up her coffee cup. "I meant a relative."

"I know you did. I was just teasing. Actually, they admired Old Abe a great deal. They considered him a true American hero, who really believed in social justice and the rights of man." He paused, his thoughts drifting back. On the rare occasions when I saw my parents, I was reminded of what I was expected to live up to."

Bela reached over and took his hand. "You have, My Dear. You have."

After breakfast Harvey said, "How would you like to go riding today?"

"Later this afternoon, maybe. There are things I need to do here. I have to help Gladys, and I want to talk to her some more about the menu."

"O.k., I'm going out to the stables and talk to Tex. He's almost as excited about the wedding as we are," Harvey chortled.

"Fine. He's such a dear man."

"You bet he is. I don't think I'd have survived to be here now, if it hadn't been for him."

"Oh, Sweetheart, I know that; and I'll be eternally grateful to him."

Harvey bent and swept her into his arms, first making certain that Gladys was out of earshot. "I love you, Dearest, through all eternity."

"Through all eternity," she murmured.

Releasing her before their passion got out of hand, he said, "I need to say 'hello' to the Princesses, too. I haven't been spending much time with them, lately."

Taking a deep breath as she pulled herself back to reality, Bela responded, "Yes, and give little Princess Penney a pat and a hug for me."

"You can do that yourself later," he called stepping out the door.

Three hours later, Gladys was standing on a chair, reaching down the "best china," handing stacks of plates to Bela.

"I need to get that big platter for the goose," Gladys said, pointing to the next section. "It's there, against --"

There was a terrifying crash as Tex, his usually ruddy face chalky, lunged through the doorway.

"It's H-Harv!" he shouted. "He-he's had a accident. Get a doctor." Without waiting, he dashed to the telephone.

Bela stood transfixed, totally oblivious of Gladys's efforts to climb off the chair.

Finding her voice, she screamed, "Harvey! Harvey!" Unable to stop the trembling, she clung to Tex as he tried to get the operator. Finally getting through, all he needed to say was, "Harvey Townsend got throwed! He's unconscious!"

"I'll get the doctor out there right away," the operator assured him.

"Where is he!" Bela choked, barely able to get the words out.

"Come on!" Tex grabbed her hand. "I'll take you to him!"

As they raced to where Harvey lay, Bela barely hanging onto Tex's waist as they sat astride Pegasus, Tex gave Bela a broken account of what had happened.

"Harv wanted to check a piece o' the fence over by the pond, there. It'd been broke down an' I fixed it. But you know Harv -- he likes to check things hisself."

Bela, panting, urged, "What! How did it happen!"

"A rattler spooked Princess Pat, an' she started buckin' like a damn bronco."

"Oh, My God," she gasped. "I don't understand. Princess doesn't buck; and Harvey is an experienced rider. How could it happen? How could he fall like that?"

"Ma'am -- Bela, he didn't fall, he got throwed! The way that horse bucked, nobody coulda stayed on her."

"The Princess has been actin' kinda funny ever since the filly was born. I told Harvey about it, and we had Doc Byrnes check her over, but he couldn't find anything wrong. Harv just thought she was lonesome for him, 'cause he hadn't been around as much lately." Tex

caught himself. "You know -- I meant with goin' to France and all that."

When they came in sight of Harvey, Bela leapt off Pegasus, her distress carrying her sprinting to where he lay on his back, unmoving, his face the color of slate. The dry autumn grass spurted around his splayed legs, the Carmel wind blowing yellowing birch leaves across his inert body.

"Harvey! Harvey! Oh, my Darling!" But there was no response.

"Don't try to move him, Bela Ma'am! The Doc'll be here soon."

Bela shook her head, sobbing. "I won't. I just want to touch --" she gently smoothed his hair back and felt something sticky below the crown of his head. "Oh My God! My God!" She stared at her hand covered with blood, then at the rock his head had struck.

XXXIII

Harvey was taken to Junipero Serra Hospital in Monterey. A sympathetic driver allowed Bela to ride in the back of the ambulance with him, although this was ordinarily not permitted by Health Department regulations

He lay in the hospital unmoving, a white bandage encasing his head like a jaunty turban. His eyes were closed, but his ashen face showed no other sign of injury. A tube stretched from a bottle of clear liquid hung over the bed to a needle taped to his right forearm.

"Water with a little salt and sugar -- to keep him from getting dehydrated," the intern told Bela as he hooked it up.

"Is -- is he going to be all right?" Bela asked, her throat tight. The doctor was silent.

"I said is he going to be --"

"I heard you, Ma'am. I'm sorry, we just don't know. Right now he's in a coma. We'll know more, if -- or when -- he comes to."

"Are you his doctor? You're so young."

"I'm the intern, Ma'am. Dr. Scholinger, is a neurologist -- a brain specialist -- and he's keeping a very close watch on your -- your --"

"My fiance. We're getting married Sunday."

"Yes, Ma'am." The intern felt she would not be up to any further detail on Harvey's prognosis, as he observed her extremely distraught state.

Many hours later Bela, having lost track of time, heard footsteps coming down the hall. She turned. "Katzie, thank God, you're here!" As Mrs. Katz embraced her, the iron control which she had managed to maintain up to now, gave way.

"Oh, Katzie, he won't wake up! I talk to him and he doesn't answer! What shall I do? Help me," she sobbed.

"I know, Honey." Mrs. Katz clasped her firmly for several moments. Then, pulling her toward the door, she urged, "Why don't we take a little walk? The nurse said you've been here all night."

"What time is it?"

Mrs. Katz looked up at the clock on the the wall. "Twelve o'clock."

Bela was confused. "How could it be? Are you trying to tell me Harvey got hurt only a half hour ago? It seems longer."

Mrs. Katz held her, shaking her head. "Bela, Darling, this is Friday. The accident happened around eleven-thirty yesterday morning."

Bela stared at her in horror, then at Harvey. She began to tremble again. "He hasn't waked up yet. He's been in a coma over twenty-four hours!" Her hands flew to her mouth as she stifled an impulse to scream. "When will he wake up!"

"Come, Bela, let's get you something to eat. We'll tell the nurse at the desk, so she'll call us if there's any change."

"No! No!" Bela sat back down in the chair she had occupied since yesterday. "He might wake up, and he won't know where he is. He might be scared. I have to be with him." She shrugged Mrs. Katz's hand off. "No!"

"All right, stay. I'll go bring you something."

Bela remained with Harvey through that night and the next, dozing fitfully only when she could no longer keep her eyes open. Food brought for her either by Mrs. Katz or Gladys remained virtually untouched, except for the coffee, which she drank mainly to fend off sleep. She left his bedside only to heed the demands of her body and, occasionally to splash a little water on her aching eyes.

"Darling, Darling, wake up. It's almost time for our wedding," she would plead.

Or, "Harvey, My Love, open your eyes. The world needs you. I need you." Or, "You didn't die in the shipwreck. That means God wants you to live."

Once, when Mrs. Katz overheard her exhortations, she implored, "Bela, Darling, come home and get some rest. He doesn't hear you, anyway."

"No! He *does* hear me! He'll wake up and think I've deserted him! He needs me here." A sudden wave of nausea caused her stomach to heave. She grabbed for a basin as she began to retch. Then the feeling passed

"Bela! You have to get some rest. You're not gonna help Harvey if you get sick!" Mrs. Katz begged.

Bela shook her head. "No. I'm all right. I can rest here. They'll bring me a cot, so I can lie down here, the nurse said."

Harvey remained comatose.

Then on Sunday morning, shortly before noon, a sound jolted Bela awake, as she sat drowsing. "Nurse! Nurse!" she cried, dashing out into the corridor. "Come quick! I think he's waking up!"

Miss Jensen, the nurse, responded swiftly. She approached the bed and lifted Harvey's wrist. With a hasty glance at Bela, she darted from the room, mumbling, "I'll get the doctor!"

