Jean-Jacques Greif

Malvina

1916 Nelly's sister

Me, I just want to be born. I know nothing of the Great War, of the Austrian army and the Russian army, of the terrible Cossacks who hold the city of L'vov[1], of the Polish guerilla fighters who try to resist them.

When my mother goes into labor, my grandmother is quite scared.

"I can't go fetch the midwife. The night is fallen already. The curfew is on. Do you hear the gunshots?"

"Come on, Mom, they allow you to break the curfew in such circumstances."

"You husband is away, as usual."

"He went to war. You can't blame him. This is not as if he had gone to the pub…"

"You could have waited until the end of the war before you had another child."

"The war may last ten more years. Life must go on."

"The Cossacks will catch me. You know what they do to women…"

"Listen, Mom, they don't do anything to women your age."

"What if they discover I'm Jewish?"

"Either you bring the midwife, or you deliver the child yourself. Hurry up!"

"It's forty degrees under. I'll freeze solid…"

"Stop your whining, Mom. It hurts like hell. Do something!"

"Right, right, I'm going… Oh, Lord…"

My grandmother wraps as many shawls as she can around her frail shoulders, so she looks like a huge onion, then she goes out without ceasing to grumble:

"*Oy weh*[2], she really chooses the best day to give birth… Soldiers fighting everywhere… The coldest winter in memory… I hope my nose won't freeze and fall down!"

Yellow flashes pop into the night sky like fireworks, followed by dry noises that sound as if the snow had muffled them. Suddenly, my grandmother sees one of those dreadful Cossacks.

"The brutes, the bloodthirsty dogs… They grab the Jews by their beard and pull them behind their horses. They tear down the women's dresses… Oh Lord, protect your servant!"

Actually, he is a very young man, a mere child, bundled up in dirty woolen bands. He seems even more scared than she is.

"What are you doing outside, babuchka? Go home quick. This is very dangerous… Guerillas are hiding over there, behind the factory…"

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[1] See maps at the end of the book. Lwów (Polish spelling) or L'vov (Russian spelling), main city of the province of Oriental Galicia, was Austrian (and called Lemberg), then Polish, then part of the Soviet Union. Today it belongs to Ukraine (and is known as L'viv).

[2] Oh woe!

"Please forgive me, Mr. Officer, your Highness… My daughter have baby. I go for midwife."

"Ah, hm, I understand. Show me the way. I'll go with you. Stay as close to the wall as you can… I'm not an officer, but a simple soldier."

My grandmother speaks Yiddish and Polish, but she also knows the Cossacks' language, Ukrainian, because the peasants around L'vov are all Ukrainian.

As soon as she returns with the midwife, I come into this world. I know all this because she told me so many times:

"I had to climb over a barricade in my long heavy skirt… You were born on February 1st. The temperature was forty under. The midwife slipped on an ice puddle and fell down. She was quite angry."

She seems to blame me for being born. Because of me, the midwife has nearly broken her leg.

My father spends a three-day leave in our home in August 1916. I am six months old. That's when he sees me for the first time. He comes back for real in March 1918, when Russia—or rather, the Soviet Union—signs a peace treaty with Germany and Austria. I am more than two years old. I like to talk and to run everywhere. I don't understand why this stranger settles in our home. I find him quite ugly. I hate his mustache, which stinks of stale tobacco. I refuse to kiss him.

1922 Wild strawberries

I play by myself while my mother is working. Babudia[1], my grandmother, is watching over me. She doesn't like me. My hair is too light.

"You look like a *shikse*[2], with your blue eyes and blond hair. This is your father's fault. Your mother should never have married this Zien. He is ashamed of being Jewish. You've got his hair. Nelly had dark hair. Quite a pity that she died!"

Nelly died ten months before my birth. She was two years old. I'm a substitute. She was cute and sweet. I'm ugly, unruly and stubborn. Pretty Nelly and plain Malvina! I hate her.

I know no other child. We live in a catholic neighborhood. My father doesn't want to inhabit the ghetto.

"I can't stand all these medieval Jews with their caftans[3] and their beards. Europe is entering a new era after this terrible war. Old prejudices will vanish, barriers between communities will crumble!"

His speeches do not impress my mother.

"Your new Poland doesn't seem eager to sweep the old prejudices away. Our catholic neighbors are happy to be Polish rather than Austrian, but this doesn't mean they want to be friends with the Jews. They think we're not as Polish as they are. When we pass them in the street, they look right through us as if we were made of glass."

I probably have cousins my age, but I don't know them. My father broke away from his family when he refused to train in my grandfather's electricity workshop. He dreams of becoming an artist. While waiting for fame and wealth, he teaches drawing in a Jewish high school. Babudia says he wants to paint naked women, which is sacrilegious.

"The Eternal forbade it. Only idolaters represent the human figure."

"Stop saying I paint naked women. Look at my paintings on the wall… Where do you see naked women?"

He paints landscapes: poplars by a river, a wooden cabin in the mountains, a wheat field dotted with red poppies. All his pictures seem alike to me. I'd like to see a naked woman for a change.

My grandmother criticizes her son-in-law, but she's quite lenient with her son, my uncle Favek. He is a nogoodnik who earns a meager living playing cards. When he loses, he sells his coat and his watch, then he comes to his mother to beg for money. Despite his mustache and his felt hat, he looks like a whining child.

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[1] Tender variant of Babka, grandmother.

[2] Yiddish word for a Christian girl.

[3] Traditional coat.

My mother works in a cigarette factory on the other side of town. She started as a simple worker when she was fifteen, to help my grandmother raise Favek after her husband's death. She's active and clever. She can face any situation and take decisions without wavering. When she was twenty-five, they promoted her to head of personnel. She works hard. Often, she comes back late at night. She doesn't smoke, but the smell of tobacco clings to her because all the girls smoke while working.

When I was a small child, I used to speak to Babudia all the time. Then I noticed she just pretended to listen to me but didn't really care. Actually, she's becoming deaf with old age. I'd rather talk to Stanislas, my teddy bear. I tell him stories of princesses and knights that take place in an enchanted kingdom. I've invented a game: I close my eyes and walk around the house with my hands in front of me to avoid bumping into walls and furniture. I go outside and play hopscotch by myself. Nelly's ghost follows me and wants to play, but I refuse with a shrug. In winter, when it's too cold outside, I knit near the earthenware stove. Babudia shows me how to knit, sew, wash the shirts and the dishes, dust and sweep. She teaches me all the tasks that a woman must perform, except ironing and cooking.

"I'm afraid you'd burn yourself with the iron or the range," she says. "I'll show you when you're older."

She's the queen of potatoes. She cooks them in boiling water or in a frying pan, mashes them, shapes them into fritters or *latkes*. In winter, the dinner always begins with a potato soup. As beef is expensive, my mother often buys ham or pork-cutlets. We do not respect Jewish customs, even though this makes my grandmother quite angry. She doesn't eat any ham, of course, but only potatoes. She sighs when we put some cheese on the plate we used for meat, or disobey some other ritual commandment[1]. We do not go to the synagogue, do not fast on Yom Kippur, do not rest on Shabbat. My parents speak Polish. Only Babudia speaks Yiddish, or rather shouts it when a certain very old lady friend, as deaf as she is, comes for a visit.

I am waiting eagerly for the first day of school. This will be the greatest day in my life. At last I'll meet other children! The better to prepare myself, I learn to read by looking at signs and posters in the streets. There is no Jewish school in our neighborhood, so my parents enroll me in a public school. I'm lucky I look like a *shikse*, as my grandmother noticed, so nobody calls me a stinking Jew.

I like school so much that I always come before the others, at least twenty minutes early. I stand in front of the door. My teddy bear Stanislas prefers to stay at home, so I don't have anybody to talk to except myself.

"Oh, look, Malvina, a motor carriage… It coughs and steams like a sick dragon. Instead of shoeing its wheels like a horse's hoofs, they circled them with a rubber buoy. Would you like to step in? Oh no, my dear, I believe I prefer a horse-drawn buggy. The coachman is a fat

[1] Religious Jews do not eat pork. They cook and eat meat and milk products separately.

fellow who smacks his tongue and talks to his horses: *Come on, my sweeties, my jollies!* Whereas the motor car's mechanic is as thin as his starting-handle. He scares me with his round glasses, his pinched lips, his hands clenched on his levers. He never says anything to his engine!"

Outside school, my life is not much fun. My father pretends all artists go to the pub, like him, and all the great French painters find their inspiration in wine and absinth. When he returns sooner than usual and spends the evening at home, he is gloomy. He doesn't say anything, ruminates over some idea while making faces, then explodes of a sudden without any motive and insults all the people around. Afterwards, he hides his face in his sleeve, cries and asks my mother to forgive him. I find him pitiful and feel like crying, too. He quarrels with Babudia all the time. Taking advantage of her deafness, he calls her all kinds of names in a low voice. She guesses what he's saying and grumbles in her corner:

"Pf… A man who paints naked women! Jews want to ape Christians, now… Some Jews even drink vodka. I know what I'm saying… The Eternal our God will lose patience with us!"

They do not speak to each other. I act as go-between.

"Malvina, ask your grandmother why the bread-bin is empty."

"You can tell your father that Passover just began. There is no bread in Jewish bakeries. I won't go to a Catholic bakery to please him. We have unleavened bread[1]…"

I wonder whether other girls act as go-betweens. I am glad I can be useful.

In summer, my mother takes a few days off. She rents a room for the two of us in the Carpathian mountains, which are not far from our city. The wooden floor has a pleasant pine sap smell. The bedsheets retain the flowery fragrance of the meadows upon which they were put to dry.

A terrible thunderstorm sometimes rents the night. The black sky screams in pain, hurls angry flashes of lightning. Although my mother is an important manager, second only to the factory boss, she's so scared that she hides under the bed with me. We shout and holler, but at the same time we can't help laughing like two madwomen.

We lace our sturdy mountain shoes and go for a walk. A narrow path covered with pine needles, crisscrossed by mossy roots, climbs through the woods to a meadow studded with white flowers. A little below the meadow, between two places we call "the rabbit-clearing" and "the tree-stump-turn," large communities of wild strawberries blush bashfully along the path. I pick up the red delicacies and gulp them right away. My mother keeps hers in her hand.

"Oh, Mom, how did you get all these strawberries?"

"My hand is bigger than yours, darling."

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[1] The Hebrews left Egypt so fast (with Moses) that they didn't have time to leaven their bread. In memory of this event, religious Jews eat unleavened bread during the Passover holiday.

“Yes, but why don’t you eat them?”

“I have eaten enough. These are for you!”

These wild strawberries are a secret, like Mom’s love. When I eat them from her hand, I feel that she loves me as much as Nelly.

1926 The exam

My mother has told me many times how she became a factory worker at fifteen, but I don't want to follow her example.

"Mom, I'll be ten soon. I must choose a high school. I don't want to go to public school. The girls are older, so they'll understand I'm Jewish. Already now they suspect something. I have no friend."

"Why go to high school? What will you do after high school? You know university is barely open to Jews. Why don't you stay in your present school and go to vocational class until you're fourteen?"

"So then I become a factory worker?"

"No, you become an apprentice and learn a good profession."

"So I'll be a seamstress or something? I'd rather go to high school, then I'll study abroad."

"You can't do that, Malvina. It is very expensive. You know we're not rich."

At night, in my bed, I think hard. "Maybe in a few years the Government will let the Jews go to university. Then if you're a seamstress's apprentice, Malvina, you won't be able to become a student. Do you want to spend your life in front of a sewing machine?"

On the next day, I ask Babudia to show me how to bow formally. I take the tramcar by myself for the first time in my life. The other passengers talk and look outside without noticing me. I cross the whole town. In the center of L'vov, I admire the grand palaces that belonged to Polish princes in the eighteenth century. Their façades are painted in beautiful colors: pink, ocher, cream, lilac. I would like to live in one of these palaces. My mother says there's a Jewish high school in a corner of her factory's building. I hope I won't get lost. "Be brave, Malvina!" I find the school. It is smaller than I thought—just a kind of large apartment, actually. I enter the office of the headmistress and I do my formal bow.

"Good morning, Madam. I am the daughter of Mrs. Zien, the cigarette factory's head of personnel."

"Ah yes, Mrs. Zien. I know her. Are you her daughter? What's your name?"

"Malvina."

"Well, Malvina, what can I do for you?"

"I would like to enroll as a student in your school for next year."

"But my dear, you're too young. How old are you?"

"I'll be ten soon."

This seems to surprise her. I am quite small, that's true.

"What about your mother? Why didn't she come with you?"

"She's very busy. She asked me to tell you that she'll come later to fill the papers and give the money."

"All right. In that case, come tomorrow morning to pass the exam."

I get good marks at the exam. I'm afraid to say anything to my mother. I disobeyed her, didn't I? She'll be angry. By chance, my father is eating with us, so I decide to confess during the dinner. I hope my mother won't dare scold me too hard in front of him.

"So I took the tram and I saw the palace of prince Leszczynski. I found the high school so I went to see the headmistress. I said Mom agreed but she was busy so she couldn't come with me. Then she said to come back and pass the exam. So I went again and she gave me a very easy dictation and multiplications and long divisions and also she asked me questions about the history of Poland and Casimir the Great and then she said I knew lots of things and I could enter high school."

Instead of scolding me, my mother laughs.

"That's wonderful, darling. You went there all by yourself?"

My father seems quite proud of me.

"Jews are usually rather timorous, but you, Malvina, you belong to a new generation. You are not afraid."

My mother goes to fill up the papers and pay the tuition fees. I don't know whether she tells the headmistress that I did all this without her knowledge.

After picking up wild strawberries in the mountains, my mother and I come back to L'vov well before the first day of school. I need to sew my uniform: a blue pleated skirt, a white blouse with a sailor's collar. My mother buys a satchel to be worn on the back like a rucksack. She says it will help me keep my spine quite straight. I go with her to a store where I choose notebooks—rough paper for pencil drafts, thicker white paper for ink work—and a tin pen box with a picture of a tiger in the jungle. When we come out of the store, I am mad with joy. I'm sure no other human being ever knew such happiness.

After one week in high school, I know all my books by heart. There are twelve pupils in the class: ten girls and two boys. As I am the youngest and the smallest, they let me sit in front. I get the best marks right away.

I wake up every morning at six. I eat my buttered bread quickly, as I must walk for nearly an hour to go to school. Taking the tram would cost too much. Some of my classmates live in my neighborhood, but I can't go with them: I start much earlier, for fear of arriving late.

1930 The dark staircase

My father says I'm not afraid. Actually, many things scare me: thunderstorms, darkness and of course my father himself, when he gets angry for a trifle after drinking in the pub. Having borrowed a book called *Triumph of the Will* in the school's library, I decide to confront my fears. I hold a conference with myself:

"You can't change your father, Malvina, but you could become less skittish. To begin with, you could fight your fear of darkness and thunderstorms."

Several nights on a row, I get up without lighting a lamp and I walk downstairs ten times in the pitch black staircase.

"Do not be afraid, Malvina. Take it easy… One step at a time! Do you remember when you pretended to be blind and went around the house with closed eyes?"

I am very careful to walk lightly. I hardly let my feet touch the steps. They must not creak, otherwise the noise might wake up my parents. I focus my mind on my feet so carefully that I forget to be afraid of darkness!

I rejoice when summer brings back our wild thunderstorms. I open the window and I lean outside. The rain pelts my face. I defy the thunder and the thunderbolts.

"Don't move, Malvina… Breathe quietly… Don't tremble…"

I think of Nelly. She would have hidden under the bed, I bet.

A great event changes our town: they install electric power everywhere! Nobody regrets the smoke and smell of oil lamps. Now we just turn a switch and we get as much light as in the middle of the day. A mysterious power hides in this tiny switch. You'd think such magic just sprang out of a fairy tale. I could turn the lamp on and off for hours.

"That's enough, Malvina," my mother says. "The lamp is not a toy."

A soon as electricity powers a new neighborhood, they open a movie theater. I am thirteen, a student in fourth year of high school. I give private lessons to first and second year pupils. I spend part of the money I earn to go to the movies. I find the lion who roars at the beginning of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer movies very frightening. I hope it won't come out of the screen and jump at me. I love American comedies. In Polish movies, vile seducers disgrace innocent maidens. The audience sheds torrents of tears. Happily, brave gentlemen always avenge the poor dears, before offering them sincere and eternal love.

In the fourth year of high school, new students come into our class. They've gone to vocational class, as I would have done if I had obeyed my parents, and now they passed an exam to enter high school and go on with their studies. One of them, Sofia, becomes my friend.

She is black-haired, somewhat plump, full of charm, funny and bright. At first, I saw her as a rival. When it appeared that I would remain at the head of the class, we really became pals. We walk to school separately, because she's always late, but we come back together and chatter like magpies. The whole school notices her dark beauty. Her charcoal eyes fascinate even the teachers. As for me, the boys find me too blond and too thin. Sofia says they appreciate me for my brains… This is not some kind of barb, as she really has a kind and generous nature. We go to a dancing-hall or to the movies together on Saturday night and Sunday afternoon.

I don't spend my vacations with my mother anymore, but with Sofia and other classmates. In winter, we go to the mountains. In summer, either we go to the mountains too, considering they're so close, or we cross Poland all the way to the Baltic sea. Everybody considers that sports are very manly and that women should avoid them if they want to stay feminine. While the boys climb rocks or swim like fish, the girls are content with admiring them. I try skiing and skating, but I never learn to swim.

1933 Like a cabbage

My friend Sofia falls in love with a young man who belongs to a Zionist group. As antisemitism is getting worse all the time, the Zionists say the Jews should emigrate to Palestine and recreate the country of their ancestors. Sofia joins the group and soon becomes a fierce Zionist. This may be due to her fiancé's influence, I think. I distrust organizations and political parties. I'm afraid I'll lose my freedom if I enroll somewhere. Sofia does convince me to come with her one evening:

"You can come to the club without joining the organization. We talk, we study Hebrew, we play table tennis, we sing."