Bela was mistaken. He was not awakening. Harvey Lincoln Townsend succumbed to a massive head injury at eleven fifty-four a.m. on Sunday, October 3, 1915, their wedding day.

XXXIV

Bela carried her grief deep inside. Her mourning was silent and unrelenting.

Two weeks following the funeral, she returned to work at Russell's. She dreaded going home because her evasiveness toward Katzie made her feel guilty. Yet, she couldn't bring herself to talk about Harvey or any of the events of the past few months. Her pain was too profound, the wound too grievous. To avoid having to encounter Mrs. Katz and, she knew, to hurt her, she began going to the Union office each evening when she finished at the factory.

Ari, finding her there one evening a few days before Hallowe'en, was dumbfounded. "Bel, what are you doing here? Go home!"

"I will, Ari, I just have some work that needs to be done," she lied.

Sensing her need to work through her grief in her own way, Ari said no more. Over the next few weeks, however, he began coming to the Union office with greater frequency. Finally, one day in mid-November, he urged Bela to let him drive her home.

"It gets dark so early now, Bel, it's down right dangerous for you to be going home alone."

Bela started to refuse. "No. thank you, I'm --" She was suddenly very dizzy and nauseated.

"Bel! What is it? What's wrong? Are you sick?"

She tried to answer, but she couldn't get the words out.

"Come on, Bela, I'm taking you home. You've been through hell, and you're exhausted!"

Her resistance gone, she realized she couldn't fight anymore. And she knew her troubles were just beginning.

Fifteen minutes later, Ari was helping Bela up the stairs. Not wanting to bother her for the key, he twirled the doorbell.

Mrs. Katz opened the door immediately. Seeing Bela being supported by Ari, her arms reached to enfold her. "Bela, Darling, what happened!"

"She felt a little sick in the office. Maybe you'd better call the doctor."

"Right away!" Mrs. Katz started toward the telephone.

"No!" Bela shrieked. "No doctor! I'm all right."

"I'm gonna call him!"

"No, Katzie, *please*. No doctor. I know what's wrong with me. I-I'm just tired. I'll be all right. Ari, thank you for bringing me home. Just let me sit down."

Mrs. Katz was torn between elation at hearing Bela call her "Katzie" for the first time since Harvey's death, and concern for what might be wrong with her. "Are you sure you don't need Dr. Malkin? He's not far."

"No, I'm fine. I don't need any doctor." She did feel better. At least the nausea and dizziness had passed.

"What did you eat?"

"Nothing. I didn't feel like eating."

"Maybe that's what's wrong. I'll fix you something. Ari, you stay, too."

Ari caught Bela's fleeting expression of annoyance. "No thanks, Mrs. Katz, I can't stay."

As he left, Bela again felt the guilt she often felt when she was unkind to Ari. He is so good to me, she thought, I don't deserve him. I don't deserve anybody. Oh God, I should have gone riding with Harvey; maybe he'd still be alive.

And the dam burst.

Mrs. Katz clasped her again. "There, that's right, my little one, cry. That's what you need." She held Bela tightly against her breast, stroking her hair and back, crooning softly, "Cry, cry, my poor baby, cry." Her own tears fell unheeded on Bela's shoulder, while she rocked her back and forth, as she had not done with anyone since Tessie was a tiny girl.

Finally, the storm subsided. Through occasional sobs, Bela mumbled, "Katzie, you don't know. There's something else."

Alarmed, Mrs. Katz reared back and stared at Bela. "What! What's happened? You're sick, aren't you!"

Bela shook her head, unable to speak as she tried unsuccessfully to choke back a new flood of tears. Finding voice at last, she moaned, "I -- I haven't had my period in two months." She felt Mrs. Katz's body tense up at her words. "Oh God, Katzie what am I going to do? I need him. I love him so. How can I live without him?"

"You will live, Darling, and be happy again. Believe me, I know.

"And don't worry. Your period will adjust itself. It's the shock. Things like that happen with women."

Bela straightened up, suddenly calm, and stared directly into Mrs. Katz's eyes. "Katzie, I'm pregnant. I'm going to have Harvey's baby."

Mrs. Katz caught her breath. "You're sure? You didn't use anything?"

"All except the last time -- th-the night before -- before--." The words caught in her throat. The tears welled up again and spilled down her cheeks.

"Well don't worry, Darling, we can get it taken care of and nobody needs to know."

"Katzie, there's nothing to take care of. I'm going to have Harvey's baby. I'm going to keep it, and love it and raise it -- Just like Harvey would have wanted." She felt the sob rising in her throat. "It's all I have left of him."

Mrs. Katz nodded as she placed her arm back on Bela's shoulder. "I'm not surprised. You're a very brave girl -- no, I mean a brave *woman*!" She hesitated. "I guess you know what you're in for?"

Bela nodded as she breathed a deep sigh.

PART THREE

1916 – 1920

XXXV

Bela's son was born May 30, 1916. He weighed an even seven pounds, was twenty inches long and sported a shock of black hair. Despite Bela's minute stature, she had a moderately easy labor. She named him Harvey Lincoln Townsend Kransky, but she called him Lincoln. She could not bring herself to say "Harvey" without choking up.

"Some mother, I am," she said with a touch of irony, one day when he was almost four months old, "I can't even say my child's name without crying. What's his life going to be like?"

"He's going to have a great life, and you're a fine mother. Look at him. He's fat as a horse." Mrs. Katz caught herself, but too late. "Oh, Honey, I'm sorry. I should bite my tongue."

Bela gazed intently out the window as if seeking something. "It's all right, Katzie, it wasn't the horse's fault. Harvey loved the horses, and so do I."

"And you don't even have them. My God, the government took everything he had. They even auctioned off the horses. At least they had enough heart to sell Princess Pat and her baby together."

"It's the law, Katzie. Harvey didn't leave a will. He didn't know he was going to die." Tears spilled down her cheeks and onto the baby's blue and white blanket.

"Here, let me take him for a minute." She took the infant from Bela's arms, crooning, "Come, Link, come to Katzie." She had tagged him with the nickname when he was a few days old. "Lincoln is too formal and too long for such a little fellow. Besides," she had giggled with a mischievous twinkle, "I think it's very fitting since *'Linke'* in Yiddish means 'left'!"

The sobriquet stuck as others gradually picked it up.

The first anniversary of Harvey's death, ten days later, was less difficult for Bela than she had feared. It was as if the initial pain of losing him was so profound that nothing which followed could match it.

Added to this were the demands of caring for Link, which eased some of the ache. He was a lusty, alert baby. Bela and Katzie both thought him beautiful. He had Harvey's round cobalt blue eyes and a remarkably full complement of hair, black like Bela's, but curly like his father's. His skin was fair, like Harvey's. Bela adored him. Although she dared not breathe a word to Katzie, in her mind she thought of him as a miracle. She felt that having him had saved her sanity -- or perhaps even her life.

Over the next few months, as Link grew and thrived, Bela's life began to assume a more even, if not a normal, course, despite the newest wound, inflicted by her beloved sister. From the time Hannah learned of Bela's pregnancy, she refused to speak to her or have any contact with her. She had never seen her nephew, and as Link's first birthday approached, Bela began to hope that Hannah would relent.

"It's not his fault," she said to Mrs. Katz more than once, "no matter how bad she thinks I am. Why? Why must she punish *him*? He needs to get to know his aunt.

But it was not to be -- at least not for several years.

Bela also lost her job at Russell's. The union could do nothing to help her get it back, since the contract had a "morals" clause in it.

"How did we ever let that get by us?" she asked Ari one day in the union office.

"Don't ask me," he replied. "I don't remember seeing it."

"Well, I was the first one to sign that contract after the strike, and I don't remember seeing it either; and believe me, I read it very carefully."