"I can neither play table tennis nor sing."

"Well, you'll learn!"

I find the warm brotherly atmosphere of the club quite pleasing, so I end up spending several evenings there every week. Sofia's boyfriend, a tall fellow named Dolek, dreams of becoming a peasant in Palestine. Although this idea seems utterly ridiculous to me, I understand Sofia's choice: Dolek is a gentle companion, whose presence puts everybody in a good mood.

I learn some Hebrew. The Zionists want to revive not only their forebears' land, but also their language.

The club's main attraction, actually, is a shining horn gramophone. In the dance halls I go to with Sofia and other schoolmates, there are always tensions between the Jews and the Poles. In the club, we can dance without fear.

We say "Poles" for "Catholics," even though we're as Polish as they are. We're born in Poland, we speak Polish. We let ourselves be influenced by the anti-Semites' propaganda, which pretends there are two categories of people in Poland, the Poles and the Jews.

I hope antisemitism will vanish eventually and the Catholics will "assimilate" the Jews. The Zionists believe this will never happen.

"They are not assimilating us," Dolek says. "On the contrary, antisemitism is gaining every day. Not only in Poland: look at Germany. We'll be safe only when we have our own country."

This way of thinking irritates me.

"You accept to consider yourself a stranger in Poland. That's precisely what they say, so you're playing into their hand. What's more, Palestine is not your country."

"The Jews lived there for many centuries."

"Yes, but other people are living there right now."

I notice a boy who keeps slightly apart. His name is Lonek. He doesn't dance—a great frustration for the girls, considering he's so handsome with his velvety black eyes and his

curly hair. They say he's the best student in the whole high school. He seems to look at the club's futile activities with a severity bordering on scorn. He only smiles (barely) when I criticize Zionism. By and by, I become conscious that he spends most of his time watching me. One evening I leave early, without Sofia, to go over some mathematics exercises. He catches up with me in the street.

"May I see you back home, miss?"

"If you please, sir."

We exchange views on literature and movies. We have similar tastes. I'm registered in two different libraries and I gobble books like an ogress, but I wonder whether I haven't found, for the first time in my life, someone who's read even more books than I have. We tell each other the story of our life. I forget my mathematics and walk at length with Lonek. I can't part from him. I feel at the same time giddy and a little worried: "Have you fallen in love, Malvina? In one evening?"

We get in the habit of walking together in the evening. I never weary of our conversations. When I am in his company, I feel a sweet radiant joy, which I find as surprising as undeserved. I think that if the rest of the world suddenly vanished, I would just shrug and say: "Bah…"

My visits to the Zionist club become less frequent and regular. Lonek is very jealous: he dislikes it when I dance with other men.

My mother, who never missed a day's work in twenty-five years, falls ill. She's just celebrated her fortieth birthday (and I, my seventeenth). The best surgeon in L'vov removes a colon cancer and declares her cured. While I'm sitting near her bed in the hospital, he brings the tumor in a glass jar. It looks like a cabbage. Seeing it makes me shudder, but I can't help looking.

The surgeon excised a length of my mother's colon, then sewed the remaining part to an "artificial anus"—a small opening in the middle of her belly to which a rubber pouch is glued with adhesive plaster. The nurses show me how to remove the pouch. I must empty it and clean it twice a day. It is a very unpleasant task, but at least my mother is alive. I order myself not to tremble. I consider this a good exercise for my willpower. "When you were small, Malvina, she changed your diapers. Now you're reciprocating."

I clean the pouch in the morning before going to school, then in the evening when I come back. What saddens me is that my mother has turned into another woman. Before her illness, she was cheerful and seemed so young that people often thought she was my sister. Now her mood is dark. Deep wrinkles line her emaciated face, gray strands streak her brown hair. I often catch her crying; she quickly wipes her eyes when I approach. I take her to the movies for a change.

After three months, she feels well enough to resume her work at the cigarette factory.

As for me, I'm coming to the end of my high school studies. I've always been careful to learn all my lessons, I've never waited for the last minute to write an essay or finish some homework, I've stayed at the head of the class. All my masters (except for the math teacher) write very flattering comments on my school file. I pass my final exams *summa cum laude*.

Instead of spending the summer vacations with my schoolmates or my Zionist club friends (or Lonek), I go to the mountains with my mother, like in the good old times. This isn't as much fun as it used to be. My mother is much too weak to climb to the meadow along the wild-strawberry path.

Marshall Pilsudski, the hero of Polish independence, came to power in 1926 and changed our country into a dictatorship. The condition of the Jews is going from bad to worse. Universities limit the number of Jewish students to a very low proportion through a system known as *numerus clausus*. Moreover, the Jews are assigned separate benches. To protest against this discrimination, they refuse to sit down. The fascist students attack the standing Jews with their canes. They kill several and wound many. The success of Hitler in nearby Germany[1] comforts the anti-Semites.

I would like to study medicine to fight against illnesses such as my mother's. Most doctors used to be Jewish, but with the *numerus clausus* the number of Jews admitted to medical school is very low. The only way to get in is to pay a huge sum for a special recommendation or "protection." Unless they belong to a very rich family, Jews who want to study medicine go to Prague or Paris. I can't do that, because I have to change my mother's pouch twice a day. My friend Lonek decides to study Latin and Greek.

"People consider these subjects arduous," he tells me, "so there are fewer candidates than the *numerus clausus* allows. You don't have to buy a protection."

"I don't know… I guess I'll go with you, but this means letting the anti-Semites choose my profession for me. Supposing these studies actually lead to a profession…"

I talk to my mother.

"I just can't imagine where I'm headed. Maybe you were right, Mom: I should have gone to vocational class and become a seamstress. I would be sure to find work, whereas Latin and Greek are dead languages that nobody has any use for."

"You could become a teacher in high school."

"A catholic school will never accept a Jewish teacher. As for Jewish school, I'm sure they already have more Latin and Greek teachers than they need."

As soon as I start studying Latin and Greek in earnest, I discover I love these old languages. Their strict grammar and logic satisfies my sense of order. Besides, antiquity is a good place to escape to. When I lose myself in Plutarch or Cicero, I forget not only our troubled times, the terrible dangers threatening the Jews, but also my own worries. My days

[1] On January 30th, 1933.

are quite busy… I take care of my mother, I give private lessons to schoolchildren to earn some pocket money, and on top of that I must learn French—because our Greek teacher, an old fool, pretends Greek literature shouldn't be translated into Polish but only into French. I don't lack opportunities to apply the principles I learned long ago in *Triumph of the Will*. "Work doesn't frighten you, Malvina. When there's a will, there's a way…"

I don't have time to go to the Zionist club anymore. Actually, the Zionists are following their program and moving to Palestine to flee antisemitism. My friend Sofia marries her Dolek and goes there with him.

While I attend the same courses as Lonek in university, I can't say I look forward to meeting him every morning. My mother's illness and the plight of the Jews harden my mind, so that I become less tolerant of his somber character and stupid jealousy. The confrontation with the fascists is useful in a way: it reveals the true qualities and defects of people. I discover that Lonek avoids the anti-Semites like a coward. I suspect his jealousy hides the weakness of a vain man. I can't count on him.

One year after the operation, my mother seems in good health. She's regained some weight. Her smile is back. The surgeon is confident the cancer has vanished totally.

"The colon healed up," he says, "so we should be able to put it back where it belongs."

This means suppressing this awful artificial anus, which my mother hates and I have to clean twice a day.

One of my friends goes to Prague for her studies. On the railway platform, after saying goodbye to her, I talk briefly with her brother and a friend of his, an engineer named Kasimir or Kasik.

I take my mother to the hospital, where she must spend a few days for a checkup before the operation. I visit her in the morning and evening. On the second evening, as I come out of the hospital, I meet Kasik.

"I live just across the street, miss. I've seen you from my window. If you allow me, I'll walk you to the tram stop."

He's there again on the next evening. He looks like a cartoon scientist: tangled hair, loose necktie, unmatched socks. He reminds me of Stanislas, my teddy bear. He is not tense and pompous, like Lonek, but stolid and always ready to make fun of himself and others. While I worry terribly because of the coming operation, his whimsical blather soothes my frayed nerves. I even laugh several times.

During the operation, I stay in the waiting-room instead of going to university. I've brought my books and notebooks. I must translate a Thucydides text into French, but I look at the strange letters and see a meaningless gibberish. The surgeon comes out of the operating room. He seems quite happy:

"It was tricky. I could have failed…"

"You have succeeded, doctor?"

"Full success! Your mother should be able to lead a normal life. Just like before."

"That's wonderful. Thank you so much!"

A little later, my mother wakes up. I tell her the operation succeeded. At first she can't talk, but she smiles at me tenderly. By and by, she recovers her voice.

"Next summer, Malvina…"

"Yes, Mom."

"If I feel better…"

"The surgeon told me you were fully cured!"

"Instead of going to the mountains…"

"Anything you like, Mom!"

"I thought about Italy… A trip to Italy…"

"What a good idea! I've always dreamt of seeing Italy. We could go to Venice and Rome and Naples… Oh, my little Mom, I love you!"

The nurse (she's a nun) tells me my mother needs rest. She does seem terribly weak. As she's beginning to doze, I go away. Kasik is waiting for me. His cheerfulness comforts me. Exhausted by the day's anxieties, I go to bed as soon as I come home.

An awful feeling of distress awakes me towards the end of the night, a little before dawn. I dress in haste and run to the hospital in the gray mist of early morning. In the entry hall, I meet the mother superior, who is also the head nurse. She takes me into her arms.

"You must be brave, my child…"

She leads me to my mother's room. As soon as I see her, I know she is dying. Her beautiful face is contorted. I understand or guess that she's gathered all her strength to wait for my visit.

"Mom! Mom!"

Hearing my voice, she relaxes. She looks at me with a lucid stare, full of a boundless love, then she closes her eyes forever.

1934 Alone

This is my first encounter with death—and the beginning of a long ordeal. I must break the news to my father, my grandmother, the cigarette factory's director. My father hides his dejection by cursing the surgeon. Babudia wails like an injured beast. I just can't soothe her.

I take care of the burial permit and other administrative tasks. My father spends his days in the pub to forget Mom. Babudia sits in her armchair and whines:

"Oy, oy, for what offense did the Eternal Lord punish us thus? Why didn't I go before her?"

On the day of the funeral, the cigarette factory closes its doors. The whole personnel, lead by the director and the department heads, follows the procession. Six men carry the coffin on their shoulders from the synagogue to the graveyard. The director himself delivers my mother's eulogy. He says she was a careful and skillful person, utterly reliable. I have a feeling that his grief prevents him from reaching the end of the speech he prepared. On the way back, he promises to pay me a pension, as a token of his esteem for my mother, until I marry.

"This is the least I can do. I owe it to her… Twenty-five years of faithful service… A terrible loss. We'll never be able to replace her. I believe your father's salary is not very high…"

"Thank you, sir."

Babudia insists on performing a Jewish mourning ritual. She pretends we must close the blinds and spend seven days at home, sitting on the floor, barefoot, in the dark, without doing anything. I understand her sorrow, but I think this is too much:

"As if we needed to follow all the rules in the Bible… Do you also want us to cover our heads with ashes?"

"What do you say? Speak louder!"

"Do you want us to cover our heads with ashes?"

"This is no time for joking, Malvina. The Eternal punished us because we didn't obey His law. We must atone for our sins."

"Maybe it meant something to spend a week barefoot under the tent two thousand years ago, but today, in the twentieth century…"

She is stubborn. She adheres to the letter of her Jewish mourning laws. I sit on the floor with her a few hours every day. This is very uncomfortable. I stand up to buy food and to attend the most important courses in university. Kasik comes daily for a short visit—a pleasant diversion that alleviates my pain.

She spends the following weeks in her armchair. She doesn't move much and barely eats anything. She shrivels up like a drying apple. After six months, she ceases to leave her bed in

the morning. She doesn't want to live anymore. I go looking for my uncle Favek, the gambler. People tell me they've seen him in this or that pub. I miss him several times. Fate plays cruel games with me: instead of finding my uncle, I meet my father. He drinks vodka with very gross people, laughs loudly, sings in a raucous voice. I don't want to come close. Ashamed, blushing, holding back my tears, I run out before he sees me.

I find my uncle eventually. I tell him his mother is letting herself die. He sneers.

"What do you want me to do about it? She can't live forever, and neither can we."

Babudia stops speaking. She moans softly. It sounds like a song without words. I imagine she's repeating the same words over and over under her breath:

"Oy weh, oy weh!"

She doesn't seem to suffer, so I don't call a doctor right away. When he comes, he tells me he can't do anything. She wanes away slowly. Her death agony lasts a week. I stay by her until the end.

Again, I take care of the funeral by myself. I bury her near Mom.

I live with my father. He sleeps at home two or three nights a week. He still teaches drawing, but gives me very little money. When he comes home at lunch or dinner time, he gets angry if I don't prepare a hot meal for him right away. I must also wash his clothes and his underwear, iron his shirts, wax the floor, dust the furniture. "You shouldn't complain, Malvina, but rejoice that your father gives you these opportunities to train your will."

Towards the end of 1936, my father tells me he intends to remarry. He's been a widower for nearly three years. I meet his future wife. I don't like her. Her features are blurred by alcohol, like my father's. She says they met in a pub. He moves to her apartment even before the official wedding.

Now I am really alone. Every afternoon, after avoiding the fascists and their canes in the university, I come home to an empty house to translate Latin and Greek texts. My evenings are gloomy. What can I do? Hold a conference with myself, of course. "You wanted to study medicine abroad, Malvina, but you gave up your project because your mother needed you. Today, nothing detains you here. You could live in Paris with the pension the director gives you." Timorous students go to Prague, because the Czech language is similar to Polish. As for me, I want to change my life totally. Flee as far as possible from L'vov and its cane-wielding students, forget the very language of the anti-Semites. It so happens that I studied French for my Greek course. I've read descriptions of Paris in *Les Misérables* and *César Birotteau*[1]. I dream of discovering the City of Light, which everybody considers the cultural capital of the world.

Kasik is training as an engineer in a Cracow factory. Now and then, he spends a week or two in L'vov. Then he waits for me every afternoon in front of the university. Seeing him

[1] Novels by Victor Hugo and Honoré de Balzac.

quickens my pulse, which may mean I'm in love with him—but when he asks me to marry him, I refuse.

"I'm sorry, Kasik, but it is not possible. I don't want to become *the engineer's wife* in some godforsaken Polish town or hamlet. I've decided I'd go to France and I won't change my mind."

"We're made for each other. You're destroying two lives. Everything is crumbling. What shall I do?"

"I'll come back for the summer vacations. We'll see where we stand."

I spend nearly a full year getting ready to depart. Obtaining a Polish passport isn't easy. I must prove that I've registered at a foreign university. I go to the French consulate to inquire. They say I must write to the Paris medicine faculty and ask for a registration form. Every step takes weeks or even months. "Be patient, Malvina." I do get my registration certificate, then my Polish passport. I go back to the consulate and ask for a French visa.

I sell the house's lease and all the furniture. I need money for the registration fees, the passport, the visa, the train ticket. I buy French francs with the first installments of my pension. The government, pretending it needs to protect Poland against speculation and capital flight, levies a heavy tax on foreign currency transactions.

As I must empty the house before the new tenants' arrival, I give clothes, personal objects and all my Polish books to my various friends. I find the moldy corpse of Stanislas the teddy bear at the bottom of a cupboard. I throw it away with a bundle of my father's drawings and other old papers.

1938 The smell of Paris

I leave the L'vov railway station on December 30, 1937 around 11 PM. I feel a sudden heart pang when the shapes of Kasik and my other friends begin to shrink on the platform. "Don't you cry, Malvina. Be strong!" I change trains in Warsaw on the morning of December 31. For the first time in my life, I go across the western province of Silesia, which belonged to Germany until the end of the Great War.

I read *Jean Barois*, a French novel by Roger Martin du Gard. I don't want to talk to the other passengers in my compartment. Actually, they're all reading, as if to escape the iron box that speeds straight to Germany. Now and then, when the silence becomes too loud, they exchange a few words in hushed voices. In Berlin, policemen wearing black uniforms check our passports. Their gleaming helmets and boots seem as threatening as their machine-guns. They don't speak the language of Goethe and Heine but shout it, like their Führer. They look at us with disgust. They see us as barbaric Slavs. Deep inside, I shiver when I think that I am not only a barbaric Slav, but also a degenerate Jewess. "You shouldn't worry, Malvina. You're just going through their country." I hold their ferocious glare. My blond hair, my blue eyes, my turned up nose could protect me, as they give me the looks of a perfect Aryan, if a blue stamp on my passport didn't say "Mosaic religion."[1].

On the evening of December 31, as night falls on the gray suburbs of Magdeburg or Hannover, we see windows framing holiday lights and Christmas trees, families eating fat fowls, housewives carrying huge soup-tureens, happy children. *Wie gemütlich!*[2] I studied German in school for so many years that I know this language much better than French. Often, I think in German. So the adjective "gemütlich" comes naturally to my mind. How could it be otherwise? Inferior languages like Polish or French can't express the perfection of an authentic German housewife's homemaking. The Nazis simplified her life. She just has to take care of the three Ks: *Küche*, *Kirche* and *Kinder*[3].