"You don't suppose --?"

"What -- do you think they could have stuck it in later? No, they wouldn't do that, would they?" with disbelief, then her eyes rounded in horror as realization dawned. "But why?"

Ari smirked. "It sounds like a mighty convenient way to get rid of a worker whom they probably consider a pain in the ... um, a big headache."

Bela gasped. "They wouldn't dare -- or would they?"

"Well, maybe it's worth checking out. Meanwhile, you've got a job here as long as you want or need it."

"Thank God for that, Ari. And thank *you*."

Ari hesitated. "The other offer still holds, too, you know."

When Bela, knowing she could no longer put it off, had broken the news of her pregnancy to Ari, she had expected him to repudiate her, too. Instead, he had asked her to marry him.

Bela dropped her eyes, heaving a sigh. "I know Ari. And I'll always be grateful to you -- for everything. But I can't. I wish I could. I'd be a lucky woman -- but it would be terrible for you."

"How could it be terrible for me? I love you, Bel. I always have. And now I love Link, too."

"I know, Ari. And I guess I'm very fortunate to have you as my dearest friend. But I don't love you -- not in that way."

"Bel, Dear, at least if you had a husband, perhaps some of these Victorian prigs would ease up on you. It infuriates me the way they treat you and Link."

"I don't give a damn about those fools and what they say!" Bela snapped with some of her old flash. "I don't need them -- and neither does Link!"

The days, first so heavy and depressing, gradually evolved into a routine for Bela. The demands of work with the Union and caring for Link gave her little time to grieve or even to think. Sometimes, though, late at night -- Link now slept through until morning

-- Harvey's voice would come to her as she recalled his teasing -- or their whispers and sounds of love making. And then the tears would wet the pillow as the feel of his arms tightly clasping her would force her to stifle a cry of anguish. She didn't want to wake Link or Katzie.

At times panic would seize her as she would think, My God, I'm even forgetting what he looked like. But then she need only look at Link as he laughed happily and

raised his arms to her to be picked up, and the pang of fear was gone. As he grew, Link bore more and more resemblance to his father.

"It's strange," Bela said to Katzie one day. "It's almost as if God -- or something, anyway -- wants to make sure that Harvey lives -- through Link."

"Of course he looks like Harvey. What you call 'God or something' is the simple fact that Link is his flesh and blood, Darling." Katzie's practical agnosticism wouldn't let her ignore Bela's hint at mysticism. She thought, *I've got to find some way to help her. She needs something to bring her out of herself.*

Katzie had hoped that eventually Ari would be the solution, but it was becoming increasingly clear that Bela regarded him as a dear friend -- perhaps even like a brother -- but their lives were totally intertwined with Union work. And Katzie was gradually coming to the realization that Bela would never view him in any other context. (Bela had never even told Katzie about Ari's marriage offer -- she always thought of it as an offer rather than a proposal.)

XXXVI

“Bela,” Mrs. Katz called from the kitchen, “will you answer the telephone, please? That’s our ring, and my hands are wet.”

Bela put Link down and went to the telephone on the wall near the kitchen door, O’Reilly padding after her. The tiny kitten given her by Harvey that Friday night so long ago, was never far from her side. He had grown into a beautiful white angora, and often the rhythm of his purring against her body helped provide some solace when Link and Katzie were both asleep and her sense of solitude most profound.

Keeping one eye on Link, she lifted the receiver and placed it at her ear.

“Hello? Oh, Ari, how are you? I hardly ever see you anymore. You haven’t been down to the office in weeks.”

“I know, Bela. I - I’ve been busy -- in the San Francisco office. Lots of work there, lately. But I called for a reason. I’ve arranged a meeting with -- “

“Ari, I’m sorry. Hold on for a second. Link is into something.” Dropping the receiver, she ran and grabbed him as he was about to pull the table lamp next to the front window over on himself. She gently pried his fingers from the cord, which he held firmly.

“Let go, Darling. We’ll go get your choo-choo.” Link loved the little wooden train Tessie had given him for his birthday. At fifteen months he walked fairly well, but he still seemed to prefer the more rapid locomotion of crawling, which the train suited perfectly.

. Lifting him onto her right hip, she carried him across the room to where the toy lay on its side near the telephone, abandoned for his newest interest -- the lamp. "My, my. What a heavy boy you're getting to be," she cooed, nuzzling his neck. She set Link and the train at her feet as she picked up the receiver.

"Yes, Ari, here I am. Sorry to keep you waiting. What were you saying?"

"It's o.k., Bela. I guess he's getting to be a handful. What I was trying to say was that I finally was able to arrange a meeting with Russell about the so-called 'morals clause' in the contract. I've looked it over very carefully, and there is definitely nothing that could be interpreted that way. Can you get away long enough to make it?"

"When is it?"

"If we can get Russell to agree, we'll set it up at your convenience."

"Well, really the best time for me would be after 6:00. Link is in bed by then, which makes it a little easier for Katzie -- if Russell is willing."

"Well, let's say he's not hot about the whole idea of our meeting, but I think he'll agree." Ari chuckled. "Business has been pretty good, lately, and I don't think he's anxious to do anything that might rock the boat."

"Oh, Ari, do you think he might consider giving me back my job?"

"Well, let's see what happens."

A few days later Ari called again. "Russell's office, 6:30 Wednesday evening. O.k. with you?"

"I guess so. I suppose Graham will be there, too?"

"Probably. Will it bother you if he is?"

"That *momser*, I don't care where he is. He can do what he wants. It wouldn't surprise me if that 'morals' thing was all his idea."

"Bela, be careful. You know damned well you can't trust either of them!" Ari was exasperated. "With all that's happened, you're still so naive and trusting."

"I know, I know, don't worry. Hold on while I check to make sure Katzie isn't busy that night."

Back on the 'phone a minute later, Bela said, "Fine. Katzie will watch Link for me. In fact, she's glad for me to be going somewhere."

She paused. "To tell the truth so am I. I adore Link. He's my life. But it's good to get away, even if it's just Union business." She covered her mouth in the characteristic gesture, even though Ari couldn't see her. "Oh, Ari, I'm sorry. I did it again! I didn't mean it the way it sounded"

"It's all right. No offense taken."

"Maybe we can have dinner after," Bela suggested. When Ari made no reply, she added, "just you and I, I mean." Still no answer. For a moment Bela thought the line had gone dead. It often did, especially with calls from across the Bay. "Ari? Are you there?"

"Yes," he said, "I'm here. Yes, sure, we can have dinner." There was another pause. Then Ari said, "In fact there's -- um -- there's something I want -- need to talk to you about. I'll pick you up about 6:15. See you then." He hung up.

Bela stood at the the telephone for a moment, looked at the receiver still in her hand, shrugged and hung it back on the hook.

"That's funny," she said, walking into the kitchen where Katzie was holding Link on her lap, feeding him cereal.

"Katzie, I told you. Put him in his high chair when you feed him. He has to get used to it. Besides, he has to begin to learn to feed himself."

"I always fed my babies this way, and they turned out all right." She looked up at Bela. "What's wrong? You look upset. Is something the matter?"

"I don't know. I think Ari hung up on me."

"HUNG UP ON YOU?"

"Well, not really hung up on me, but like our conversation wasn't finished yet."

"Nu, maybe he's giving you a little taste of your own medicine."

"Maybe; I don't think so though. It was more like there was something he wanted to talk about, but not on the telephone."

"Then, so you'll find out when you see him. And relax and try to enjoy yourself. God knows you need a little fun."

“I’m not sure ‘fun’ is the word. We’re meeting with Russell and probably Graham.”

Katzie made a face. “So after you’ll have a good time, maybe. Yes?”

“Maybe.” Bela felt uneasy, yet she couldn’t explain why. There was something in Ari’s voice (or perhaps his manner?) that she couldn’t identify. Oh, well, maybe she was just not accustomed to his being the one to cut the conversation short. Somewhat ashamed, she resolved to be nicer to him.

At 5:30 on Wednesday evening, Bela’s stomach was in knots. She knew it was partly the tension of meeting with Russell and Graham. Despite the reputation she had acquired as a “firebrand” during her years at the factory, and especially in her role in the strike three years ago (had so much time passed?), she still hated confrontations and conflict.

But tonight something else bothered her even more. She couldn’t let go of the feeling that Ari sounded odd on the phone. So unlike himself. She felt a sudden chill. Then mentally shaking herself, she thought *My God, what’s the matter with me?* Well, whatever was bothering Ari (if anything was) she’d make it up to him. There weren’t many people like him in the world, and she knew how lucky she was to have him as a friend.

The doorbell cranked promptly at 6:15. Bela’s heart flipped over and began racing wildly. She took several deep breaths, struggling to calm herself. In fifteen or twenty minutes she would be facing the two men whom she most dreaded confronting at this point in her life.

“O.k., Bela, ready to gird the lions in the arena?” When Ari saw her stricken face, he realized how overwhelmed with anxiety she was. “Oh, my God, Bel, I was joking. I know what these bastards have done to you. They’re not good enough to be in the same room with you -- in the same city!” He was furious with himself. This poor girl -- woman -- had been through so much, and here he was acting like an ass.

“It’s ok., Ari, don’t worry. I’ll be fine.” She paused and exhaled a deep sigh. “You know, I just hate this whole thing.” She was quiet as she looked at her hands, now roughened with washing

diapers and blankets and pricking her fingers with the needle as she mended the knees of Link's coveralls, grown threadbare from crawling on the rough sidewalk.

"Oh, Ari, I miss Harvey so much. He made me feel strong -- like I could do anything!"

"You can, Bel, I've always told you that."

"I know. You've been wonderful. I don't know what I'd have done without you."

She felt the tears beginning to cloud her vision. "Ari, please forgive me. I don't know what's the matter with me. I do appreciate everything you've done. I know I couldn't have gotten through the past two years without you. You're always there -- always when I need you." She felt a momentary twinge at the memory of the abrupt termination of their last phone conversation.

"Come on, Bela, we have to go. Let's not give those two s.o.b.'s the advantage by coming late."

Back in control, Bela gave Link a kiss and called, "Katzie, we're leaving."

"Have a good time at dinner, *Kinder*. Don't worry about Link. We'll play a game and tell a story and have lots of fun -- and then we'll both go *schlofn* (to sleep). So give 'em hell, my darlings!"

She took Link from Bela's arms as they walked to the door together. "Here, *Linkele*, give Mama a big kiss and tell her to relax and have a little fun." She stretched her arms holding the baby to Bela. They laughed as he began smacking his lips at her before he made contact, finally planting a very moist kiss on her cheek; and Bela again marveled at the ability of her "miracle child" (as she called him in her most private thoughts) to heal her wounds.

XXXVII

Trying to sound light yet feeling totally dejected, Bela said, "Well, I guess it's over, but I still don't fully understand their argument."

"It's very simple -- and very, very wrong. They claim that the so called 'morals' clause is implied on the basis that a woman who has a child 'out of wedlock' is deemed 'immoral' by society, and therefore it is *de facto* a part of any employment contract and doesn't have to be specifically stated."

"Oh, God, Ari, I'm not immoral -- am I?"

"Dear Bela, you're the most moral person I know. They're the evil bastards, and we'll show 'em what's what when the contract comes up for renewal." He thought for a moment, then snapped his fingers. "We'll insert this statement: 'Single parentage is not illegal, therefore it cannot be cause for dismissal under any circumstances.' How's that?"

Bela drew herself up to her full five feet, breasts heaving. "I wouldn't go back there to work if they offered me double my salary and a five-day week!"

"Of course not, Bel. Besides, you've got a helluva lot better job with the Union, where you're really needed. But for the sake of women who might work there in the future, or anywhere else in the uniform industry for that matter, we have to make sure it doesn't happen again.

"Hell," he crowed, "we might even set a precedent for women workers throughout the country!"

Bela said nothing; she knew better. She had known from the time her pregnancy began to reveal itself, the derision most people

held toward her -- even her own sister treated her as if she had some horrible disease. Only Katzie, Ari, and Tessie had never wavered; and of course her friend Ronie had remained steadfast in her loyalty. But what hurt most was the attitude the majority of people displayed toward Link -- admiring and adoring until they found out he was "illegitimate" (that dreadful term -- as if *any* child could be illegal), then treating him, too, as though he were not quite human. Did they really think he would somehow contaminate them or their children., this bright, innocent, lovely child?

Cold fear clutched her momentarily. Dear God, she thought, what will happen to him when he starts school? She brushed the thought back. She couldn't afford to think of that now.

"Where would you like to go for dinner, Bel?"

She came to with a start. "Anywhere, Ari. You pick."

"You know what I'll bet we could both use -- some good *haimish* cooking! Let's go down to Seventh Street. How about Maxie's? You look like you could use some good, heavy homestyle cooking. Maybe we'll start off with chicken soup and matzo balls -- not as good as Katzie's, maybe, but still not bad."

"Followed by thick slices of fat brisket and roasted potatoes and kasha." Although food was probably the last thing on her list right now -- or any time recently, for that matter -- Bela tried to show her gratitude to Ari by picking up on his enthusiasm. "There's my girl! That's the old spirit!" She knew he wasn't fooled, but she felt his appreciation for her effort.

Later, as she scraped the last crumbs of cheesecake onto her fork, Bela looked up at Ari and smiled. "I had no idea I was so hungry. It was really good, Ari. I'm glad you suggested coming here." She really loved the neighborhood where Jewish restaurants and butcher shops congregated. She loved even the second hand stores. It brought her back to her childhood in Chita. So long ago, she thought. So much had happened in her life since that far away time in that far away place. She wished she could remember something about her mother. She didn't even have a picture of her.

"I am, too, Bel. It was nice to see you enjoying your dinner." Ari's words cut into her thoughts. He looked at her empty plate and laughed. "And it looks like you enjoyed it, all right, every bite of it."

It took her a moment to reconnect. "Oh, yes, I really did. It's been so long since I've been out to dinner, I'd almost forgotten how nice it can be -- even under the circumstances -- I mean that horrible meeting with Russell and Graham, not being with you." She looked at the watch on her lapel. "Oh, it's late. I'd better get home to Link."

"I see you still have your mother's watch. It's amazing that it's lasted so long." Ari took Bela's hand in his, and for once she did not pull away. "Not yet, Bel. Link is fine with Katzie. They're probably both asleep -- and I need to talk to you." He paused, looking for the right words. "There's something I want -- that is, I need -- to tell you."

"Yes, Ari, go on," then suddenly alarmed, "Oh, Ari, you're not leaving! You're not being transferred to another area! The Local here needs you! I need you. You're my best friend -- one of the few friends I have left." She searched his face. (She could not bring herself to tell him the watch was not her mother's, but the one Harvey had given her after her mother's no longer worked.)

"No, no, I'm not leaving. Let me tell you." Taking a deep breath, he said, "There is this new girl -- woman -- that is she isn't really new, she's been there about six months -- but you haven't met her yet -- her name is Sonia -- Sonia Kaplanova -- she's Russian, or she was -- from Minsk -- in our San Francisco office. You'd like her Bela, I know you would." God, I sound like an idiot, he thought

Beginning to suspect what Ari was about to tell her, Bela waited, trying not to second guess or interrupt him again.

"Oh, Hell, I don't know why this is so hard!" He sat for a few moments, drumming his fingers on the table, then stood and walked around to her chair. Circling her shoulder with his arm, bending close to her face while half expecting her to withdraw and surprised when she didn't, he plunged ahead. "Bela - Bela, I'm getting married!"