Around 1 AM, I admire a magnificent *Kirche*, the cathedral of Cologne. Then we cross the Rhine and I remember Heine's *Lorelei*: *Die Luft ist kühl, und es dunkelt, und ruhig fließt der Rhein*[4]. The Nazis wanted to ban all the poems of Heinrich Heine, because he was Jewish, but they couldn't suppress *Die Lorelei*, which everybody in Germany knows by heart. So they

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[1] The Germans thought they belonged to a superior blond and blue-eyed race called "Aryan." The Jews (the people of Moses, thus "mosaic") were supposed to have black hair and eyes, a big hooked nose, flat feet, etc.

[2] How nice and homely!

[3] Kitchen, Church, Children.

[4] The air is cool, it gets darker, quiet flows the Rhine. See also p. xx. The Lorelei is the best known poem of Heinrich Heine (1797-1856).

decreed it was a "folk poem." Even though human beings behave like monsters, the Rhine goes on flowing quietly.

After going across a corner of Belgium, the train rolls into France. The friendly French custom inspectors are so different from the black Berlin guards… I can't help smiling when I hear their jolly parting words: "Happy New Year, ladies and gentlemen!"

The train reaches its final destination, Paris, on January 1st, 1938 at 7 AM. I'm glad I'm beginning my new life on the first day of the year. "At last you're stepping on French soil, Malvina!" I wouldn't have been surprised if the French soil had been covered with marble, but I have to admit it looks like a regular railway platform. The passengers do not seem to know whether to walk or wait. They look for friends or relatives who're supposed to welcome them. When they see them, they stop to exchange heaps of kisses and shouts. Although nobody's welcoming me, I stop too. My suitcase weighs a ton. It contains all my clothes, as well as a flat-iron to press them and my favorite French books. I've prepared my trip carefully. I've studied the map of Paris at a friend's house. I've gone over my French grammar in the train. The subjunctive and conditional modes, the demonstrative adjectives, the relative pronouns *qui que quoi dont où*, the coordination conjunctions *mais ou et donc or ni car*, the concordance of the past participle. The air isn't as cold as in L'vov, or maybe I feel warm because I have to carry my heavy suitcase. I open all the buttons of my thick Polish fur-lined coat.

I look at the huge black steam engine. I find it very ugly. Suddenly, it spews a last spurt of steam, as if it wanted to protest against the monotony of its task. I start, pick up my suitcase and walk on. I'm eager to leave the noisy and smoky station and discover the stylish streets of Paris. I repeat to myself the itinerary I learned by heart: "When you come out of *Gare du Nord*, you walk on *Boulevard de Magenta* until you cross *Boulevard de Strasbourg*."

Yes, but—instead of leaving the station through the front gate, I come out through a side door. I am famous for never making a mistake; I guess I'm more nervous than I want to admit. I lose myself in a maze of narrow streets bordered by decayed houses. I notice a nondescript foul smell. I become very sensitive to odors when I am tired… Is this the perfume of Paris?

All of a sudden, a violent yearning for my hometown overwhelms me. Have I really taken the right decision?

"Anyway, Malvina, you can't go home. Your mother and grandmother are dead, your father has a new wife. There is no turning back." My future is fuzzy, but the past is already vanishing in the mist. Pictures of my trip march in my mind like a silent movie's scenes, masking my other memories. I see the faces of the Berlin policemen framed by their steel helmets, the housewives bringing soup to their brood, the cathedral of Cologne reaching for the stars.

"Instead of thinking of this trip and these stupid German housewives, Malvina, you'd better find your way." A French policeman, wearing his short blue cape, is standing at a street

corner. The cape is as ridiculous as the pictures I've seen in books, but I am too tired and worried to laugh at it—which would be a very bad idea, of course. "Ask him the direction to the Boulevard de Strasbourg."

"Excuse me, *monsieur l'agent de police*. I just arrived from Poland by the train, but I am lost in the small streets. I am looking for Boulevard de Strasbourg, for I desire to go to the Latin Quarter…"

I hope he'll pity me and be nice to me if I seem shy. As a fact, I don't have to overdo it: I'm not as confident as usual.

He smiles.

"Secondrightthenleftthenright, miss. Itsnotveryfar."

Right then, I discover something awful: I don't understand a word of French! Or rather, I understand the French of my Greek teacher and of Roger Martin du Gard perfectly… This policeman speaks too fast, obviously.

"Could you repeat but more slowly please, *monsieur l'agent de police*?"

"SECONDRIGHTTHENLEFTTHENRIGHT, MISS. ITSNOTVERYFAR."

He repeats in a louder voice, but just as fast. "You know, Malvina, your new life may not be much easier than the old one."

He laughs at my puzzled look. He seems to consider himself lucky that his duty compels him to walk a few blocks with the pretty foreigner.

"I'llgowithyou, miss."

To help me understand this sentence, he grabs my elbow. I am amazed—not by his gesture, but by my lack of reaction to it. If he was one of the Berlin black cops, or even a Polish policeman, I would be terribly frightened. The Poles are endowed with a sixth sense that lets them recognize Jews even when they have blond hair and blue eyes. You never know when they'll insult you or worse.

So Paris is indeed as pleasant as the city of my dreams. And now we come to one of the magnificent tree-lined boulevards that I expected to see when I stepped out of the station. The policeman shows me a blue enamel plate: "Boulevard de Strasbourg." Then he points ahead:

"StraightonthenboulevarddeSébastopolthentheSeine. Goodbyeandgoodluck!"

I think hard and I understand what he said: Good bye and Good luck.

I walk a little. I put my heavy suitcase down. I look around. "Do you see, Malvina? A Parisian man! A Parisian woman! A Parisian bench!" There are not many automobiles, this being the morning of January 1st, but they seem bigger and more beautiful than in Poland. A bus stops near me. It has a strange rump, a kind of open platform probably intended for smokers.

"Are you coming?" the conductor asks me.

A thick black handlebar mustache winds across his face. I laugh and show him the opposite direction.

"I am going to the Latin Quarter."

He pulls a chain hanging form the bus's roof. A bell tinkles and the bus goes away.

The stores are closed. I stop now and then to look at a shop-window. I see a pharmacy, marked by a signboard in shape of a green cross, and a movie theater. "You'll be able to go to the movies, Malvina… A good place to hear French spoken." I mutter the names of actors I know: "Louis Jouvet, Jean Gabin, Arletty, Michel Simon…"

I raise my eyes towards the top of the apartment houses. "These are mansard roofs and garret windows. Maybe I'll see a gutter cat, a dowager duchess, a gentleman burglar.[1]" With their cast-iron balconies and potted flowers, the stone façades of the buildings look like stern gray robes livened by lace ribbons and shining gemstones.

When I reach *Place du Châtelet*, I put my suitcase down again. What a strange fountain… Why do these four Egyptian sphinxes spit water? The Châtelet and Sarah Bernhardt theaters stand on opposite sides of the square. My father told me about Sarah Bernhardt, a great Jewish actress. Is she still alive[2]?

And then I see a bridge. The Seine river! I just have to cross it to be on *Boulevard Saint-Michel*, the backbone of the Latin Quarter. I've read in a book that they nicknamed it *Boul'Mich*… I stop halfway across the bridge. I recognize the Paris that books and postcards installed in my mind. I gaze at the river, which seems to flow with the kind of unhurried carelessness that the French call *nonchalance*.

As I step on *Île de la Cîté*, I believe I've reached the left bank, so I wonder why I don't see my dear Boul'Mich. Then I remember the two islands moored in the middle of the river. From the second bridge, I admire the Notre-Dame cathedral, which looks more like a gigantic sculpture than a church. I want to laugh like a madwoman. "You realized your dream, Malvina… You're in Paris! The most beautiful city in the world!"

[1] In French, this sentence is full of quirky words and expressions that would puzzle a foreigner.

[2] No.

The Latin Quarter

For the first time in my life, I walk up Boulevard Saint-Michel. I stare at the few passers-by. This young man must be a student! This young woman too! I've met Parisian students in French novels. Instead of fighting with their canes, like Polish students, they prefer to dance and enjoy life. They wear corduroy jackets and smoke a pipe. They're poor, but not forever like factory workers. They know Latin, of course, since they live in the Latin Quarter.

I walk slowly, turning my head right and left. "Be attentive, Malvina. You'll remember these first impressions of Boul'Mich to the end of your life." I see several cafés, but they are closed on this holiday. I try to speak to myself in French: "Students sit in the café and order a glass of red wine." Large bookstores line the boulevard. I'll come back tomorrow as soon as they're open!

The building for the freshman year of medicine is located on rue Cuvier, near the *Jardin des Plantes*[1]. "When you're a doctor, you'll cure sick children and prematurely stricken mothers. The operation succeeded, but she died. Instead of helping you, he went to the pub. Women are brave and men are cowardly. They hide their weakness behind black uniforms and shiny guns. He married this horrible tart…" I would like to roll my bad memories into a ball and expel them from my mind.

"You'd better find a cheap hotel between Boul'Mich and rue Cuvier, maybe somewhere near place Maubert or rue des Écoles." I decide to cross the boulevard to enter rue du Sommerard, which seems narrow and quiet enough to hide a hotel to my taste. As I'm looking downwards to avoid the trams' rails and the horses' manure, an old convertible comes to a stop in front of me in a cacophony of horn, brakes and insults:

"Hey, you peasant, look where you're going!"

"The train station to go back to your native Brittany is this way!"

Eight or ten boys and girls wearing white frocks are huddled together in the car's seats and on its footboards. I guess they have spent the night celebrating the New Year. What reddens their cheeks is pleasure rather than cold air. They laugh, sing, blow into paper trumpets. They startled me, but now I find their elated mood infectious. Medical students! I feel as joyous as if I had frolicked with them for hours. Two magical syllables dance in my head: "Boul'Mich, Boul'Mich!"

I find a tiny hotel room on rue du Sommerard. The rent is 180 francs per month. The pension my mother's boss sends me amounts to 300 francs only—because I must change it into francs and deduct the currency tax. "This leaves you 120 francs for food and medicine books."

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[1] Botanical gardens.

The room contains a bed, a small table and a wash-basin. I feel awfully dirty after the long train journey. Whereas I love to soak for hours in a bath-tub, I'm reduced to washing myself as well as possible with a hand towel. I wash my hair in the basin. "Look at the water, Malvina! So black! The steam engine's smoke and soot entered the compartment and sullied everything." I also wash my shirt. I'll give my gray suit for dry-cleaning tomorrow. In the meantime, I iron it on the room's table.

I look at myself in the mirror. My hair is falling on my shoulders. "You should shorten it a little, the better to wash it in this little basin. Or else you might buy a large wash-bowl." The round cheeks I had before my mother's death have melted away, so that my cheekbones stick out. I am going to be 22 years old next month, but I seem older.

During the first few days, I explore the Latin Quarter. I walk from my hotel to rue Cuvier and I note that I need ten minutes. I read the daily newspaper Paris-Soir in the big Capoulade[1] outdoor café.

"For mademoiselle, what will it be?" the waiter asks.

"A cup of coffee, monsieur, if you please."

"Black or cream?"

"Cream, if you please?"

"Small or big?"

"Hm, big, monsieur, if you please."

"You know what? Next time, just ask for *un grand crème*[2] directly!"

I enjoy learning new expressions like *un grand crème, le plat du jour, une demi-baguette*[3], which you don't usually find when translating Thucydides.

I visit the Notre-Dame cathedral. I see stain-glass windows, an altar, holy water, for the first time in my life. In Poland, I didn't dare enter a church, as it was much too dangerous. In France, I feel free.

On the first day of university, I get up at dawn. My gray suit is quite clean, but I iron it once again. I brush my heavy Polish shoes. I sharpen my already sharp pencils. I leave the hotel one hour early. A strong smell of wine and damp wood drifts from the warehouses of the old wine market, at the corner or rue Jussieu and rue Cuvier.

I enter the PCN[4] building fifty minutes before the beginning of the first course. I feel as nervous as a soprano who's coming on stage to sing her big aria. Studying medicine doesn't scare me. I'm ready to work hard for ten years and more. Yes, but why am I alone in this huge hall? "Are you sure this is the right day, Malvina? Is this the right building? If the

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[1] This beautiful Boulevard Saint-Michel café vanished long ago. As I am writing this, a fast-food restaurant called "Quick" (belonging to a French chain, despite its name) is sitting in its place.

[2] A big cream.

[3] Le plat du jour: today's special. Une demi-baguette: a half-loaf of bread.

[4] "Physics-Chemistry-Natural Science": freshman year in medicine school.

teachers speak as fast as the policeman or the hotel manager, you won't understand anything. They didn't request a white frock, but maybe you should still have bought one. They'll send you away because you don't have your frock!"

I pity this panicked Malvina… "How foolish you are! Everything will be all right. There's no one else because you're early, as usual." While I'm advising myself to be patient, another shy maiden enters the hall. What a strange thing: she wears a heavy coat, probably a fur-lined coat, just like me. I've not seen this kind of coat in the streets of Paris. Whereas L'vov ladies must wear animal pelts to resist the wild wind blowing across the Russian plains, Parisian women can stay elegant all year around. In France, even the winter is civilized.

As her coat puzzles me, I walk towards her to take a better look. Strange and stranger: I feel I know this gal. Is this some kind of mind trick due to my nervousness? Thus I thought I saw my mother in the street several months after her death. No, there is definitely something in this girl's appearance, in her red hair, that reminds me of my country and more precisely of my high school. She looks like a student whom we nicknamed *dynia*, or pumpkin, because of her round cheeks and red hair.

She also moves towards me, so that I can talk to her.

"Excuse me, mademoiselle… Are you French?" I ask.

"No, mademoiselle, I am not it. I am a Polish."

It's her indeed! Confused by this amazing coincidence, I forget that I've sworn never to speak my mother tongue anymore and I address her in Polish:

"You are Hala Pump…, I mean Karmann! We were in the same high school! I am Malvina Zien!"

We throw ourselves into each other's arms as if we were old friends. In Poland, actually, there was an abyss between us. She belonged to one of the richest families in the Jewish section of town. Besides, she was one year behind me in school. In Paris, necessity brings us together like the blind man and the paralytic one in the Aesopus tale. This meeting heartens us.

"You speak French perfectly, Malvina. When you talked to me, I thought you were French. I'm sure you'll be able to take down all the courses. Then I'll be able to use your notes."

"You take down what you can. Believe me, I'll need you notes, too."

We enroll in the same lab class. We're quite cheerful when we come out of the PCN building to do our shopping. We buy white frocks, lancets, books, stencil copies of our courses.

Hala's parents send her 200 francs per month. She lives in a cozy hotel on rue Lacépède—which is just another name for rue Cuvier when it climbs towards place de la Contrescarpe. She brought two huge trunks full of clothes, but she soon finds out that the latest Parisian fashion of L'vov doesn't match the latest Parisian fashion of Paris. This is annoying, as the difference can't escape the sharp eyes of the students. Whereas I came to Paris for my studies, Hala came mainly for the students. She finds them so amusing, with their thin mustaches and

their funny first names: René! Hervé! Désiré! Their perfect pronunciation of the French language is a constant cause for wonder. Her instinct tells her that a foreigner can attract them, with her thick coat and her melodious accent, but that she can't hope to keep one of them if she doesn't become French… She looks for the secrets of the Parisian chic in the Champs-Élysées neighborhood, with its expensive seamstresses and beauty parlors. I must often curtail my pension to lend her a few dozen francs until the end of the month.

Her favorite student is named Jean-Pierre. Compound first names, such as Jean-Paul, Jean-Claude or Marie-Louise, strike us as wonderfully French. The fluid syllables of the word "mademoiselle" also sound very French to our ears. We love it when the students say *Mademoiselle Hala* and *Mademoiselle Malvina*. After six weeks, Hala decides it is high time to frenchify her name. She becomes *Mademoiselle Hélène*.

I keep the window open when I sleep. I find the Paris night air so sweet… In March, I begin to feel a kind of mellow quality in the wind. Jean-Pierre, who comes from Normandy, recognizes this caressing wind:

"This is a sea breeze blowing up along the Seine river. If we caught it in a bottle, we would see a salt deposit after a while."

While Poland is still sleeping under a thick snow blanket, the blooming of rainbow-hued flowers turns the Luxembourg gardens into an impressionistic painting. Intoxicated by Nature's awakening, my willpower weakens. When all these handsome students ask us out, how could we refuse? We go to the movies, to the theater, to concerts and even to *Bal Bullier*[1], on the corner of Boulevard Saint-Michel and Boulevard de Port-Royal. I scold myself: "You should stay in your room and study your mathematics." I discover unknown urges in hidden corners of my mind… I prefer to go for a stroll and loaf than to study! Breathing the emollient atmosphere of the Latin Quarter makes me lenient with myself. I also begin to wonder whether I have chosen the right path. I find mathematics obscure and physics boring. I am shocked when a lab assistant murders poor mice who never hurt anyone so that we can cut them up. Sooner or later, we'll have to dissect human corpses. Although I think that religious beliefs are fables aimed at children and feeble-minded people, I can't help imagining Babudia's voice:

"A Jewish girl cutting up the dead… How sacrilegious! And then people are surprised when the Eternal gets angry!"

Shall I dare plunge my scalpel into human flesh, when the time comes? The male students sing huffy songs about "cold meat" and "stiffs." They seem to consider dissection one of these great virile acts that separate the men from the boys. To deter us from confronting the dead with our blades, they stick little body parts into our frock pocket and guffaw when we

[1] Bullier dance-hall.

start and blush. Their murky thrill proves that you do need to overcome a prohibition to maim corpses.

I get up at dawn and I talk to myself while I iron my shirt.