She looked up at him, eyes wide, silent. She picked up a fork from the blue and white checked oil cloth and absently began chasing a bit of lettuce back and forth, finally spearing it. Now holding the leaf fragment upright on the fork tine, she stared at it as if it contained the words she sought.

"You'll like her, Bel, I know you will," he repeated anxiously.

She looked at Ari again. His hair, now tinged with gray, still glowed copper in the restaurant's overhead light. She noticed how

blue his eyes were. Had she never, in all the years, really looked at him? Why, he was actually quite handsome, she thought, surprised. Had she always been so self-absorbed? She felt the prick of remorse.

"If ever anyone deserved happiness, dear Ari, you do. And -- and I am happy for you. You know I am. And of course I will like her. I already do. In fact, I love her -- because you love her, and -- and she loves you." She paused, then decided she'd better say no more tonight. She needed time to absorb it all: the meeting, Ari's wonderful news -- or was it wonderful? Could their friendship survive?

She looked at her watch again. "I really must go, Ari. Congratulations, and you know I wish you all the happiness in the world." She hoped he didn't hear the tremor in her voice. What on earth was wrong with her? She meant what she said. If ever anyone deserved comfort and fulfillment in his life, Ari surely did. And she knew she could never have provided it -- not for him. She should be joyously pleased that he had found someone who could give him what she could not. Then why the tightness in her throat?

"Bela, Honey, are you o.k.? You're so quiet -- just sitting there. Should I get you something?"

She shook her head. "No, no, I'm fine. Just thinking. I really should go, though."

"Oh, come on Bel, let's have one more cup of coffee. And how about another piece of cheesecake?"

Bela looked down at her watch again but said nothing.

"We can split the cake if a whole piece is too much for you. Bela, please help me celebrate my engagement. After all, you're *my* best friend, too."

She nodded, "O.k., Ari, I'll share with you -- half a piece each -- and just half a cup of coffee for me, please." She owed him that.

He laughed with delight. "Good! You drink your coffee slowly anyway, so we can talk a little longer" He signaled the waiter.

They sat quietly, playing with the cheesecake, taking an occasional sip of tepid coffee, each waiting for the other to speak first. Finally, Bela broke the stalemate. "What's she like?"

Ari thought for a moment. "A little bit like you, in a way."

"How? How is she like me?" She felt nervous but intrigued by the comparison.

"Feisty, independent -- struggled all her life against odds. She's a lot taller than you, though!" The corners of his lips twitched, as he fought to avoid smiling at her serious expression. Teasing her, he said, "Don't worry, she's only about five inches taller. But can she pack a punch -- just like you!"

"ARI!!" For the first time in the two years since Harvey's death Bela began to giggle, then to laugh.

"Bela! It's not *that* funny."

Bela laughed harder. Suddenly she couldn't stop.

Somewhat concerned at first, Ari became alarmed at what he feared was incipient hysteria. "BELA!!"

"No, No," she assured him between guffaws, trying to catch her breath, "I'm fine. It's so good to really laugh again."

Then Ari grinned. "In that case, I can be funnier; see?" He crossed his eyes until they almost disappeared into the bridge of his nose, stuck his thumbs in his ears, waved his fingers and brayed like a donkey.

"Oh, Ari, stop; what's everybody going to think?" She had ceased the almost uncontrolled laughter but continued to smile as she wiped her eyes with her napkin.

"Well listen to the woman -- She, who has defied convention - - in fact thumbed her nose at all the fools in the world -- is suddenly worrying about me behaving like an ass for the moment. My, my. To quote a playwright we both know and love, 'What fools these mortals be'"

"Yes, Ari, I guess Puck was right -- in a way. But you sound angry now. Did I say the wrong thing?"

"I'm angry, all right, but not at you, my dear. I'm angry at all the damn people in this damn world who sit on their self-righteous rumps as they judge others by their stupid superficialities!"

"My goodness, Ari, I've never seen you so angry."

"I don't think I've ever been this mad. I guess maybe that meeting tonight kind of crystalized it for me: Those two ignoramuses describing you as 'an evil influence.' My God, they're the evil ones." He realized he was sweating. Mopping his forehead with his handkerchief, he continued, "For those bastards to talk like that about someone as intelligent and sweet and good as you just -- just --" He

paused for breath. “You know, for a minute in there I thought I was going to hit Graham. I can’t believe I once included him as a friend.”

“I’m glad you didn’t hit him, Ari. All it would have done is get you in trouble,” eyes widening with the thought, “maybe in jail.”

Ari laughed without mirth. “I wouldn’t hit him. I never hit anybody in my life and never will. That’s not my way -- even though he probably deserved it.”

“They have all the power,” Bela pointed out. Soberly she added, “Besides, their opinions are no different than ninety-nine per cent of the rest of the world.

“But let’s talk about something else.”

Ari relaxed. “You’re not tired? Not worried about Link anymore?”

Bela smiled, waving the thought aside. “Oh they’re probably both asleep. Besides, I want to hear about your wedding plans.”

XXXVIII

“Come on Link, Darling, put your toys back in the the box. It’s time for bed.”

“No bed, no bed!” Link, nearly half a year passed his second birthday, was fascinated by the power of the word “no” and its effect on his mother. He had already learned that it was a losing battle in the long run, but he found it fun to prolong; and the trade-off was a story. He had yet to discover that the story would come anyway!

“Yes bed. Right now, as soon as you put your toys away.” Bela looked stern as she took his hand and guided him to his eternally favored train, now showing serious signs of wear but no less cherished..

Picking up the caboose, she looked over her shoulder at Mrs. Katz, who recently had begun using a magnifying glass to read. “You know, Katzie, that was an inspiration on Tessie’s part, giving Link the train. He loves it so much!”

Katzie, looking up from her Yiddish *Forward*, nodded, smiling. “Tessie ought to know what kids like, since she has three now!” She loved being a *Bubba* and, without reservation, numbered Link among her grandchildren. Bela knew this and accepted it as natural, including the occasional unsolicited bits of grandmotherly advice.

Katzie and Bela had long ago assumed mother/daughter roles, for which Bela was grateful those rare times when she thought about it. Thank God the older woman had been there through the terrible time after Harvey’s death. She sometimes doubted she could have survived without Katzie’s support and empathy and mostly her love.

Mary never could have given her what she needed. They did not have that kind of relationship. Mary was too focused on her own needs, and with Hannah's refusal to accept Bela's situation, contact with Bela and Link was virtually non-existent. Mary did come to see Link when he was about three months old, with "a blanket for the new baby." And there had been a brief telephone call around his first birthday.

Bela caught herself up. Here she was letting her thoughts wander again, instead of tending to Link, who had grabbed the locomotive and was "choo-choo"-ing around the floor.

"Come on, Link Honey, you and I will put your train and all the other things in the toy box together. Then whoever finishes first gets to have any story they want, o.k.?"

"O.k. O.k."

Link was at a stage where he would often repeat his words at least once. Bela decided he did this at least in part for emphasis, but perhaps also because he liked the feeling of the words as his little tongue and teeth and lips struggled to form them. She could empathize with his efforts, since her own struggles with English were not that far behind her and even now sometimes tripped her up. In any event, she delighted in what she viewed as her son's doughty determination. It reminded her so much of his father, as everything about him did.

He scrambled his toys into a little pile and within less than a minute threw them all into the box, while Mrs. Katz watched in amusement.

"I win, I win! Thtory, thtory!" he lisped, his tongue not yet able to articulate sibilants clearly.

Swinging him over her shoulder, her diminutive body more than equal to the task, Bela marched with him to the bedroom.

"What story do you want tonight?" she asked, nuzzling his neck as she tucked him into his crib

"Bees, bees!" Link squealed.

"O.k.," Bela began. "A long time ago in a far away country called Russia, a little girl named Bela and her friend, Sucha, went in the woods with a bucket to pick some cherries. They picked and picked and got so many cherries that the pail was almost ..."

"Full, full!" Link knew the story by heart.

“That’s right, and then what happened?”

“Bees, bees!”

“They interrupted the bees, who were busy making honey, and they said to the two little girls, ‘*Go home and let us do our work!*’ And do you know what happened then?”

Link nodded sleepily. “No more cherries,” he mumbled.

Bela whispered, “They didn’t get any more cherries and went home eating what they had.” Bela had softened the tale for her son. In reality, she and her friend were badly stung when they inadvertently invaded the hive. But he loved the story she made up and sometimes acted out for him, with buzzing bees flapping wings and little girls running and giggling.

She leaned over and kissed his soft pink cheek, murmuring, “Night-night, Darling,” her single concession to baby talk.

XXXIX

"Bela, it's time you start getting out and making new friends," Mrs. Katz said one evening a few weeks later as they sat over tea and apple strudel.

"Katzie, you know how hard it is for me working all day and taking care of Link when I come home. I see little enough of him as it is."

"Enough with the excuses, already. What kind of mother can you be with such a limited life? And don't forget, Link is growing and changing. Before you know it, he'll be ready for school. You can't make him your whole life."

"He *is* my whole life!"

"Bela, he can't be, and you know it. It's not fair to you and it's certainly not fair to him." Her voice softened. "Darling, I know you've been through all kinds of hell the past three years, and I wouldn't wish that kind of pain on my worst enemy. But you can't expect Link to take Harvey's place, because he's *not* Harvey -- he's himself, and you have to let him be himself!"

"I know, but what can I do?" She sighed. "I go visit Ari and Sonia when I can, but with their living in San Francisco, that's not very often. They've both been wonderful about taking Link and me places, and I really like Sonia, but I feel like -- you know -- a-a fifth wheel or a three-legged horse -- or something. I don't know -- I always feel like I'm intruding -- even though they really try to make me feel welcome and included."

"Bela dear, I know how difficult it is. Remember, I was a widow with two children to raise."

With tears of anger and frustration choking her words, Bela sobbed, :”I’m not even a widow, remember, I’m an ‘immoral woman’”

“Are you still stuck on that? I thought you had Russell and Graham where they belong -- in *drerd* (hell)!

“It’s not just them. It’s the whole world that thinks the same way.”

“Not quite the whole world.”

“Well, most of the world, any way,” Bela grinned despite her tears.

“Come on, stop feeling sorry for yourself, and let’s have a another hot glass of tea, Russian style, with a suck of rock sugar!” Mrs. Katz placed her arm around Bela’s shoulder, giving her a gentle squeeze.

Bela awoke with a start. She reached for the lamp, then picked up the clock ticking loudly by her bed. Squinting as the light struck her sleep-clouded eyes, she barely made out three-twenty. She shook the clock then thought groggily, *it’s working, else it wouldn’t be ticking*. Still somewhat dazed, she tried to figure out what had wakened her. She arose and walked over to Link’s crib. He was sleeping soundly, his three-year-old body curled into a ball, the blankets tangled around his feet. Adjusting the covers, she bent and lightly kissed his flushed cheek. She crawled back into bed and switched off the lamp.

After tossing and twisting for what seemed like hours to Bela, she realized there would be no more sleep for her this night. Not wanting to wake Link, she quietly slipped on her robe and tiptoed into the kitchen. She turned on the kitchen light and lit the gas under the teakettle. She sat down at the table and absently began playing with a tiny crumb that had been missed in the after dinner cleanup.

“Are you all right? Is something wrong? Where’s Link?”

Bela turned with a start to see Mrs. Katz tying the belt of her robe.

“Link is fine. Something -- I don’t know what -- I woke up and couldn’t fall asleep again.”

“Well, it’s almost five o’clock. We’ll have a little tea before Link wakes up. And then you’ll have to start getting ready to go to the Union.”

“The water’s boiling,” Bela announced, pouring the steaming liquid into the cups in which Katzie had sprinkled a few tea leaves.

“We’re so lucky, you know? Nobody in the family got that terrible influenza,” Mrs. Katz said, partly to break the silence. It had become increasingly difficult to get Bela to talk, and it worried her. Maybe I should have picked a more cheerful subject, she thought.

Bela responded, “So many people died. Three of our union members.”

Katzie nodded. Hoping to turn the conversation while encouraging Bela to talk, she asked, “What do you plan to do this weekend? Are you going to Ari and Sonia?”

Bela shook her head. “They’re going to Sonia’s family for dinner Saturday, and Sunday they have something else. They asked me, but I told you -- I really feel like I’ve been taking advantage of them. They need time to themselves.”

“What about...”

“I know what you’re going to say: ‘What about Tessie?’ I feel the same about her and her family. I love her like a sister. In fact more, when you consider how my real sister has treated Link and me -- especially Link.” Bela hesitated. “When is the next meeting of your lodge?”

Katzie brightened. “You mean the Workmen’s Circle? A week from Monday.”

“Oh.”

“You think maybe you want to go?” All the times Mrs. Katz had suggested or invited Bela to come with her to a meeting and been met with an excuse, refusal, or simple silence made her wary. She didn’t want to discourage the first hint of interest Bela had shown in any new activity.

Bela shrugged. “Mondays are bad for me. We’re trying to organize The Singer Shirtwaist makers, you know. It’s another sweatshop, and, God forbid, we don’t want another Triangle tragedy here like happened in New York in 1912. Monday is the day we try to meet with the owners, and I’m usually exhausted when I come home.”

And depressed. It would do you good to get with new people, Mrs. Katz thought, but she refrained from voicing her frustration. *Maybe if I keep quiet about it, she'll go sometime.* "Well, Darling," she said, "it's almost six o'clock. You have to go get your bath and get ready. I lit the heater, so the water should be hot enough."

"Oh, there's Link. O.k., Honey, Mama's coming."

"I'll get him, Bela, go take your bath."

"I'm just going to say 'good morning' to him, Katzie. And thanks for sitting up with me. I love you." Bela felt guilty. She's so good and so patient with me, she thought, I need to show more appreciation.

The next few weeks passed quickly for Bela. She continued to have trouble sleeping, but now she thought she knew at least part of the reason: The Singer Shirtwaist managers were giving her a lot of trouble.

She leaned her head against the wingback chair she and Harvey had bought for Katzie to replace the old worn one Mrs. Katz had used for so many years. It had been a long, stressful day, but she was not yet ready to retire. Link was long since in bed, sound asleep. Katzie, propped against couch pillows, alternately dozed and struggled to focus on her newspaper. Bela had decided to stay up and read for a while, in the hope that if she was sufficiently exhausted, she would sleep through the night for a change.

Katzie was right, she thought. She needed to get out and meet new people, for Link's sake. She didn't want to make him into a "mama's boy," which she knew they were headed for, if she didn't start trying to make a life for herself apart from him. She told herself it's what Harvey would have wanted for her -- and for Link, if he had known him.

"God, Harvey. Why did you have to go riding that day? Why, why!" The grief she had kept buried in work and caring for Link the past three years suddenly broke through -- and then a profound rage. She pounded her fists on her knees, choking out dry sobs. "Damn! Damn! Damn!! Harvey! HARVEY!! With our wedding three days away, how could you!" she cried.

Mrs. Katz, instantly alert, lay down her newspaper and magnifying glass, walked over and placed her arms around Bela. Bela

laid her head on Katzie's now age-withered breast and wept as she had not since Harvey's death.

"That's it, *Teire Kint* (Dear Child)," Katzie soothed, holding her tightly and massaging her back, "get it out; get it all out."

Gradually Bela quieted, deep sobs eventually becoming moans, then sighs. "He didn't even know about the baby." Finally she whispered, "I forgot you were here, Katzie. I'm sorry."