"The only sure thing is your good old Siemens iron. It gleams like the helmets and the machine-guns in Berlin… Do you remember the Solingen knife in your L'vov kitchen? Steel is tough and you're so weak… I'm not afraid, but it would be easier if Mom was there to support me. *Die Luft ist kühl, und es dunkelt*. Folksong. Unknown writer… How did they dare? You thought that as soon you'd be in France, you'd cease to feel Jewish. Now you discover that by blotting out Heine, the Nazis are trying to erase you too. Until they return *Die Lorelei* to him, you can't forget that you belong to the same people as he did. When these students snicker and utter expressions so obviously gross that you don't even need to understand them, they look like the German cops. This is their way of asserting the manliness of medicine. Why didn't they save your mother? Nobody ever heals. Add a few months of pain… Fake hopes. The tumor in a jar, like a cabbage. The filthy hole in the middle of her belly. The stinking dressings you had to change between two Greek courses. Then the small routine operation. No risk, the surgeon said… What will you do with your life, Malvina? Remove dressings to look at infected wounds? Excise organs? Tell patients they'll live one more year? Lie to the dying? Fight against death and lose, lose, lose. Yes? No?"

Although I find it rather sound to question my motives and possibly disagree with myself, I don't really intend to change my mind, to give up, to reverse my decision. This wouldn't be like me. Chance (or fate) will decide in my place.

The lost handbag

Coming back from the ladies' room, I feel that something is wrong. I walk across the café half-heartedly. I see the waiter brought the two *big creams* and the *croissants* to our table. Hélène is dunking her croissant into her cup.

"Wait a minute, Hélène. I'll be back. I forgot my handbag downstairs."

I retrace my steps much faster towards the staircase. I'm nearly running. How long did I leave it down there? Less than a minute. Oh my, it is gone already. I feel my face is turning red, then white, then red again. A terrible disaster. My papers! My passport! The money for the hotel and for food!

Hélène tries to comfort me.

"I'll lend you money for the hotel, Malvina. Papers can be replaced. I'll ask Jean-Pierre what you should do."

Jean-Pierre finds this adventure quite funny. As he is French, he never takes anything seriously.

"You must declare the theft to the police station."

"Where is it, your police station?"

"Very close, on place du Panthéon."

I can say I get to know this police station in and out. I go there at least twenty times. A very helpful official, monsieur Mahé, who plasters his hair down and wears tortoise-shell glasses, is in charge of my case.

"Ah, mademoiselle Zien, I've got news for you. The French consulate in L'vov sent a duplicate of your French visa. For your passport, you must go to the Polish consulate, which will deliver a consular passport. For your residency card, you should ask your hotel for a receipt proving you're paying your rent and bring it to me. When did you arrive in France?"

"On January 1st. I've been here nearly five months."

"If you could find your train ticket, or some other token of your trip, it would be nice."

"I'll look for it in my things. Thank you so much, monsieur Mahé. You are very obligeant."

"Obligeant? I don't know whether such a word exists…"

"My French is so poor. What should I say?"

"Well… *You're very kind*, maybe. I shouldn't say that about myself, mind you!"

Not only did I lose the money I had in my bag, but I must borrow several hundred francs from Hélène to send a wire to the French consulate in L'vov and buy the consular passport. As I don't want to beg the cigarette factory director for more money, I go to a student aid office on Boul'Mich. They send me to a Swiss couple, monsieur and madame Stern, who need a baby-sitter for their little boy, Simon. They're both chemists, Jewish, quite religious. They live near the Buttes-Chaumont garden, in the north of Paris. From my bedroom, I can

see the garden. My salary includes room and board. For the first time in my life, I follow the Jewish diet, with separate plates and cutlery for meat and dairy products. They give me 150 francs per month, which I can consider a kind of pocket money. In the morning, after cleaning and doing other household tasks, I go to the park with Simon. Thus, I miss my lab courses. In the afternoon, I attend the math, physics and chemistry courses, which I find more mystifying every day.

Simon is only four years old, but he is a great French pronunciation teacher. He imitates my accent to make fun of me, rolling the Rs in a comical way and warping the nasal sounds *en*, *in* or *on*. With his help, I identify my main failings and I can try to correct them. As he doesn't frighten me, I try tough words on him:

"*Regarde ce marron dans sa fourrure. Il ressemble à un oursin*![1]"

I discover that I would have enjoyed a little brother. "Will you have children someday, Malvina?"

[1] Look at this horse-chestnut inside its fur. It looks like a sea-urchin.

Farewell to L'vov

I can't sit for the June exams, because I've missed too many lab courses. Besides, I'm too weak in math's and physics. Not only does Hélène fail, but Jean-Pierre also stumbles. Hélène reacts to this mishap "with philosophy," as the French say.

"We intend to enroll in the pharmacy school in September. It's supposed to be much easier. Plus you're sure to earn a good living."

"You know, Hélène, I think I'll drop out, too."

"You, Malvina? But you're so much above me. You'll make it for sure! You've progressed so much in French. You speak like a real Parisian, now!"

"I don't know whether I want to go on. I was mad at the surgeon who had operated on my mother. He said she was cured, but then she died. I thought doctors had more conceit than knowledge. I wanted to study medicine and change things. It was a decision forced on me by anger and grief, you understand, not a vocation. In fact, I don't know what I want to become."

"Come to L'vov with me. It will open up your mind. Maybe you'll find out what you want to do!"

She goes back there for the summer vacations. Six months ago, I thought I was severing forever the links that tied me to my motherland. Kasik never fails to repeat, in the letters he sends me two or three times a week, how eager he is to see me again soon. Yes, I did promise I would return, but… Dipping my croissant in my big cream at Capoulade erases Poland and all its citizens from my memory.

Well, isn't it strange, when Hélène shows me her train ticket, I feel a sudden urge to travel eastwards. I've earned enough money working for the Sterns to pay off my debt to Hélène and buy my train ticket. "You've got to go, Malvina. You'll put an end to the Kazik affair, so you won't spend hours answering his letters anymore. And don't forget the boss of the cigarette factory: you must tell him what happened." I have changed, thought things up, matured perhaps. I don't consider Poland with a rebel girl's disgust, but with a nostalgia-colored curiosity.

Instead of embarking on the Berlin train with Hélène, I take the Vienna line via Strasbourg, Stuttgart, Munich, Salzburg. The director of the cigarette factory asked me to visit his daughter, Mrs. Silber, who lives in Vienna. I arrive there a morning at 7 AM, in early July. I call a young porter.

"I must spend the day in Vienna and take the L'vov train at midnight."

"I'll put you suitcase in the cloak-room. Where do you come from?"

"Paris."

"You speak good German."

"Thank you. Could you call a taxi for me?"

"Of course. Tonight, ask for my number: 67. I'll help you find your train."

He wears glasses like a student. His number is embroidered on his cap.

Mrs. Silber inhabits a magnificent building in a plush neighborhood, but her husband expects to lose his job as director of a bank any day—because he is Jewish. They want only one thing: to leave all their possessions behind and flee abroad. Hitler just annexed Austria. The Jews live in fear. In Poland, the anti-Semites are virulent, but the Jews do not feel their lives threatened. They emigrate because the Polish universities reject them or because they can't find work. After talking with the Silbers, I'm convinced that for them emigration is a question of life and death. They have a sweet six-year old daughter, Edith. They think about her future. Will she grow up among people who pretend she belongs to an "inferior race" and doesn't deserve to live? They ask me all kinds of questions about France. They dream of settling on the Riviera. Mrs. Silber gives me a long letter for her father. She asks the driver to bring the automobile. He drives us to the center of town, then she shows me the main monuments and palaces of Vienna. The palaces remind me of those in L'vov, except they're much bigger. They look like huge cream cakes, as I can check by eating real cakes in one of the famous Viennese pastry-shops. I prefer the monuments and cafés in Paris, but I understand the sorrow of Mrs. Silber, who must leave this town where she spent ten years.

After having dinner with the Silbers, I take a taxi to the station, where I ask for the porter number 67. He seems delighted to see me again.

"Did you spend a good day?"

"I visited Vienna. It is nearly as beautiful as Paris."

"What can you know about Vienna after one day? I you stayed longer, you'd forget Paris! I'll get your suitcase from the cloak-room."

He takes me to the train and finds a seat for me in a third-class compartment. I give him all my change. In L'vov, I won't need money, since Kasik is supposed to wait for me at the station.

I've walked a lot in Vienna's streets, so I'm glad I can rest at last. My mind wants to rest, too. "You don't have to worry about anything, Malvina. The train follows the rails. You can let your watchfulness and your willpower take a nap." After a few minutes, as I'm vaguely thinking about Kasik and L'vov, I believe I overhear the other passengers mentioning walks in the Swiss mountains. My watchfulness and willpower wake up right away.

"*Mein Herr,* could you please tell me where this train is going?"

"Why, to Zurich, of course!"

Talk about willpower! I need all of it to control my panic… I get off quickly. A railroad employee tells me the train to L'vov doesn't leave from the West station, but from the East station, on the other side of town. It is 11.30 PM. I don't have a cent left. My suitcase is very heavy. How can I pay a porter and a taxi? "Keep cool, Malvina… You'll find a way."

I find porter 67.

"The lady from Paris! What's the matter? Didn't you take your train?"

"It was the wrong one. I'm going to L'vov. My train leaves from the East station in twenty-five minutes."

"From the East station? To go to Switzerland?"

"L'vov is not in Switzerland, but in Poland!"

"You don't say… In Poland… Give me your suitcase. You just take a taxi—you'll make it."

"But you see, I don't have any money left, neither for you nor for the taxi."

"For me, it doesn't matter. For the taxi, I can lend you some."

"Thank you. It's nice of you."

I give him Mrs. Silber's address.

"You'll tell her what happened. She'll give you the money."

"Hurry up. *Bon voyage!* Next time you're in Vienna, ask for porter 67… We can have dinner together!"

The taxi whizzes like lightning through the sleeping town. I don't know how I manage to run to the train with my heavy suitcase. It is ready to leave, so the conductor reopens the door expressly for me.

I sit down in the first compartment with an available seat. My legs wouldn't have carried me much farther. I am out of wind, drenched with sweat, shaking like jell. I feel I have fought a terrible battle and won a great victory. I am so nervous I can't sleep all night.

As if this wasn't enough, we spend two extra hours at the Czech border, because of the Austrian policemen's meticulousness. By the way they check identities and luggage, I surmise they hope to intercept disguised millionaires fleeing Nazism with bags full of diamonds. The steam engine's stokers raise the pressure or something, but they only make up for half an hour of our delay. Nobody is waiting for me in the L'vov station… Seeing my disarray, one of my compartment's passengers invites me to share his taxi. I don't even know where to go: Kasik was supposed to find a room for me. I give my father's address.

Luck smiles to me at last (albeit timidly). When I ring, someone opens the door: a man who looks like my father, only smaller and older. He seems totally dumbfounded.

"Do you recognize me? I'm Malvina."

"Of course I recognize you, but I am quite surprised. I didn't know you were in Poland."

"I've come for the summer vacations. I asked Kasik to tell you. Did you see him? He wasn't at the station…"

"Who is Kasik?"

I walk into the apartment, which I find dirty and disordered. Soon after, Kasik comes in with a bunch of roses.

"Forgive me, Malvina. I went to the station on time. They told us the train would be two hours late. When I went again, two hours later, the train had been there for half an hour and you were gone. I had imagined our reunion on the platform so many times! I was so happy!"

He seems crestfallen. My father looks at him as if he came from some other planet. My mother-in-law, coming back from the market with a basket full of vegetables, doesn't understand what this is all about. A perfect reunion! I am rather angry with myself: "You should have stayed in Paris, Malvina. As soon as you set foot in Poland, everything becomes tangled and irksome."

I see my father and my mother-in-law without any emotion, which means without any hate. A Parisian visiting distant acquaintances. Now that I'm going to give up my first ambition, I understand my father somewhat better: he wanted to become a painter, but he had to renounce and accept to become a drawing teacher—a much less glorious profession. In any case, I don't want to stay here.

"Did you find a place for me to stay, Kasik?"

"Your high school and university friends were ready to fight over the privilege of sheltering the famous Parisian student! I chose Lucia, who's been living alone in a large apartment ever since her husband went away."

"The doctor?"

"The authorities wouldn't recognize his Prague diploma, so he settled in South America, a country called Bolivia. She's going to join him there soon."

I vaguely remember this Lusia, a blonde I met in university. The woman who welcomes me is blond and named Lusia, so I guess it's her. We become good friends in no time.

I meet other classmates and Zionist club friends. I find it fun to see them pop out of my past like devils out of a box, to try to recognize who is who, to match the flesh and blood person with the portrait I kept in my memory.

The only one who doesn't amuse me anymore is Kasik. What a lout! Caught up in the marshmallow of his oriental romanticism… I can't help comparing him to the Latin Quarter's merry students. In Paris, to be honest, I mainly see Poles. I go to the movies and I have dinner with Nuuk Elster, a nephew of the cigarette factory director, or with Fritz[1] Bloch, a classmate of my friend Hélène who studies architecture. These Paris Poles, transformed by their walks along the Seine and down the Boul'Mich, seem highly elegant and refined to me when I compare them with this poor Kasik.

(About Hélène… I see her once or twice in L'vov. As I said before, we belong to different groups. In the restaurants where she goes with her friends, I could barely order a hard-boiled egg.)

Lusia must sail from Genoa to South America.

"I would like to visit Italy on the way. God knows when I'll be in Europe again… Don't you want to come with me? All alone, I wouldn't dare."

"Why not? When are you leaving?"

"I thought August 1st or so. The ship sails early September."

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[1] The Polish spelling is "Fryc", but it is pronounced "Fritz." Niuk is a diminutive of Ernest.

"Yes, this gives me another two weeks here. More than enough…"

Kasik disagrees.

"Are you thinking of going already? But we must talk… Take a decision. Our future is at stake."

"All right. You don't need to adopt such a dramatic tone."

"Listen, Malvina. Either you marry me immediately, or everything is over between us."

"If this is an ultimatum, I say no. I don't want to come back to Poland. In Paris, I'm free. I was in love with you, but now I'm in love with freedom…"

I have an appointment with the cigarette factory director. When I see him, I remember the moving speech he gave in the Jewish graveyard and I feel like crying. I hand him his daughter's letter. I confirm what it says: Mrs. Silber is quite worried, feels dangerously threatened, thinks she should leave as soon as possible. He pulls a photograph out of the envelope.

"Look, this is my lovely Edith… You're lucky to have seen her. Me, I have never seen her and perhaps I'll never see her…"

"She's a darling. She resembles your daughter. She doesn't speak Polish at all."

"Who needs to speak Polish? She'll grow up in France or in America. I'll get them out of there."

"Is it possible?"

"With money, everything is possible. The Eternal favored my business, but I took care not to spend everything I earned. I guessed that hard times were likely to occur. I succeeded in investing some dollars abroad…"

"She told me she'd like to go to France."

"Some people print false ID papers, others take you across the border. You can even bribe high-ranked Nazis. All this is expensive, very expensive, but possible. What about you, Malvina?"

I thank him for the pension. I tell him about the lost passport, the failed year, the teachers who speak too fast, the awful mathematics.

"I'm afraid I won't become a doctor after all, so your investment will be lost."

"It is not an investment, Malvina, but a sum I owe you as the daughter of my head of personnel. I haven't changed my mind: I'll pay it until you marry."

"I'll probably go visit Italy with a friend. We'll change trains in Vienna. Do you want me to carry something for Mrs. Silber?"

He phones me a few days later.

"My wife wants to prepare a chocolate cake for little Edith. If you agree, she'll give it to you on your departure's eve."

He gives me six months of my pension in advance. Thus, I can buy my train tickets to Austria, Italy and France and I still have money for the Italian hotels. I don't really need the pension in Paris, as I earn a living working for the Sterns.

Instead of going to the cemetery and brooding on my mother's tomb, I prefer to go on a pilgrimage in the mountains. I fear I won't recognize the forest path without my guide. I see only dead leaves, pine needles and knotty roots, but my legs remember the rabbit-clearing and the tree-stump-turn so well that they take me there by themselves. I eat tiny strawberries, whose childhood perfume intoxicates me. "Remember this taste, Malvina. This is the last time…"

Like in the olden days, I inhale great drafts of mountain air. What a delight after the sticky heat of the city! My mother used to lay a blanket on the grass and we got our rye-bread sandwiches out of our backpacks. It was the only time when I felt she really cared for me. I received my yearly dose of love in one shot, as a bunch of little red dollops.

I consider the trip to Italy a sort of appendix to the pilgrimage: "You remember, Malvina, she expected to heal and visit Italy…"

I leave the city of L'vov without looking back. I feel strong and cheerful, as if a heavy weight had been removed from my shoulders. I must comfort Lusia, who is parting from her parents for the first time—and perhaps, forever.

"Your husband will earn lots of money in Bolivia. You'll be able to fly over in an airplane[1]!"

"They're afraid the situation will worsen, there will be pogroms, they won't survive long. They say the main thing is that I escape."

Tears roll down her cheeks like small glass snails. She pulls a wad of banknotes out of her handbag:

"Look, they changed all their savings into 400 dollars… They also gave a big amount of money to a woman whose son is a tailor in Milan. I'll go see him over there and he'll refund me in Italian money."

"A clever trick."

"My father says this is the first banking system, which the Jews invented in the middle ages. What do you think: should I keep the dollars in my handbag or hide them in my suitcase?"

"When I crossed the border from Austria into Czechoslovakia, the guards went through the suitcases very carefully."

"Listen: you put 200 dollars in your pockets, I keep the rest. So we split the risk."

The Polish policemen do not reason like their Austrian colleagues. They leave our suitcases alone, but ask us to follow them into the custom-house. There, a woman searches us, finds the

[1] In those times, only millionaires could afford airplane tickets. People traveled by boat.

dollars right away and seizes them, then writes a report. Back in the train, I feel rather less strong and cheerful. Lusia begins to cry again.

"Forgive me, Lusaka, I gave you very bad advice for the banknotes."

"It's not your fault."

"At least they let us go. They could have jailed us. We still have some marks and liras. The Milano man will also give you money."

The police didn't confiscate the marks and liras we bought legally in Poland, as we could show proper receipts for them.

In Vienna, we have lunch at Mrs. Silber's. For dessert, we eat her mother's chocolate cake. I show Lusia the Schönbrunn palace, the Blue Danube and the elegant Prater neighborhood, where she buys a Tyrolian sweater.

I do not see porter number 67, as we take the train from the South station. We go to Ljubljana. This city was Austrian when I was born (and its name was Laybach), but now it belongs to Yougoslavia. We avoid visiting the baroque palaces and churches, which are as numerous as in Vienna, because we do not want to spoil our appetite before we reach Venice.

Venice is only a few hours away from Ljubljana, but me must step off the train and take a boat! The salt in the air is bad for Lusia's nerves. She becomes hysterical and shrieks like a three-year old child:

"Look, Malvina, another gondola! And here, look, the bridge of Sighs! You said Paris was the most beautiful city in the world, but you hadn't seen Venice yet."

"Yes, but could you live here? It is a dead beauty, whereas the beauty of Paris is alive."

We spend four days is a very small family pension, where we discover Italian pasta, as well as the delicious soup called *minestrone*. Then we go by train to Milan. The Polish tailor is not very friendly. When he speaks to Lusia, his tone is scornful.

"I am sorry, miss, but the transaction is not possible anymore. I sent an explanatory letter to your parents. My mother will return the money to them, actually."

"This is dreadful! I counted on you… What are we going to do? You say your mother is going to reimburse my parents, but I don't know whether this is true. For all I know, you might be some kind of crook…"

"You'd better watch your language, miss. If you're not satisfied, why don't you go to the police? *Arrivederci*!"

After this new disaster, I expect Lusia to burst into tears once more. Instead she laughs and buys a little green hat at a milliner's near the Dome.[1]. We still have enough *lire* to last until the end of our journey, provided we eat only pasta and minestrone.

We spend two days in Florence. I find the *Ponte-Becchi* more impressive than anything we've seen so far. It floats above the river like an ancient stone poem that the centuries can't alter.

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[1] Cathedral of Milan.

I know someone in Rome: a student in archeology, Munek. He is the brother of Dolek, the husband of my friend Sofia. He invites us to stay in his small apartment. He shows us the forum and other antiques traces of the eternal city. I love to discover the remains of monuments that Cicero, Seneca, Tacitus and all my favorite Latin authors may have known. Lusia soon ceases to gap at ruins with us. She prefers to go window-shopping on via Veneto.

Munek plans to join his brother and sister-in-law in Palestine.

"I'm learning my profession here, but I'll practice it over there."

"You don't want to till the soil, like Dolek and Sofia?"

"No, I want to split it and pull out its secrets."

"Have you received some news? Are they okay?"

"They write in Hebrew, as they pretend I must learn this language before emigrating. I don't understand much. I believe they grow tomatoes."

"Does the word tomato exist in Hebrew?"

"They say *tomat*. They have to create new words. There are no automobiles and airplanes either in the Bible!"

We end our Italian journey in Genoa, where Lusia must embark. We haven't enough money left for pasta and soup, so we eat only bread.

On September 29, 1938, as we're walking about in the narrow streets above the harbor, we notice small groups of people talking loudly with their voice and hands. A man explains to us in French that Daladier and Chamberlain[1] just signed a treaty with Hitler in Munich, leaving the Czech province of Sudeten to the Germans. Lusia doesn't know whether she should rejoice or grieve:

"We won't have war, Malvina. This is good news."

"Do you think that the poor Czech who'll come under Nazi dictatorship find it good news?"

"In the Sudeten, there are few Czech and many Germans. If these people want Hitler… They didn't draw the border very carefully after the war, everybody knows that."

"The Austrians also want Hitler. You heard what Mrs. Silber thought about it. You'll find even more so-called Germans in Poland than in the Sudeten. Millions! All the people who remained in Silesia when the province became Polish[2]. Suppose they call for Hitler, too. Who'll defend Poland when the Nazis attack it?"

"Poland has allies."

"Yeah… The French and the English, who didn't lift a finger for Czechoslovakia."

"Poland can defend itself."

"Against the Germans? You're kidding…"

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[1] Prime ministers of France and England.

[2] Silesia was German from 1815 to 1918.

"You had decided to forget Poland, Malvina, but you seem to become a Polish patriot, all of a sudden!"

"I don't give a damn about Poland, but you can't let the Germans conquer the whole world…"

I'm furious. I want to do something, but what? I'm just a weak girl who earns her living as a nanny. I feel at the same time powerless and ashamed to be.

I escort Lusia on board the great white ship sailing to Rio de Janeiro. She shares a cozy wood-paneled cabin with three ladies who seem to speak Spanish.

"How long does it take?" I ask her.

"Two weeks."

"You'd better talk to your roommates as much as possible to learn some Spanish. You'll need it in Bolivia!"

"I hope they do speak Spanish. It might be Portuguese, for all I know…"

A little before noon, loudspeakers ask the visitors to leave. I just have time to read the lunch menu: carrousel of hors d'œuvre, macaroni with mushrooms, baked flounder, veal alla milanese, cheese, cakes, ice-cream and fruit. My mouth is watering, but all I can buy with my last lire is half a loaf of bread. I stay on the beach until evening. It seems to me that hunger is slowing the hands of my watch and that my train's departure time will never come.

Back in Paris on the next morning, I take a taxi to go to the Sterns' apartment. I hope the Sterns, or some neighbors, will lend me a few francs to pay for the ride. The taxi driver speeds on the boulevards.

"People can't drive properly," he grumbles. "Look at this fellow : he raises his left arrow and he turns right! *Va donc, eh, bourgeois*![1]"

I repeat his words silently to recapture the taste of the French language: *Va donc, eh, bourgeois*!"

As I am tired because I didn't sleep much in the train, and also, I guess, because I haven't eaten anything for close to twenty-four hours, I lean on the taxi's door. It opens. I fall on the pavement, in the middle of automobiles and trucks. I stand up instantly and start running after the taxi. My suitcase! My handbag! I don't want to lose all my papers again and spend more days in the police station and the consulate. I thread my way in the traffic with the energy of despair… Luckily, the driver notices I'm gone and stops to wait for me. I climb into the automobile again and close the door with great care. I hear a drum beating somewhere… Why, it's my heart thumping in my breast. I feel shaken up and relieved at the same time. Everything's fine! I ran like a champion! My energy and my willpower surge back as soon as I step on the boulevards of Paris. I'm confident I can overcome any obstacle. I look at the future without fear.

[1] Get lost, you bourgeois!

A new friend

When you walk along the Boul'Mich towards the Seine, you're said to be "going down" the boulevard. In the other direction, you're "going up." That's because the Latin Quarter lies on the flanks of a little bump grandly called "Sainte-Geneviève Mountain." The first time I heard that name, I imagined a high mount, similar to our Carpathian mountains! On top of the bump stands the *Panthéon* mausoleum, with its Greek columns and huge gray dome. It took me a long time to understand the sentence engraved above the columns: "To great men the grateful fatherland." I thought the sculptor had forgotten the verb… I like to walk about the village-like neighborhood that slumbers behind the Panthéon. With its outdoor cafés and trees, the little Contrescarpe square reminds me of Italy. I enjoy a free concert by listening to the shouts and calls of the food sellers who line *rue Mouffetard*. I explore the narrow streets that wind up around the mountain and marvel at their quaint medieval names: *rue du Pot de Fer, de l'Epée de Bois, de l'Arbalète*[1]. Although I live on the other side of town, I often come here in the afternoon to see my friend Hélène. She moved with Jean-Pierre and Fritz Bloch, the architecture student I used to go to the movies with, to a small hotel on *rue Tournefort*— a quiet street close to *place de la Contrescarpe*. Several L'vov students have gathered in this hotel.

I pass gentlemen in the corridors. They say *Prosze Pani*[2]*,* kiss my hand politely in the Polish manner.

"Do you come from L'vov?" they ask. "What school did you go to? Do you know So-and-so?"

We didn't know each other in Poland, but we always find a mutual friend who lets us forge a link. Fritz Bloch has two friends who study architecture like him. We call them the three architects. There are other single gentlemen: Milek Roth, Leos Geist (who is here with his sister), Bernard Kohn. Whereas I tend to mix them up at first, they distinguish me quite well from Hélène, who's not free anymore, and from Myriam, Leo's sister, who's as shy as a mouse and never steps out of her brother's shadow. There is another woman in Hôtel Tournefort, Wanda Warner[3], but she is already married.

Wanda Warner becomes my best friend. She's is a small gray-eyed woman, lively and cheerful. She came to Paris in October 1938, began to study French literature in the Sorbonne but stopped after a few weeks, like I did, because she understood too little of the course.

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[1] Iron Pot street, Wooden Sword street, Crossbow street.

[2] Please (or: I beg your pardon), madam. The pronunciation is "proshay."

[3] This is pronounced "Vanda Varner." The letter v doesn't exist in Polish.

"You know, Malvina, I did study French in Poland. I even wrote an essay about a Molière play, *Les femmes savantes*[1], for the final exam."

"What's the use of being a learned woman if you don't understand the teacher? My case was even worse: I studied French as a kind of theoretical language, needed only for Greek translations."

While Henek, her husband, is finishing his medicine studies, Wanda wants to earn a living working with her hands. She has "socialist" ideas; she dreams of belonging to the working class. She studies leather work in the morning in an arts-and-crafts school.

"We learn how to cut leather, fold it and sew it. Soon, I'll be able to make belts and wallets. Work isn't scarce. We don't need to pass an exam or speak French."

"When you know, you'll show me, Wanda. I want to try, too."

We both have free time in the afternoon to wander across the city. Germany, after swallowing Austria and Czechoslovakia, is threatening Poland. We're all quite worried, of course, but when I roam the Latin Quarter with Wanda, when we sit in the Luxembourg garden or in the Capoulade café, we can't help being as careless as the sparrows who twitter under the plane trees. Often, we go visit a neighborhood because we remember its name from *Les Misérables* or some other novel: *la Bastille, Ménilmontant, la Bourse, les Batignolles, la Muette*. We never get lost, as we know a magical sentence: "Excuse us, sir, could you tell us where we can find the nearest *métro* station?"

Leos Geist tells a joke about a Pole who's lost and can't find the way back to his hotel.

"What's the name of the street?" they ask him.

"That's the rub. I don't know it."

"Try to remember, old man. It is written on a plate affixed to the buildings' walls."

"A name on the wall? Oh, I remember now: *Di-fen'-sé-da-fi-chère*…[2]"

I'm beginning to distinguish some of the Poles in the hotel. Henek Warner, my new friend's husband, is tall and bald. He speaks slowly, choosing his words with great care. What he says seems to be the result of a powerful thinking process. Leos Geist, whom you never see without his sister, has tousled hair and shirt tails that refuse to stay tucked into his pants. He loves to tell jokes.

"Have you noticed" Henek Warner asks, "how many clocks, hmm, I mean public clocks, are to be seen in Paris on street corners or on buildings' façades? It seems to me that this superabundance expresses two typical French qualities—the first one being a special care for accuracy and precision and the second one a generosity of a social nature that leads the community to consider the plight of citizens too poor to own a watch."

"This reminds me of a story," Leos remarks. "A Jew sees a clock in a store window. He walks in and asks the shopkeeper how long it would take to repair his watch. 'I don't know,' the shopkeeper answers. 'I don't repair watches. I am a circumciser.' 'A circumciser indeed?

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[1] Learned women.

[2] No posting (spoken with a very thick accent).

Then why did you put a clock in your window?' 'All right, so what do you want me to put there?'"

Towards the end of the year, the Silbers spend a few days in the hotel on the way to Nice. They've been able to flee Austria.

"The Nazis want to get rid of the Jews," Mrs. Silber tells us. "They want Germany and Austria to become *judenrein*[1]. They let the Jews go away if they can afford to pay a big sum of money for their freedom. They believe the Jews are all millionaires. We're lucky my father owns a factory and could find money. As for those who can't pay, I'm afraid they'll kill them all in the end."

Little Edith opens her eyes wide to gaze at the Latin Quarter's busy streets. All the gentlemen in the Hôtel Tournefort fall in love with her.

[1] Jews-clean.

New Year's Eve on rue Mouffetard

Henek Warner, my friend's husband, began medical studies in France from 1928 to 1931, then went back to Poland to complete them. The Hôtel Tournefort people sneer at him behind his back. They say he's one of those Jews who paid a fortune for the privilege of having the fascist students beat them up. When he stayed in Paris for the first time, he lived with a certain Viktor, whom we call Stiff-leg Viktor because there's something wrong with one of his knees. This Viktor has finished his studies and works in a hospital. On December 31, 1938, he gives a party for New Year's Eve. He's rented a gymnasium on rue Mouffetard and hired a small orchestra.

There's quite a crowd. All the Galician Jews who study in Paris are waltzing and tangoing between the parallel bars and the vaulting horse. Some have brought friends who come from Warsaw or Cracow, or from Hungary, Rumania, Czechoslovakia. The boldest among us already have French boyfriends or girlfriends, like Hélène. Stiff-leg Viktor, who's been living in France for ten years, is married to a Parisian woman, Renée.

While I'm chattering with Wanda and munching slices of the delicious dry sausage the French call *saucisson*, Viktor comes towards us with a bearded man.

"Hey, girls, let me introduce you to Lonek Greif, a French doctor. He lives near here, on boulevard Saint-Marcel. Lonek, this is Wanda Warner, the wife of my pal Henek, and her friend Malvina Zien."

This Lonek is probably single. He asked Viktor who was the pretty blonde. I don't like him. Firstly, his name reminds me of my former fiancé, who was so gloomy and jealous. Secondly, I've never liked bearded men. The rue Cuvier students used to sing:

Y'avait dans mon village	*There was in my village*
Un homme qu'avait des poux.	*A man who had lice.*
Comme il avait d'la barbe,	*As he had a beard,*
On l'app'lait Barbapoux,	*They called him Licebeard,*
Barbapoux Barbapoux Barbapoux…	*Licebeard, Licebeard, Licebeard…*

This song expresses exactly what I think of beards: dirty and smelly shrubs, full of fleas and lice, similar to a dog's fur. Why does a dog come to my mind? Because the stubbly fellow holds a nasty long-haired and long-eared mongrel on a leash.

Viktor said "a French doctor." French doctors aren't named Lonek…

"Are you French, monsieur?"

"Naturalized. I come from Sambor."

"Is this Sambor in Poland, near L'vov?"

"That's right. On the Dniestr[1]."

"I crossed your town when I went to the Carpathian mountains, but I never stopped there. Have you been living in Paris for a long time?"

"Since 1925. I came here to study the piano, but I changed my mind and chose medicine. I have known Viktor for ten years! I also knew your husband, mademoiselle Wanda, during his first stay in France. He still had his hair then… Nice, Flip! Don't worry, mademoiselle Malvina, he doesn't bite."

"He didn't bite me, he just clawed a ladder in my stocking."

"He likes to play, you understand."

"I'd rather he played elsewhere!"

I don't dance with Dirty Beard, but with my usual admirers: the three architects, Milek Roth, Bernard Kohn.

Milek Roth is a discreet and silent man, who spends a few nights in Hôtel Tournefort now and then. He studies neither architecture nor medicine. Nobody knows how he earns a living. In Poland, he spent seven years in jail for communist activities. He is thirty, but his hair is already gray and deep furrows line his face. We suppose the Communist Party sent him to France to further the communist cause among the Paris Poles.

Bernard Kohn doesn't study medicine either. That is, not yet… Wiser than I am, he enrolled in an engineering school to improve his mathematics and physics and pass his *baccalauréat*[2] before beginning his PCN. Of all my fans, he is my favorite. His head is well-filled and well-made[3]—and quite handsome. I'm sure he could play a cowboy in an American film. He's tall, wide-shouldered, and a thick mane of jet-black hair encases his rectangular face. I waltz with him more than with anybody else. I do dance with Lonek Greif once, after all. He's not as tall and good-looking as Bernard Kohn, and let's not forget his beard and his dog.

I would be amazed if somebody told me I'd just danced with my two future husbands.

At midnight, we kiss each other. My first year in France comes to an end. "One year ago, Malvina, you were crossing Germany in the train… Through the compartment's window, you saw people celebrating the new year in their brightly lit-up homes…"

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[1] A river that flows across Ukraine to the Black Sea.

[2] Foreign students received a special diploma that let them practice medicine in their own country. If they wanted to work in France, they had to pass the baccalauréat, the French final high school exam, and obtain the French nationality.

[3] This refers to a saying by Montaigne: Better a well-made head than a well-filled one.

1939 The *Châteaux de la Loire*

I join the Hôtel Tournefort students, who leave Paris together during their Easter vacations to visit *Les Châteaux de la Loire*, the castles and palaces built along the Loire river at the time of the Renaissance. The girls hitch-hike from a castle to the next one, the boys rent bicycles. We discover the pleasure of stopping for lunch in a village inn, of tasting the sprightly white wines of the Loire valley, of sleeping in youth hostel bunks. We're in love with France, we're young and happy. I'm only twenty-three.

In the evening, after clearing the table and washing the dishes, we discuss current events with the other shorts-wearing and backpack-carrying tourists. Whether they're French or foreign, they all agree that Hitler, Mussolini and Franco are awful monsters headed for the dustbin of History. Opinions differ when Stalin is mentioned. Some Polish Jews consider communism with favor:

"As the system's basic idea is that everybody is equal, there can't be anymore antisemitism."

"Ideas? Promises? Look at facts: in USSR, people tend to vanish, just like in Germany."

We try to guess what the future holds in store. Henek Warner has already applied his powerful mind to the subject:

"Hitler might invade, hmm, swallow Poland like a mouthful of cake, but then he would have to face the impassable immensity of the Russian steppe."