"What do you mean 'sorry'? Sorry for what?"

"I am so angry. You must think I'm awful."

"Of course you're angry. How else *could* you feel, after what you've been through?"

"But you don't understand. I'm mad at *Harvey*. It's crazy."

"Oh, I understand, all right. You think I wasn't mad at Saul? He left me with two girls to raise."

"But he couldn't help it; he got sick and died. And Harvey didn't know he was going to die. He -- he thought he was going to get married." The tears flooded up again.

Mrs. Katz wiped Bela's eyes, then her own. "No, neither one wanted to die. They both loved life and had everything to live for. But it's natural to feel angry and abandoned, especially when you're left with children to raise." Mrs. Katz's wisdom stemmed from a lifetime of homespun experience, and from knowledge gleaned from reading, especially *The Foward* and the volumes of enlightened advice it offered to immigrants.

Bela remained silent for a few moments. She gulped and choked back a tremulous sigh. Then with trembling lips she repeated, "Harvey didn't even get to know he had a son."

"I know, Darling, I know." Mrs. Katz continued to hold her.

The following evening, after having tucked Link in for the night, Bela came into the living room and sat down on the footstool in front of Mrs. Katz's chair, for the first time since those terrible days after Harvey's accident. Katzie felt a mixture of relief and anxiety. At last there seemed to be a break-through in the depression and denial to which Bela had been clinging, but might she become overwhelmed by the flood of feelings? Katzie resolved to watch closely and be there if she were needed. *After all, she's like my own daughter; closer, in fact. We've been through so much together, and*

her own family has not been there when she needed them. “Except for Walter.”

“What did you say?” Bela asked.

“Nothing. Just thinking out loud.” Katzie blushed slightly. She should be more careful. She didn’t need to scare Bela back into silence.

“I thought you said something about Walter”

“Just thinking how nice he is to us.”

“Katzie, he and Nina have been wonderful. And Link adores him. He calls him Uncle Vevvie. Only Link could get away with that. You know, he changed his name from Vasily long ago, when he decided that since he was an American, he must have an American name.”

“I know, I remember.”

Bela became somber again. “I didn’t even go to their wedding. My own beloved, talented brother. I complain about Hannah’s remoteness toward Link and me. Who am I to talk?”

Katzie chose to treat Bela’s relapse into self-reproach casually. She shrugged. “They understood.”

XXXX

“It was wonderful to have everybody here tonight, Katzie,” said Bela as she stood on tiptoe to place a cup she had just dried on the second shelf. “I love Passover, especially the *knedlech* (matzo ball) soup. And even Hannah came. I was so surprised, weren’t you?”

“Here, you wipe, and I’ll put them away,” Mrs. Katz said, drying her hands on her apron. “It’s too hard for you to reach.” She was not going to let Bela draw her into a discussion about her sister tonight. She’ll get upset, and the evening will be spoiled for both of us, she thought. “Linkele said the questions so good for not yet four years old.”

Smiling with pride, Bela tried to assume a modest tone. “Well, he’ll be four in another month. You know, it’s hard to believe. This year has passed so quickly.” She took the cup back from Mrs. Katz. “No, no I’m fine; I can do it. You did all the cooking and washed the dishes, too. You should at least let me put them away.”

“Nonsense, it’s no problem. You have enough with working all day and attending to Linkele when you come home.”

“And what a marvelous idea to include Tex, too. It’s been such a long time since we’ve seen him.”

Katzie nodded. “Yes, it was good to see him. But the best thing was that he got such a kick out of Linkele.”

Bela sobered. “I know; did you see the way he talked to him? Like a grown-up; and Link seemed to understand every word. In fact they really carried on a conversation. I’m sure he reminds Tex of Harvey. He practically raised Harvey, you know.”

“Of course I know. Don’t forget, I knew Tex when he was a young cowboy.”

“Oh, I’m sorry, Katzie. I know that. I’m just babbling, I guess.”

Mrs. Katz smiled and gave Bela a quick hug.

Later, with Link bathed, storied and tucked soundly in his bed for the night (he had long since outgrown the crib), dishes and pots dried and put away, the few leftovers in the icebox, the two women settled in the living room, Mrs. Katz with her newspaper and magnifying glass, Bela absorbed in a book of Emily Dickinson poetry. Suddenly the magnifying glass slipped from Mrs. Katz’s hand, landing on the carpet with a thud, the newspaper still on her lap as her head dropped to her chest.

Alarmed, Bela leaped up and ran to her side. “Katzie! Katzie!” Still holding her book, Bela grasped Katzie’s shoulder and shook her.

“Huh? Wha’sa matter?” Confused, Mrs. Katz looked up at Bela. “Oh, I must have fallen asleep.” She grinned, embarrassed. “I’m sorry.”

“Oh, Katzie Darling, you’re tired. It’s been a long time since we’ve had even a Friday night dinner, let alone all the work for *Pesech* (Passover). Why don’t you go to bed?” Gathering herself together, Mrs. Katz stood up. “I think I will. Goodnight, Bela.” She staggered off to her room.

“Do you want I should help you get undressed?” In her anxiety, Bela’s English faltered slightly.

“No, I can do it. I’m fine. Stop worrying. I’m just a little tired.”

“No wonder; I’m not surprised. You must have spent the whole day cooking. I should have called in sick today and stayed home and helped you. Or we should have gotten Mrs. Gruberman to help.” Mrs. Gruberman lived a few doors down, and she and Katzie had become good friends over the years. She was also one of the few people who knew the circumstances of Link’s birth and didn’t condemn Bela. In fact, she loved Link and sometimes sat with him to allow Bela and Katzie to go out to a movie together.

“Well, maybe next time I’ll ask her for a little help,” Mrs. Katz murmured as she lay down, her nightgown only partly on.

“There isn’t going to be a next time. Let me or Tessie, or even Agnes, do it, and *you* can be the one waited on,” Bela stated as she gently pulled the covers over her. A light snore was Katzie’s only response.

XXXXI

That night sleep again evaded Bela. She realized how much she depended on Katzie, for emotional support, for Link's care, perhaps even for her life. Most of all she loved this woman dearly -- this woman who had been more to her than a precious jewel -- who had nourished and comforted her through the most terrifying period in her life. When Harvey died it was Katzie who had kept her focused.

She unconsciously thought of Katzie as immortal -- eternally there, robust and stable. Bela wondered how she could have been so unaware of this woman's needs and her own egocentric expectations.

The shock that Brocha Katz was now an elderly woman, despite her immense spirit and determination, struck Bela with blinding force. She knew that she would have to make changes in her own life, beginning with efforts to ease Katzie's anxiety by reaching out to new friends, *if she could find any*. The thought made her quail. Who, other than the very few she had, busy with their own lives, would care to have anything to do with an "unwed mother"?

As she lay through the night, tossing, determined not to get up lest she disturb Katzie's desperately needed rest, an idea was born.

The following morning, having insisted that Katzie allow herself to be waited on, Bela prepared *matzo brie* (matzos fried with eggs and butter) a traditional Passover breakfast enjoyed by secular and orthodox Jews alike.

"For a change, I'M in charge," Bela ordered. She set a heaping plate of the egg mixture in front of Katzie, along with a

glass of fresh squeezed orange juice and a cup of steaming black coffee.

“What about you and Linkele?” Katzie asked anxiously.

“I’ve got mine coming up right away, and Link’s already had his breakfast.”

“You got up so early? You need your rest on a holiday, working all week.”

“Oy, Katzele,” Bela laughed, using a diminutive play on Katzie’s nickname, “it’s not so early. You and I both were exhausted, and we slept late. I fed Link and then the two of us went back to bed. Even Link was tired.”

Shaking her head, Katzie said, “I don’t know what happened to me. I never in my life felt so tired.”

Bela nodded, but made no further comment. She saw nothing to be gained by dwelling on what she knew was a hard reality for Katzie -- that she was no longer able to do all the things she once did, that time was exacting its toll -- in her dimming vision and in her waning strength.

When the older woman arose and began to clear the table, Bela commanded, “No, Katzie, not this time!” Leading the protesting woman to her chair, Bela gently pressed her into the seat. “You sit”

Katzie laughed, shrugged and reached for the local English language newspaper to which the two women now subscribed for local news. “That Hearst,” she said shaking her head as she turned the pages, “what a *momser*.”

“Well, at least Link enjoys it. He likes to look at the funnies even though he can’t read them yet.”

The breakfast dishes washed, dried and assigned to their proper storage places, Bela picked up the Emily Dickinson book from the floor, where she had dropped it in her alarm the night before, and read again:

*We never know how high we are
‘Til we are called to rise;
And then, if we are true to plan,
Our statures touch the skies.*

Suddenly she saw these four lines in a new light. It was as if this timid retiring girl who kept her genius hidden from all but a very few, whose beautiful words were given to the world only after her death, was speaking to Bela. For Link, for Harvey's memory, for Katzie, and most of all for me, she thought, *I can do it. After all, I managed to travel half way across the world with the children, when I was merely a girl. I was strong then, and I can be strong now.*

"Katzie," Bela asked later that evening as she sat down in her old place, the ottoman at Katzie's feet, "when did you say the next meeting of your lodge is?"

Mrs. Katz felt her muscles grow taut as her stomach began to churn. *This is the second time this year she has asked about the Workmen's Circle. Don't spoil it all by talking too much,* she cautioned herself.

Aloud, she replied, "Second and fourth Monday of the month, and if it's an affair, usually Saturday or Sunday."

"What kind of affair -- for instance?"

"Well, it could be a lecture, or a dinner, a dance maybe. You know, all kinds of things. Socials, but don't make no mistake, we're a serious group." Mrs. Katz realized her grammatical error immediately, but decided to let it pass.

"What's it for -- the serious part, that is?"

"Mainly two things: mutual benefits and to support organized labor. You may even know a couple of members from the ILGWU."

"Are there any people around my age -- or are they mostly older?" Bela felt some awkwardness at the question, but she had to ask it.

"You mean like me?" Mrs. Katz laughed. "Darling, they're almost all young people, mostly around your age. -- men and women."

"Hmm-mm. Tomorrow's the second Monday. If we can get Mrs. Gruberman for Link, maybe I'll go with you. If it's only a meeting, maybe I won't feel so out of place."

"Out of place! You? Darling, they'll love you! You'll see! You share the same ideals -- for a *besere veldt* (better world)" Mrs. Katz hand abruptly

flew to her cheek. "Oy! what about your meeting with the shirtwaist bosses? Don't you have to be there?"

"We're usually through by six. Anyhow, I'll make sure we are!"

"So we'll go tomorrow night?" Mrs. Katz suggested cautiously. "It just so happens, because it's *Pesach*, we're gonna have a *Seder* -- secular -- like we had last night."

Bela sat quietly thinking for a few minutes, her face serious.

Anxious not to dampen Bela's seeming new interest, Mrs. Katz hastily added, "You don't have to go this time. You can go any time."

"I suppose so." Bela paused, then she laughed "No, no," she responded, with growing assurance, "we will go tomorrow night. A Seder is probably a good place to get to know people." She stood up and stretched. "Well. I guess I'll go to bed. I haven't been sleeping so good. She bent and kissed Mrs. Katz. "Good night, Dear, Dear Friend."

XXXXII

“Just imagine,” Bela said one evening in early December of 1920, “we actually voted for President. I never thought it would happen in my lifetime; did you?”

“*Pitsele* (Little One), I never doubted it. Women are strong -- we would never have let go until we had the vote.”

“Nineteen-twenty will go down in history as the year political freedom began in this country. And Debs got more votes than ever,” Bela said with emphasis, proud of her growing knowledge of national events. “We women did that, didn’t we?”

“Well, maybe we helped, anyway,” Mrs. Katz responded, smiling. “But we still have Harding as the elected President.”

“But he promised to commute Debs’s sentence,” Bela said. (Debs had been imprisoned this time for his opposition to the War.) Mrs. Katz shrugged. “We will see what we will see.”

Bela was laughing when she came out of Link’s room after having tucked him in for the night. Even though they shared the same bedroom because of space limitation, she always referred to it as “Link’s room.” She thought it helped to give him a strong sense of self. She was deeply aware of his emotional needs and psychological health, her awareness made more acute because of the absence of a father.

Walter and Ari both tried to fill some of the gap, but they had their own families. Walter had a two-year-old daughter whom he adored and another child on the way. Ari and Sonia were hoping to start a family soon, but Sonia had not been able to conceive so far.

Meanwhile, they lavished all their attention on Link, who absorbed it like a sponge. But Bela knew that had to change some time.

“Katzie, can you believe it? I don’t read to him any more, he’s reading to me!”

Mrs. Katz chuckled with pride. “I guess he’ll be starting kindergarten in February, no? Maybe he’s too smart for kindergarten. Maybe he should go right to first grade.”

“Oy, Katzie, you’re prejudiced -- But me, too!”

A few evenings later Bela looked up from the book she had been reading and asked, “Katzie, who is that man with the glasses, who always sits by himself?” She was sitting in her usual spot on the ottoman at Mrs. Katz’ feet. “You know the man I mean? He has dark curly hair like Link’s, only a little grayish on the sides.”

Mrs. Katz perked up, amused at Bela’s detailed observation. “You mean Abe Pritzker? I’ve known Abe since they came here from Chicago about six or seven years ago.”

““They?” I guess he’s married, then. Why doesn’t his wife come to the meetings, or at least the socials, like some of the other wives?”

Mrs. Katz sighed. “He’s had his troubles, too.” She hesitated. “You want I should tell you a little about him?”

Bela nodded. She could feel the anxiety creep through her body. She hoped Katzie didn’t notice her tension.

“He used to be very lively,” Mrs. Katz said. “He liked to talk and discuss -- and sometimes argue. He was very active in the Workmen’s Circle in Chicago -- and here, too.” She sighed again. “Then he lost his wife and little girl from the ‘flu’ epidemic.”

“Oh, God,” Bela moaned as her eyes filled with tears of sympathy, “I can’t imagine what he must be going through.”

Mrs. Katz nodded.

“How old was his daughter, Katzie?”

“Six, I think. She had just started first grade. You want I should introduce you?”

“Of course,” Bela replied.

Maybe I’ve finally arrived, she thought, and her heart went out to this man who

had been through so much. I can begin to give instead of only taking. At least I have my son, healthy and smart. Poor Mr. Pritzker has nothing. No, maybe not nothing. He has friends, the best kind -- Workmen's Circle friends, who seem to really care about each other. And perhaps I can be one, too -- at least I'll try.

Bela was suddenly very tired. The stress of learning of Abe's ("*Abe's?*") tragedy had taken its toll on her emotions, but she knew she'd handle it.

"I guess I'll go to bed, Katzie. It's been a long and busy day." She stood up, setting her book aside, but changed her mind. "No, I think I'll read in bed a while. I like to sometimes. It's relaxing."

Katzie arose from her wingback. "I think I'll go to bed, too." She took a step and stopped. "Oy, I been sitting so long, my back and hips are stiff!"

Bela reached to help her, but, as usual, Mrs. Katz refused any assistance. "I'm fine, I just sat too long in one position."

Bela watched, shaking her head slightly as she watched her friend limp toward her bedroom.

Bela set the book on the bedside table. She knew she would sleep soundly this night. She reached for the lamp beside her bed, and as she switched it off she smiled in the darkness. Her journey was finally over -- or was it just beginning?