"So what?" a French student asks. "Don't you trust your own army?"

"To fight the armored divisions of the German Reich, let me tell you what we have: horse-riding lancers!"

"The French army will come to your help."

"Only if the Germans do not turn it into mashed potatoes or rather, how do you say, into pulp. They'll take Warsaw first, then Paris."

"That's impossible. The Maginot[1] line is protecting us!"

We try not to let these anxious debates alter our happy mood. Every morning, we hit the road, enamored with sun and freedom. We discover that an authentic joy of living was hidden deep inside us and ready to bloom, despite having been repressed for so long in Poland. We feel we're fully enjoying vacations for the first time. Of course, we do not know that it is also the last time before many years.

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[1] A series of fortresses near the northeast border of France. Maginot was a representative who promoted the project.

The improvised cook

The Hôtel Tournefort students usually spend their summer vacations in Poland. As there is so much talk of a looming war, they're afraid they might be stuck over there. They decide to wait and see. Why wait in Paris? Spending a few weeks on the Riviera can't hurt. Lonek Greif, who belongs to a campers' association called *Nature's Friends*, suggests they camp with him in Sainte-Maxime. They also want to see Cannes and Nice. I can't go with them, for lack of money. The Sterns have given me a small raise, but my pension went down with the Polish *zloty*. I find a summer job through the student aid office: a children's camp located in Puycelsi, near the southern city of Albi, needs a cook from July 15 to September 15.

I buy a cookbook in Joseph Gibert, the largest bookstore on Boul'Mich. Bernard Kohn laughs at me:

"Do you think you can learn everything in books?"

He has a small spirit stove in his room. He shows me how to use onions and herbs to make food tastier and mask my ignorance.

He won't visit the Riviera with the others, because he must return to L'vov.

"The army's recruiting board wants me. If I don't go, they'll say I've deserted and seize the pension my parents are sending me."

"You'll become a soldier?"

"They should give me a deferment as a student. Unless the war begins, of course… In that case, everything is possible."

In Puycelsi, I am glad to have my cookbook after all. I need it to replace Bernard. I try a new recipe every day and I manage quite well. I would be perfectly satisfied, if only the coal stove wasn't so hot. I get up at 6 AM and work hard until late evening. I barely find half an hour in the daytime to walk along the Tarn river. Before leaving Paris, I borrowed some Balzac novels in the public library. I hoped I'd read them during my free time, but I'm so tired at night that I can't read one page without falling asleep right away.

On August 23, we hear terrible news on the radio: Germany and the Soviet Union just signed a pact. This means the Russians won't prevent the Germans from invading Poland. As the French are allied to the Poles, they decree a general mobilization of all their soldiers. On September 1st, the Nazis bomb Warsaw and enter Poland. France and England react immediately by declaring war on Germany.

I resign from my job at the summer camp. On September 2nd, I find someone who drives me to Paris in an automobile. My employers, the Sterns, are spending the summer in their country, Switzerland, so I take a room in Hôtel Tournefort. All my friends returned from the Riviera as fast as they could. Wanda and Henek Warner worry about their parents.

"We were supposed to spend a month in L'vov after our Riviera vacations. We'll go to the Polish consulate and see whether this is still possible."

"I'll come with you."

One year ago, I thought I was leaving Poland forever, but now I want to go back. Who knows how a France at war will treat foreigners? They might consider us spies, forbid us to work, send us to the concentration camps they opened in the South for the Spanish refugees.

A noisy crowd fills up the consulate. The consul is standing on a table and shouting, but we can barely hear him.

"Listen to me! Waiting here is just useless. Nobody can go to Poland. How do you want to cross Germany?"

Bernard Kohn says we're foolish to even think of going to Poland. He came back on August 31st, just before being stuck in L'vov. He took the very last train headed west. The Polish army was getting ready to fight the Germans, but even then it didn't want Jewish soldiers.

I meet two newcomers: Danka and Bronek Müller, who came to Paris on their honeymoon. They knew Leos Geist, so they took a room in Hôtel Tournefort. They arrived on August 25th. They had time to visit the Louvre museum and the Eiffel tower. Now they can't go back to L'vov! They're charming, delicate, fragile-looking. They coo like lovebirds. They haven't decided to leave their family and spend years, or their whole life, in a foreign country. They're joining our group by chance or even, in a way, by mistake.

The phony war

We listen to the radio and read the newspapers all day long. The Polish lancers charge at the German tanks without much success. The French, instead of attacking Germany to help Poland, stay safely behind the Maginot Line. The Germans bomb Warsaw and prepare to besiege the town. Henek Warner fears a disaster:

"They could puncture the Maginot Line like a, hmm, balloon with their tanks… Things will happen very fast. *Blitzkrieg*[1]! They bomb cities on a massive scale to break any will to resist. Bombs will rain on Paris, like on Warsaw. Maybe tomorrow, or else on Thursday. The better to frighten people, they'll destroy the great monuments first: The Notre-Dame cathedral, the Louvre, the *Arc de Triomphe* which celebrates French victories. There will be incendiary bombs, gases. We should expect the worst, I'm afraid."

"This is awful, Henek. What can we do?"

"I've thought about it. I figured out that the range of their airplanes won't let them go much beyond the Loire river. We could find a safe haven somewhere in the *Massif Central* mountains."

The part of Cassandra suits Henek, as his last name is Warner. Heeding his warning, Danka and Bronek Müller, the two lovebirds, follow Wanda and him to Clermont-Ferrand, the main city in the Massif Central. So do Leos Geist and his sister.

I'd rather stay in Paris. On top of the war councils I attend every day at Hôtel Tournefort, I hold my own private conference: "What's the point of fleeing imaginary bombs, Malvina? If real bombs begin to fall, you'll see how you react." I'm waiting to see what happens, full of curiosity and a touch of fighting zeal. If I were a boy, I might enlist in the army that exiled Poles are assembling in Brittany. Most of our men, forgetting they worked hard at avoiding military service in Poland, go to the consulate to enlist. The only one they do send to Brittany is handsome Bernard Kohn. He is 22, the age of military service. The other ones are too old.

The Germans crush Poland in a matter of days. The city of Warsaw resists a little longer than the rest of the country, but the fighting is over before the end of September, 1939. Amazing: the Germans do not invade our province, but offer it to their Soviet allies. Oriental Galicia, also known as "Little Eastern Poland," becomes "Western Ukraine."

In France and on the Western front, all is quiet. This is the period called "Funny war" by the French and "Phony war" by the English. The Clermont-Ferrand bunch comes back to Hôtel Tournefort. Henek Warner is convinced the war is over.

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[1] Lightning-war.

"This was a replay of the Munich comedy. *Bis repetita placent*! After they cut up Czechoslovakia, it's Poland's turn."

We grieve when we think how much the poor Jews of Warsaw or Lodz will suffer under the Nazi yoke. About the catholic Poles, opinions differ:

"In the Nazi worldview, the Slavs aren't worth much more than the Jews. They'll suffer too."

"That will teach them. They persecuted us enough. Now they'll discover what it means to be considered inferior beings."

"You're naive, Wanda. Do you really expect the Poles to learn the lesson and change their attitude towards the Jews? I bet they'll become even more anti-Semitic. They'll take their revenge on the Jews for the humiliations the Germans will inflict on them. You know the story: the boss berates the employee, the employee beats his wife, the wife slaps the child, the child kicks the dog."

When we evoke our parents and friends in L'vov, the debate really sours. Milek Roth, the silent man who believes in communism, is so happy with the turn of events that he nearly becomes loquacious:

"They're lucky… Nothing to fear from the Nazis. Nor from the Polish fascists. Under Soviet rule, no more antisemitism."

Nobody agrees with him. I even see my sweet Wanda become quite angry:

"What are you talking about, Milek? It's Ukraine, now, over there. The Ukrainians are even more anti-Semitic than the Poles. You won't convince me that communism changed the Cossacks. It's horrible, what might happen: Cossacks… pogroms…"

We knew one of us was a communist. Now we discover a capitalist in our midst: Bronek Müller, or at least his father, who owns a petroleum company.

"I sent a cablegram to my parents," Bronek says, "to tell them we're okay and we'll soon go back home. They advised us to stay in France. The Soviets pretend my father exploits the proletarian workers. They threaten to seize his properties and send him to Siberia. I worked with him. I'm lucky to be here."

"He gets what he deserves," Milek Roth remarks. "No more, no less. Communism is tough but fair."

Milek is so smug that we find him quite ridiculous. We ask him serious questions just for the fun of hearing his ready-made answers:

"How could Stalin sign a pact with Hitler?"

"The land of peace wasn't ready for war… Just gaining some time… Neutralize the fascists… Let the capitalist sharks tear each other up… This war planned by the City[1] bankers…"

[1] London's financial district.

Listening to his empty rhetoric, we see him as a pitiful Communist Party puppet. We pay scant attention when he says our parents are lucky to live on the Soviet side on the new border.

"Can't compare their fate to what's going to happen to the Warsaw Jews."

Bernard Kohn comes back from his army training in Brittany.

"They're as anti-Semitic as in Poland. I'm sorry I volunteered."

"They dismissed you? You deserted?"

"We're going to Norway. No phony war over there: they're fighting for good. I have a three-day furlough before embarking."

"You look pretty good in your uniform."

"Did you learn how to shoot?"

"Yeah, but they gave us old Lebel rifles dating from the Great War!"

He goes to another Pole's place for dinner with Leos Geist and his sister. When he returns, he's got a belly-ache. Henek Warner, who's specializing in gastroenterology, examines him.

"You'd better go to the hospital, old man. If I'm not mistaken, it could be, hmm, a nice case of appendicitis."

Because of his cautious character, Henek examines his patients very carefully and puts his diagnosis in the conditional mode—but seldom errs. Instead of going to Norway, Bernard ends up on the operating table. His convalescence is a godsend to us: without his talent as a cook, we would all die of hunger! The Hôtel Tournefort students do not receive any more money from Poland, of course. Henek Warner earns a small salary as a hospital extern, Bronek Müller and Leos Geist are taking advantage of a decree that allows refugees to work in arms factories, I'm going to the garden with little Simon again, but we can't afford to eat in restaurants like we used to. So we need our dear Bernard. He goes rue Mouffetard when the shops are closing and buys left-over vegetables for a few cents. He lets them simmer for hours with tough (but cheap) beef cuts and feeds us with wonderful soups.

All the store-keepers know him.

"Monsieur Bernard, I've got some cabbages for you!"

"Look at these apples, monsieur Bernard… They're past their prime, but if you cook them you'll have a tasty applesauce."

1940. The Germans in Paris

The Polish army in Brittany is becoming less picky. It calls most of our men in the first months of 1940. Bernard Kohn, still recovering, lives in Hôtel Tournefort. Henek Warner doesn't like the army. He finds a job replacing a mobilized doctor near Montpellier, in the South of France.

Wanda stays in Paris. She tries to take care of a child, like me, but she gives up after three days. She's too nervous and lacks self-confidence. She feels the child's parents are scorning her. She remembers her leather-working courses and begins to make women's belts. She's very skillful. She draws her models herself, buys leather and buckles, installs a small workshop in a corner of her room. She gets lots of requests, because all the leather-workers are gone—the French on the Maignot line, the Polish Jews in Brittany.

We sometimes walk together in the Latin Quarter, in the vain hope of recapturing the flavor of good old times. The few people going up Boul'Mich are walking too fast. The City of Light has become quite dark. They don't turn up street-lamps anymore, as if this could keep bombers away. We refer with nostalgia to the period already known as "before the war[1]."

"Do you remember, Malvina, the *Châteaux de la Loire*… One year ago!"

"If we could have looked into the future, we would have tried to enjoy the trip even more."

"A pity we haven't visited Normandy and Brittany. At least we've seen the Riviera."

"I haven't."

"Of course… You were in your summer camp. The sea is very blue. You know, Henek found the landscape too perfect. He said he preferred the wildness of our mountains or of the Baltic sea. The others reproached him his taste for paradox."

"I went to the Baltic sea once, but I could barely dip my foot into the water, it was so cold. I can't swim, anyway.

"I can't either. I dipped a foot into the Mediterranean sea!"

"Is Henek a good swimmer?"

"He swims a little. Do you remember Lonek Greif?"

"Yes: the bearded man with a dog."

"We met him in Sainte-Maxime. He spent his days swimming and playing volley-ball. He is a natural athlete."

On May 10th, 1940, the funny war is replaced by real war—which is not so funny. The Germans invade France by going around the Maginot Line. The French and the English seem to be surprised when the German tanks attack in the very same manner they did in Poland.

[1] A specific name in French : *L'avant-guerre*, or the "fore war."

"Altogether unexpected!" they whine. "How could we prepare for this?" After a month of lightning-war, France is vanquished.

On June 10th, with the German army rolling unopposed towards Paris, people begin to panic. This time, the city might really be bombed. We do not know where our men are. Bernard Kohn is away too: he joined his Polish division somewhere in the North of France. As Wanda wants to be with her husband is these hard times, she decides to go to Montpellier.

We walk down rue Lacépède and cross the *Jardin des Plantes* together, carrying her suitcase each in turn. The garden's flowers display their many hues and smile at the sun, as if to mock human folly. Wanda wears her thick Polish coat and her heavy winter shoes, because she doesn't know when she'll come back to Paris. We walk towards the Seine river along a path lined by plane trees. We stop and rest on a bench. Looking at the dark vault of the trees' foliage, I feel that I have entered another world through a secret passage. In this mysterious world, this noiseless and sunless world, there is no war.

A gardener is sculpting bushes with pruning-shears.

"See, Wanda, this gardener is lucky. Even when the Germans will be there, he'll go on taking care of his flowers."

We cross the river on the Austerlitz bridge. The graceful shape of Notre-Dame cathedral, sharply outlined against the blue sheet of the June sky, glows in the morning sun. It has been standing here for six or seven centuries. Will the German bombs fell it?

As we come near *Gare de Lyon*, the southern train station, we discover an amazing sight: the big square in front of the station looks like an overflowing refugee camp. Thousands of men, women and children are sitting on suitcases or rope-tied packages. I've never seen so many people at the same time. Wanda begins to cry.

"I'll never be able to take the train. This is hopeless…"

"Don't worry, Wandounia. We'll find a way."

We stay away from the crowd. I see a train company employee, an old man with white hair under his cap.

"Excuse me, monsieur, may I beg you to help us? We are Polish. My friend desires to join her husband who is sojourning in Montpellier."

"Follow me…"

He takes us around the station, to a great hall where lorries are delivering crates and boxes. The old man tells Wanda they'll cross the hall. I kiss her good bye.

"Good luck, Wandenka."

"Thanks, Malvina. Good luck to you too. Write to me in Montpellier, care of General Delivery."

She told me later that the old man brought her to a train, then helped her enter a crowded compartment through the window.

As for me, I leave on the same day—June 10th— in an automobile with Simon and his parents. We're lucky to flee Paris before everybody else. On the next morning, and during

several days, the so-called "exodus" throws half of the Parisians helter-skelter on southbound roads. On June 14th, the Germans march down the Champs-Elysées avenue.

On June 22nd, France and Germany sign an armistice. This means that France admits its defeat. Whole French regiments have been caught and sent to Germany as prisoners. Since nobody minds the Polish regiments, Leos Geist and Bronek Müller find civilian clothes and come back to Paris on foot. They haven't finished their training period, so they didn't have to fight.

We found it difficult to imagine our good Leos Geist in uniform, carrying a rifle—he's so clumsy he can't even tuck his shirt into his pants.

Milek Roth learned how to fend for himself in Polish jails. He steals a bike, rides to Bordeaux and comes to the Sterns' apartment to say hello. Bernard Kohn retreats with his unit all the way to Brittany, then works in farms to earn some money. How does Milek find me? How do I know about Bernard? Well, all the members of the Hôtel Tournefort troop write to each other as often as possible. We try not to break the fragile bonds that link us. People you can count upon are scarce and valuable. Hélène and Jean-Pierre found refuge in Angoulême, Danka Müller in Toulouse, but we can't locate Myriam, the sister of Leos. We've also lost track of the three architects. One of them took the risk of going to L'vov in August '39 and didn't come back, number two might be staying with relatives he has in Switzerland, the third one enrolled in the Foreign Legion.

According to the armistice treaty, France is to be divided in two parts. Bordeaux will belong to the "occupied zone," but the Germans haven't entered the city yet. We don't want to wait for them. The Sterns go back to Switzerland. While I lose a dear friend: my little Simon, I recover my freedom. Wanda Warner praises Montpellier so much in her letters that I decide to go there. Milek Roth, ever the practical man, thinks it is quite a good idea:

"Now it's warm. But how long will the war last? We must expect restrictions. No fuel for heaters. In Montpellier, it will be less cold."

We can still travel. We take a train to Toulouse, another one from Toulouse to Montpellier. Milek Roth owns a big wad of banknotes, but won't say where they come from. Wanda and Henek Warner welcome us with open arms. They're glad they can share the hotel bill with us! We all sleep in a tiny bedroom: Wanda and I in the bed, Henek and Milek on the floor.

A kind of Hôtel Tournefort on the beach takes shape by and by. We receive a letter from Danka Müller: "Bronek is in Toulouse with me. He came from Paris on foot![1] He crossed the demarcation line in the middle of the night. He sent a cablegram to a cousin in America, who wired some dollars. We think we'll go to Lisbon and sail to Brazil." Wanda answers: "Why don't you come and say good-by before going away? Life is quiet and pleasant here. Malvina and Milek just arrived from Bordeaux." So Danka and Bronek come for a farewell visit. They rent a room from a charming old lady. Their window opens on a garden. If their arms were

[1] 500 miles. The demarcation line separated the "occupied zone" (north) from the "free zone" (south).

slightly longer, they could pick up the fruit of a tall fig tree. “Must we really go to America?” they wonder. There’s no hurry. Let’s wait until autumn. See what these figs taste like when they’re ripe.

Then Leos Geist settles in Montpellier too. He stayed in Paris to look for his sister. She vanished without a trace. We guess she joined the Parisians’ exodus. We hope she’s safe in the country somewhere.

What little money Henek Warner earned for replacing doctors is gone already. As he reads the newspapers very carefully, he discovers that refugees are entitled to a small pension. We’re not really rich. Milek Roth wants to keep his banknotes in case things get tougher, and besides they don’t belong to him. They put me in charge of preparing the meals, since I became an expert cook in a summer camp. On even days I serve an onion and tomato salad, on odd days pasta.

We go to the beach every morning. Wanda and I, we can’t help it if we’re young and love to have fun. Henek worries, but he’s always had an anxious character. Milek Roth doesn’t want to stay in Montpellier:

“The war is over. We can cross Germany. Back to L’vov. Before anything, escape the Nazis.”

Henek Warner finds this a stupid idea.

“Now that your Soviet friends have grabbed Galicia, you think it is, hmm, paradise on earth. I’ve read news in the paper. They seize private property. Four or five different families must share an apartment. People spend hours every day standing on line to buy a loaf of bread.”

“Change society. Can’t be done in one week. Need time. Need goodwill. That’s why we must go back there.”

I think Milek Roth has a better grasp of the situation than Henek Warner. Even if the south is called “free,” the Nazis hold France under their heel. I can’t forget the policemen in black uniform whom I saw in the train on December 31st, 1937, with their cruel eyes and their machine guns. Staying in France can become dangerous. If I have to choose between two dictatorships, I’d rather trust the Russian one, which is not officially anti-Semitic.

Thus, I return to Paris with Milek Roth in September 1940. Henek, Wanda and Leos actually come back two weeks after us. They’re ready to go to L’vov, too, if it is possible. We know that the Nazis mistreat the German Jews, deprive them of their jobs, drive them to despair and suicide. It is becoming every day more obvious that they’ll do the same in France, with the help of their friends in the puppet French government in Vichy. A federation of storekeepers already sends out posters saying “French business” to its members. A new magazine, *Au Pilori*, publishes lists of Jewish stores—and then “spontaneous” demonstrations throw stones into their windows. On August 27th, the government suppresses the law that forbids anti-Semitic propaganda. Soon after, it sends away all the Jewish public servants. The

Germans, having annexed Alsace, expel the Jews from this province. The Vichy government group them in concentration camps in the south of France.

Our dear Latin Quarter is rather gloomy. German soldiers walk along the Boul'Mich. In Hôtel Tournefort, nobody makes fun of Milek Roth anymore. We follow him to the Soviet embassy and fill up forms to request visas.

Bernard Kohn comes back to Paris after working all summer in the fields. I'm happy to have him around, with his sunny character and useful skills. Danka and Bronek Müller remained in Montpellier. Hélène and Jean-Pierre have gone to the farm of Jean-Pierre's parents in Normandy. In the company of cows and chickens, they won't suffer from hunger.

Should we declare ourselves?

On September 27, 1940, the German administration in France orders a census of the Jews. The French authorities ask the Jews to "declare themselves" by reporting to the police stations. On October 3rd if their name begins with A, on October 4th if it begins with B, etc.

We haven't entered a synagogue since our childhood. I'm sure there are synagogues in Paris, but I don't know where they are. We'd like to forget we're Jewish. That's why we left Poland, actually. We spend several evenings discussing that fateful question: "Should we declare ourselves?" It so happens that most of our names are grouped towards the end of the alphabet. The first person who'll have to go is Leos Geist.

Milek Roth finds us very foolish.

"Declare yourselves? What else? Jump into the tiger's mouth? Crazy! First they take a census. Then they separate, despoil, imprison and murder. If you don't declare, the whole system fails."

"Your particular case may call for, hmm, boldness, Milek, but I suggest you consider mine: before my name was Henek, it was Moses Hersch. These names are printed on my passport."

"At least you're Warner, but what about me? I'm Kohn[1]."

"Change names. Easy. I find false papers for you."

False papers? Scary words to Wanda.

"Easy for you, Milek. You lived underground in Poland, you went to jail. We haven't received the same training. I won't be able to pass a German soldier without blushing. If he asks who I am, I won't remember my fake name."

"We're not adventurers," Leos adds.

"You're far from Poland. No sixth sense here. Besides, this stuff you're selling… Not lawful, is it? So you're halfway there already!"

Milek Roth knows people who let him buy scarves, bags and other objects known as "Paris souvenirs" wholesale. I choose the stuff with him. Wanda is making women's belts again. Bernard Kohn and Leos Geist sell all this to the German soldiers. This requires a certain bravery. The soldiers find Leos more amusing than frightening with his rebellious shirt, his wild necktie, his uncombed hair.

Henek Warner feels he lacks the necessary qualities to become an illicit street vendor. He prefers illicit medicine. As the law keeps him away from the hospital, he visits with poor Jews in the North of Paris. He earns twelve francs for an examination with a diagnosis and a shot, minus three for the subway. Wanda also complains about these three francs for the subway, which eat into her belt profits.

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[1] A variant of Cohen, a traditional Jewish name.

One evening, Stiff-leg Viktor, Henek's friend, comes to Hôtel Tournefort and gives his opinion:

"I've chosen France because it is a country where State and religion are kept separate. All the citizens are equal, so they shouldn't ask me whether I'm Jewish. If they do, I don't have to answer. I am not breaking the law—the Vichy government is breaking the law."

Milek Roth and Stiff-leg Viktor seem more valiant to me than Henek Warner, Bernard Kohn and Leos Geist. Unless they're just bigger braggarts. I just don't know what to think… Whether I declare myself or not, I'll need all my willpower to endure difficult moments.

On the appointed day, Leos reports to the police station. When he comes back, he shows us a nice "Jew" stamp on his residency card.

"It doesn't hurt at all! Listen, I've heard a good joke… You know place Saint-Sulpice, with the big church on one side, the police station on the other side and all the stores that sell religious junk? Well, the owner of a religious-junk store is so pious that he goes to church every day and prays under a statue of the Virgin Mary. So today he goes there, but he can't believe his own eyes: the Virgin Mary and baby Jesus have vanished! In a panic, he goes and finds the priest, who just shrugs: Yeah, what do you think, they went across the square to declare themselves!"[1]

On the following days, the other members of our group report to the police station. It's not only that they're afraid to go underground. Also, they hope to get Soviet visas and go back to L'vov to see their parents, so they want to stay legit.

As my name is Zien, I come last. Until the end, Milek Roth tries to convince me not to go.

"Your blue eyes, your blond hair, your upturned nose… The perfect Aryan! Your name is neither Esther nor Sarah. You have nothing to fear. I can help you…"

"Upturned nose? Not really… I don't like it so much, anyway."

"The others, can't help them. Too fearful. You're different. Got hidden resources. I trust you."

A flame dances in his eyes when he evokes the fight against the enemy. His face seems younger, his hands cease to shake. He often goes away for a few days. When he returns, he reveals in a sibylline way that he "organized a hideout." I understand that Milek or one of his friends could hide me if necessary. At the same time, I worry when he's away: "Some day he won't come back, the others will be detained in a camp somewhere and you'll be alone, Malvina."

Saturday, October 19th, is census day for letters W, X, Y and Z. I go to the police station on place du Panthéon with the Warners.

Leos Geist and Bernard Kohn are still free, and now they have lawful papers. A mere stamp. I lost my papers and I came to this police station a million times… The Panthéon. *To great men the grateful fatherland*. Who are these great men? Men seem quite small to me. I

[1] In case you didn't know: little Jesus and his mom were Jewish!

thought I'd lost them again when I fell from the taxi. Papers are important. Without this tiny stamp, my papers become worthless… I feel so weak. Can't control my fate. "You let your mother die, you didn't keep your father from marrying his awful lover, you gave up your medicine studies… You're going down the drain."

In the police station, several police employees are sitting behind a long counter. One of them is a man with plastered down hair and tortoise-shell glasses: monsieur Mahé, who helped me so much when I lost my handbag. While Wanda and Henek show their passports to one of the employees, I report to my good friend Mr. Mahé.

"Bonjour, monsieur Mahé! You're still working here?"

"As you may see."

"Do you remember me."

"Of course: mademoiselle Zien, first name Malvina. Not a first name I see every day. I hope you haven't lost your papers again. It's not a good time to walk around without papers."

"No, I have come to… Well… I am declaring myself as Jewish."

"What did you say? Jewish? Of course not. You're not Jewish. Go back home right away!"

He seems to know what he is talking about. So I am not Jewish? Then what am I? My head is spinning. As his tone is quite firm, I obey him and step outside. The fresh air does me a lot of good. I get my bearings back. I know what I must do: face my fate. "From now on, you won't let them order you around, Malvina!"

I think that monsieur Mahé, even though he pledged his allegiance to marshal Pétain, the head of the new "French State," still believes in the grand laws of the French Republic: liberty, equality, fraternity[1]. If there are many people like him, they'll revive the Republic someday.

I simply forget to wait for Wanda and Henek. I walk down rue Soufflot and order a big cream at Capoulade. I feel as nervous and elated as when I caught up with the taxi on the boulevard. "You chose France forever. The Nazis won't pluck you away from your beloved Latin Quarter that easily!"

Everybody is looking at some students who run down rue Soufflot. They don't seem intent on studying anything: they carry fishing rods, hoping maybe to catch some trout in the Seine for their dinner. A man sitting at the next table, seeing that I don't understand what it all means, tells me that each student carries two fishing rods.

"A fishing rod is a pole. Two poles, do you get it?[2]"

So this is a clandestine Gaullist demonstration! "You too, Malvina, you'll resist." I'll try to find a way to resist more efficient than pretending to go fishing.

Milek Roth is quite proud of me.

"I knew it. You're not like the other ones."

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[1] The French State replaced this trilogy by another: work, family, fatherland.

[2] In French, "deux gaules" sounds like De Gaulle, the leader of the "free French" government in London.

"Don't say that, Milek. I'm like the others, but I'm lucky. The man who stole my handbag put me on the right track unknowingly."

My biggest luck is that I'm alone. My mother is dead, I am estranged from my father, I don't have any brother or sister. As the storm threatens, an insidious and violent desire to take refuge with their parents seizes the others, so that the Soviet visa means more to them than to me. I'm ready to risk staying in Paris.

Of course, they'd like to know when they'll get this Soviet visa they bought with their freedom. They ask Milek Roth:

"You've got all these friends in the Russian consulate… Couldn't you use your influence and hasten things a little?"

"Ahem, yes, influence… Not so simple… I got one visa. To begin with. Through someone. Hmm, for myself… Not exactly a visa, as a fact. More like a mission order. I must report in Moscow. Over there, I'll see what I can do for you."

On December 31st, we celebrate the New Year in the apartment of Lonek Greif, the bearded man with the dog. This is also a house-warming party. He moved within his building to open a medicine practice in a big apartment whose tenant fled Paris. Patients crowd the waiting room, as many doctors are prisoners or went away—not to mention the Jews who are not allowed to work.

"What about you? Aren't you Jewish?" Wanda asks.

"I'm French. My religion is my own concern, and in fact I don't believe in God. I chose to become French precisely because here they don't stamp *Jew* on you ID card as they do in Poland."

"Stiff-leg Viktor talks like you. He says we shouldn't have declared ourselves."

"Of course you shouldn't have. In my prisoners' camp, they began by asking the Jews to identify themselves, like you."

"You were a prisoner?"

"Yes, I was an officer in the French army, doctor of a regiment on the Maginot line. We waited for months without fighting, then they ordered us to retreat. The Germans surrounded us, but I knew a backroad that could have been a way to freedom. I told the colonel about it. Do you know what the colonel answered? *If you escape, Greif, we'll consider you a deserter.* So I got caught with the others. I spent four months in an Oflag[1] in Lorraine."

"So did you declare yourself?"

"Of course not."

"What happened to the Jews who did?"

[1] A prisoners' camp for officers (OffizieresLager).

"At first, nothing. But then, they came again and took them away. They act in a progressive way, on the sly. The Jews don't rebel, the witnesses don't protest. If they call you again, don't go."

"They have our address, now. They'll come and get us at home."

"You can hide in my apartment. You see there's more room than needed. Did you see Viktor recently? Where is he?"

"He didn't report. Instead, he escaped to the free zone with Renée. Her parents live near Tarbes somewhere. Did you hire the same orchestra?"

Everybody remembers the great party Stiff-leg Viktor gave rue Mouffetard two years ago. Lonek Greif also hired musicians, poor hungry fellows in search of a job. Their tangos sound desperate.

By and by, we begin to dance. Lonek Greif seems to earn lots of money, or at least enough to buy wine and even champagne. Eventually, we become so joyful that a German soldier rings at the door and complains about the noise at 2 AM or so. A bunch of them lives across the boulevard, in Hôtel Royal. Lonek Greif isn't afraid:

"This is New Year's day. We do what we want!"

He asks me to dance. I accept politely, but I still don't like him. As if his beard and his dog weren't enough, he acquired another bad habit: he smokes a pipe. This man lives in confusion: his dog isn't the same as last time.

"You do not recognize my dog, mademoiselle Malvina ? My poor Flip died of Carré's illness. This one is named Béton[1], because I've found him in a Maginot line bunker. When I was a prisoner, I left him with an innkeeper in Lorraine. My hospital said it needed me, so the Germans let me go. The first thing I did was get Béton. I came just in time. The innkeeper said he ate too much. I had a feeling that she was going to roast him and call him a rabbit."

"I've never eaten rabbit meat."

"You should try. It's very tasty."

"Right now, I'm happy when I have enough money to buy a baguette of bread, a pint of milk and a few apples."

"Well then, enjoy my buffet… Look, I have *saucisson* and *pâté*. Some of my patients, who have relatives in the countryside, bring me food."

He doesn't try to seduce me. He lives with a French woman who exchanged her name, Jeanne, for its Polish equivalent, Yanka, out of love for him. Wanda says they lived as husband and wife for years, but that now they just share the apartment like two friends and sleep in separate rooms.

I dance with Henek Warner, with Milek Roth, with Bernard Kohn. I am somewhat envious of Wanda, who can take shelter in the arms of her Henek when anxiety overwhelms her. I rest my head upon Bernard's wide breast, I snuggle close to him. I may not feel the crazy passion

[1] Concrete.

called love, but I need the help of a strong partner to face the uncertainties of the new year. We walk up rue Mouffetard together. When we come to Hôtel Tournefort, I invite him into my room. Three years to the day after I arrived in France, a new phase of my life is beginning.

1941. They're taking the Jews!

Towards the second week of January, Milek Roth goes away—without saying whether he is organizing a new hideout of going to Moscow.

"If I don't see you again… Farewell… Good luck!"

Leos Geist jokes about it.

"He's going to cross Germany in a sealed car, like Lenin[1]. Or a submarine will pick him up under the Concorde bridge!"

Whenever we see a bearded man in the street, he sticks his elbow into our ribs:

"Look, Milek !"

We're glad Leos is there to brighten the gloom with his jokes.

In March, a doctor named Zellermeyer comes to Hôtel Tournefort and gives me a large envelope.

"Comrades have given me this for you."

The envelope comes from L'vov. Milek Roth sends five fake baptism certificates: for me, my two parents and two grandparents. This Zellermeyer doesn't say whether the comrades gave him the envelope in Poland or in France. He takes on vague and mysterious airs, like a conspirer in a bad film (or like Milek). He couldn't play the part of an international spy in a movie, though: he is short and wears thick glasses. He reminds me of those serious pupils who always got the best marks in class.

"Now that you are a certified catholic," he adds," you are very valuable. Maybe you can help us some day."

"If you want."

"This hotel ceased to be safe when the tenants declared themselves as Jews. If things go sour, you'll take a room in Hôtel de la Gare, rue Perceval in the fourteenth arrondissement[2].

"Is it a hideout?"

"In a way… I was also told you can give the address of a French doctor, born in Poland, who rents a large apartment and offered to hide people there."

"Oh yes, that's docteur Greif, 68 boulevard Saint-Marcel, in the fifth arrondissement.

As Milek Roth was the main supplier of our little souvenir trade, we put an end to it. I switch to the belt business. Wanda shows me how to cut and fold leather, how to sew with the special needles. I find nothing wrong with the manufacturing process, but I question the commercial setup.

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[1] In 1917, the Germans let Lenin cross Germany in a sealed train car so he could return from Switzerland, where he was an exile, to Russia. After the October Revolution, he signed a peace treaty with Germany.

[2] District. There are twenty arrondissements in Paris.

"Six francs per belt… That's not enough, Wanda. You should raise the price to twenty-four francs."

"You're crazy, Malvina. How could we… It will never work. Nobody will buy them anymore."

"Look, if we don't try, we'll never know."

Our customers, a few seamstresses and tailors, accept the new price. Wanda has created several models. Some of them sell better than others. Her best-seller is a two-buckled belt with a long lozenge shape. I reproduce here Wanda's original drawing, which I've kept as a memento:

Wanda admires me because I can manage by myself and decide things without wavering. As for me, I admire her creative talent. "If needed, she'll learn how to manage, whereas you, Malvina, you'll never be able to draw like her, for lack of talent. You father is an art teacher, but he didn't teach you anything…"

In a very elegant belt, Wanda replaced the buckle by buttons and button-holes. Sewing the button-holes is a painstaking job.

"You know, Wanda, we should sell this belt for ten times our usual price, which would really be too much. I think we'd better give it up. Let's just make more of the lozenge belt, since it is the customers' favorite…"

On May 14, Henek Warner, Bernard Kohn and Leos Geist receive a summons to report to the Gobelins police station with their wife or an acquaintance, in order to "check their situation." We gather in the Warners' room to talk things over—without Leos, who found work outside Paris in a Citroen factory.

"What do they mean, *an acquaintance*?" Bernard asks.

"Well, Wanda goes with Henek and I go with you. This is probably so I can vouch for your identity."

"What about Leos? We should send him the summons."

"Nothing proves that we know where he's gone. Let them find him."

"Have you heard about those camps? Do you think it is true?"

The newspapers and radio don't say much, so we go to café Capoulade for news—or rumors. Some communist militants pretend to get reliable information from policemen who do not like the Germans. According to these policemen, camps are being readied for the Polish Jews. This could be true, of course, so we should certainly consider fleeing… If only we knew how and where! Henek and Bernard do not know where to find fake papers and beards. If they knew, they'd be scared to do it. They prefer to accept their fate. As we're walking down rue Mouffetard with them towards the Gobelins police station, we meet Yanka,

the French woman with a Polish first name, Lonek Greif's friend. When we tried to think of a hiding place in our talks, we just forgot that Lonek had offered his apartment.

"Is he there?" I ask Yanka.

"No, he's gone to the hospital for the whole day."

"The police called, I mean summoned, hmm, the Jews… They'll take them and put them into camping… no, I mean, camps. Lonek, hmm, I mean doctor Greif, said they shouldn't report… He said they might… His apartment being so big…"

I can't find my words. I should have thought more about it. I don't know what to decide. I mumble. I forget the French language. This French woman who hijacked a Polish name makes me uneasy. I guess she doesn't understand my ramblings. She starts running to and fro and shouting:

"They're taking the Jews! They're taking the Jews!"

This is the opposite of the cautious attitude that would be required for people wanting to go underground. The rue Mouffetard shopkeepers recognize Bernard.

"Are you Jewish, monsieur Bernard? You don't even look Jewish."

"Don't worry… Marshall Pétain won't let the Germans take you away."

"Why don't you take these apples…"

"And these goat cheeses."

"No, no, you'll pay some other time."

The policemen retain the ten or twelve Jews who report. They ask the wives and "acquaintances" to go back home and fetch blankets and toiletries for them. So we know why they wanted us too. Later, a bus comes for the Jews. The conductor may be the one I saw on my first day in Paris. At least, he has the same handlebar mustache. Our men leave towards the unknown.

The May 14th roundup shrinks the leather workers' population even more, so that our belts sell like hotcakes (except the bakeries don't sell hotcakes anymore.)

One month after Henek Warner and Bernard Kohn have vanished, as we are working in Wanda's room, the Hôtel Tournefort landlady says a policeman is asking for us. Nothing can happen to me, but Wanda is declared as a Jew… Seeing our fright, the landlady bursts out laughing:

"Don't worry, you'll see…"

The policeman comes to our room. He holds a bunch of flowers in his arms! I remember the warm custom officers who wished me a happy New Year on January 1st, 1938—and monsieur Mahé, of course. The bunch of flowers contains a message from Henek and Bernard:

"We are in a camp in Pithiviers, guarded by French *gendarmes*[1] who give us no reason to complain."

Phew! They're not in Germany! I see tears of joy welling in Wanda's eyes. I feel relieved of a heavy weight and nearly happy, as if we had won a great victory over the enemy.

As soon as the policeman is gone, a familiar shape, with tousled hair and ragged shirt, appears out of a dark corner and comes towards us.

"Leos! You were here all this time? You're hiding?"

"I avoid talking to the police. My comrades in the factory convinced me not to declare myself. They'll find fake papers for me and I'll head south at full speed. Meanwhile, I don't exist… Look, I've brought cream cheese and two cans of sardines in oil. Let's feast!"

You crush the sardines and mix them with the cheese, then you spread this paste on a thick slice of bread. Bernard Kohn taught us this delicious—or at least quite nourishing—recipe. I'm sure I'll find it delicious, as we don't appease our hunger every day. Just before I open the first can, I notice Wanda's moist eyes.

"We must send these cans to them, Malvina, now that we know where they are."

"Really? Well, I guess you may be right…"

"Hey, I came all the way from Levallois-Perret to gorge myself with you!"

"We have potatoes and onions, Leos. You won't go away on an empty stomach."

I have some oil left. I fry the onions and the potatoes. Four potatoes altogether, or one and a third per person. Leos Geist tells us a joke:

A Jewish woman spends a week in a Vienna boarding-house. When she leaves, the landlady asks her whether she's satisfied. "Listen," she says, "I'll be frank with you: I didn't find the food that good. And the helpings you serve… so small!"

Our good Leos is always ready to joke, but a sad tinge has been altering his mood ever since his sister disappeared. If Myriam was alive, she'd certainly send a word to Hôtel Tournefort. We supposed she left Paris during the exodus. German airplanes machine-gunned the crowds and many people died. Or a car ran over her. She was so frail… Maybe someone killed her to steal her watch or her shoes.

We send the sardines, as well as biscuits and sugar, to Henek and Bernard. Wanda wants to go to Pithiviers right away. It seems to me we must think hard before taking any decision.

"They're detained and we're free. If we want to help them, the first thing to do is stay free."

"Do you believe that if we go to the camp, they'll keep us as prisoners?"

"No, I'm afraid they'd come here. This policeman was friendly, but the next one might not be. They have your address on your file, since you declared yourself. Lonek Greif says the Germans move in a progressive manner. After taking the men, they could come after the women…"

"Do you want us to leave the hotel?"

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[1] Village policemen, who actually belong to the army.

"Yes. This Docteur Zellermeyer who brought me the baptism certificates suggested a hotel in the fourteenth arrondissement, near the Montparnasse railway-station."

So we leave Hôtel Tournefort and move to Hôtel de la Gare, on rue Perceval. People call it "Hôtel Trial," after the landlady's name. Madame Trial is a plump and pleasant woman, who smiles easily and calls everybody "my child." You just have to look at her to feel safe. Her hotel is not as comfortable as Hôtel Tournefort—but cheaper, which suits us fine. Instead of renting her rooms to steady students, she gets many travelers who stay only one night.

The camp in Pithiviers

On June 22nd, the Germans mount a surprise attack on the Soviet Union. In a few days, they seize Occidental Ukraine and give it back its old name, Galicia (which they write *Galizien*). So the Nazis replace the communists in L'vov.

Things are happening in France, too. A new "Office for the Jewish question" changes the status of the Jews. Having already been excluded from public service, they lose the right to practice most professions. The companies and apartments they own are seized. They are not allowed to go to the theater or to the movies. Public gardens are forbidden to dogs and Jews. A curfew is set for the Jews from 8 PM to 6 AM.

I go to Pithiviers with Wanda. The gendarmes are indeed quite decent. They let us speak to Henek and Bernard across the barbed wire.

"Are you all right?"

"So far, ahem, we can consider that our situation is tolerable. As doctors, we live in a brick house that is more comfortable than the men's wooden huts."

"You too, Bernard?"

"I told them I was a medicine student. I work as an orderly."

"Do you see many patients, Henek?"

"People get bored. They visit us for small things. As I've almost finished my medical studies, they named me doctor-in-chief, hmm, so to speak for seniority's sake. When I see an appendicitis or an ulcer, I send it to the hospital in Pithiviers."

The gendarmes even let married men, like Henek Warner, spend a night in a Pithiviers hotel with their wife. Several prisoners seize the opportunity and jump out the window. The Germans scold the gendarmes, who become less accommodating.

As Henek still wants to see Wanda, he pretends to suffer from a "hemorrhagic colitis." Wanda says he had a real belly-ache, but made it worse by eating the wrong things. He knows how to do that, since he is a gastro-enterologist. The gendarmes take him to a Paris hospital.

"He just wanted to see me," Wanda says. "He'll go back to the camp in a couple weeks or so."

"Is he crazy? He escaped from the camp, and now he wants to go back?"

"Suppose he dares leave the hospital. He'll have to hide somewhere. We don't know anybody in Paris."

"There's Lonek Greif."

"The Germans are settled here for good. He could stay with him for a few days, but then it would become awkward."

"Listen, I may be able to help you. I'll try to reach Docteur Zellermeyer and ask him to send me fake papers for the both of you. You'll go to the free zone."

I've seen Docteur Zellermeyer several times in a café. I carry messages for him while pretending to deliver leather belts. As a rule, he sets our appointments, using monsieur and madame Trial as intermediaries—but I can also ask them to contact him for me. Monsieur and madame Trial admire socialism, but they've never enrolled in the communist party, so the police doesn't have a file on them.

Docteur Zellermeyer sends me the address of a man who makes fake papers and the name of someone who helps people cross the demarcation line.

Wanda and Henek hesitate. Wanda keeps talking about her mother and her little brother who stayed in L'vov. She works hard so she can send them food parcels. She says she wants to go back to L'vov and share their fate, or even sacrifice herself in place of her mother. Henek says she should forget L'vov. He want to think some more. He wonders whether it might not be a mistake to exchange his status as doctor-in-chief of the Pithiviers camp against that of escaped outlaw, wanted dead or alive by all the police forces in the kingdom.

The man who makes fake papers wants 500 francs. Henek asks a medicine professor he knows to extend his hospital stay. Having weighed the pros and cons for two weeks, he decides to leave. All of a sudden, he becomes quite bold. He decides to keep the money Wanda earned with the belts and to dispense with fake papers. I escort them to the Austerlitz station, where I used to take the Pithiviers train with Wanda. They go to Tours. They're lucky nobody checks their residency card with the "Jew" stamp. The man whose name Docteur Zellermeyer gave me takes them across the border in the middle of the night with a group of other people. They reach Montpellier without any mishap and find a room near Danka and Bronek's. Leos Geist, who left a few weeks before them, also lives there.

I marry

Since foreigners can't practice medicine in France, the so-called "doctors" installed in a brick house of the Pithiviers camp are in fact medical students. To replace Henek Warner, they choose a new doctor-in-chief, Armand Kassar. My dear Bernard becomes his assistant. He often talks to me about him:

"He is a fantastic fellow. The rotund and jolly kind. Very warm. Never loses his temper. If the future worries him, he doesn't show it. He takes things as they come, without ever complaining. He nearly finished his studies, but he stayed in Hôpital Saint-Louis as an extern. He doesn't want the useless foreigners' diploma. He just passed his *baccalauréat*, like me. When the war began, he volunteered for the Foreign Legion in order to get the French nationality faster…"

"How does it help you become French, if it is a foreign legion?"

"It's part of the French army, not the Polish army. The defeat came too soon, anyway. He didn't have time to fight. He is a very good doctor. I'm learning a lot at his side."

"Is he Polish?"

"He comes from Plock[1]. That's why we didn't know him."

I've been living alone in Hôtel Trial since Wanda went to Montpellier. One day, as I'm bringing back two carrots and one onion for my dinner, a small dark-haired woman stops me on rue Perceval. I can see she's not French. Her high cheekbones give her face a vaguely Asiatic look.

"Are you Malvina?"

"Yes."

"The hotel's landlady told me you went out shopping. She said you'd come from this direction and I could recognize you because you always wear a well-ironed white shirt… My name is Tunia Kassar. My husband is a prisoner in Pithiviers. He lives in the same house as Bernard Kohn, your friend."

"Kassar? The new doctor-in-chief? Bernard told me about him. He said you're a doctor, too."

"They expelled me from the hospital with their status of the Jews. I still go secretly twice a week, otherwise I'll forget everything. The rest of the time, I work with a jeweler. I need money to send parcels to Poland."

"Me, I make leather belts. Are you from Plock, like your husband?"

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[1] This is pronounced "Puotsk". A small town located 60 miles northwest of Warsaw. Lodz, a much bigger city, is south of Plock. The Jews of Galicia, who were Austrian before the first world war, didn't feel very close to the Jews who came from the former Russian provinces. See maps at the end of the book.

"Yes. The Germans grouped the Plock Jews in a big ghetto in Lodz. They have very little food. Hunger has already killed hundreds of thousands, they say. Do you come from Galicia?"

"From L'vov. I don't have anybody left there, but I've heard that the Germans grouped the Jews in a ghetto, like in Lodz. Come, I'll introduce you to my friends."

I take her across the street, to a small bar.

"What does this name mean, *Au Menhir*?"

"It is a kind of prehistoric standing stone they have in Brittany. People who come from Brittany get off the train at the Montparnasse station and stay in this neighborhood."

Tunia finds the bar's customers slightly scary. She questions me in a hushed voice:

"These women… They are…"

"You know the expression *women of easy virtue*? The French have many ways of mentioning them: prostitutes, whores, harlots, hookers, joy girls, hens."

"Hens, are you sure?"

"Of course. And see the gentlemen at the back, playing cards while drinking their pastis: they're pimps, procurers, mackerels. Come… Mimi, Zaza, monsieur Paul, this is my friend Tunia. Her man is a prisoner in Pithiviers, like mine. She makes jewelry."

The demoiselles of easy virtue and their protectors promise to buy jewelry from Tunia. I tell her they're good customers.

"I sell belts to the women and crocodile-skin wristwatch bands to the men. They want to help me. They're patriots deep inside. The demoiselles come from Brittany, the men from Marseille or Corsica—except José, who is a former soldier from the Spanish Republican army."

"My husband said that you were an amazing woman, that you hadn't declared yourself, that you owned five baptism certificates, but he didn't mention the hens and the pumps…"

"Pimps! I'll tell you how they go about it. When one of the gentlemen wants to recruit a new demoiselle, he goes to the Montparnasse station and finds a *Bécassine*[1], that's how they call peasants who step off the train from Brittany. He offers her a good job as a waitress in a bar or a chambermaid in a hotel. Better than being a servant with some bourgeois lady who would treat you like trash, he says. When she is a waitress, he invites her to have dinner in a nice restaurant, he takes her to a music-hall show, he gives her a dress and a ring, he says sweet words, he seduces her. As soon as she's used to luxury, he says he knows a good job that brings in much more money than waitress…"

"I'll ask my boss for jewelry and I'll bring it here."

"Where do you live?"

"Near the Buttes-Chaumont garden."

"I lived over there before the war. I took care of a little boy. It's far from everything."

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[1] Name of a naive Britton maid in well-known comics.

"Yes, but Hôpital Saint-Louis is close, as well as my jeweler."

"Your husband worked in the same hospital?"

"He was an extern at Saint-Louis and I at Lariboisière. When the Germans requisitioned Lariboisière, I came to Saint-Louis. Armand had already moved against his will to Pithiviers, so we were never colleagues in the same hospital."

We go to Pithiviers together. All kinds of rumors enter the camp, carried by the prisoners' wives or by the guards. They whirl and swirl, becoming weaker by and by, so that it is difficult to know what's true or even just likely. People talk about new roundups, camps in Germany, Jewish colonies in Byelorussia or elsewhere in Eastern Europe. Bernard Kohn heard a rumor that Jews married to "Aryan" women wouldn't be sent away.

"You understand, Malvina, in these Byelorussian colonies, they'll send whole Jewish families: men, women and children. Aryan women wouldn't fit in Jewish colonies, so they'll let their husbands stay here. When all the foreign Jews are resettled in the East, they'll certainly free the Jews married to Aryan women, in order to close the camp."

"These so-called colonies are probably the ghettos where the Jews die of hunger. You're right to beware. Okay, you must marry an Aryan woman!"

"Just what I thought."

"As soon as I'm back in Paris, I'll inquire. I'm sure I can find someone. Maybe one of the Bécassines… You don't mind that she's a hooker, since it's just a way of getting you out of here. You'll divorce after the war."

"I thought of somebody else."

"Oh yes? Who?"

"You, of course!"

"Me? But I'm Jewish!"

"You're forgetting your five baptism certificates… Nobody is more Aryan than you."

"You're right! What a fool… Yes, me… Hmm, then, we'll get married… You marry me and I… Well, I marry you… I become Malvina Kohn. Mademoiselle Zien, Madame Kohn… Why not? We must do it, obviously. I'll ask the camp commander for an appointment."

I have to ask the Orléans Kommandantur for a special permit. The German officials look at me as if I was out of my mind: whereas I am a certified Aryan, I want to marry a Jewish *Untermensch*[1], locked in a camp maybe forever. Well, in a way, I share their doubts. I'm marrying because of mere rumors. Will the Germans really send the Jews to colonies in the east? Will they exempt the Jews married to Aryan women? Bernard needs to believe in the hope of freedom, that's why I accept his marriage proposal. Besides, while nothing proves the rumors are true, nothing proves they're false either. I can't run the risk of letting the Germans send him away. It is a sort of bet. "You may be saving Bernard's life by marrying him,

[1] Less than human.

Malvina. You shouldn't hesitate. Just consider it a marriage of convenience." I like Bernard, but I am not convinced he is the love of my life.

We marry in the city hall of Pithiviers in September. Tunia Kassar and a city hall employee act as witnesses. When I was a romantic maiden in Poland (just four years ago, but it seems an eternity), I imagined another kind of marriage: a white dress, a ballroom with lights everywhere, dozens of guests, flowers, a giant cake, a groom I'd be madly in love with…

Considering the special circumstances, the gendarmes let us spend a night in a hotel—whereas they ceased authorizing other couples to do it. Bernard could jump out the window, but I don't want any trouble. I must hold to my status as a law-abiding Aryan if I want to help Docteur Zellermeyer and his friends.

Actually, I've been preparing his escape and Armand Kassar's, by other means, for a long time. I explain my plan to Tunia:

"You know the gendarme called Salmon?"

"A gendarme? I don't know any gendarme."

"You should know them. It's important. This Salmon, he considers it wrong that people be kept in a camp without a sound reason. He has friends who maintain contacts with the London government in exile—you know, Général de Gaulle. I gave some money to Salmon."

"Do you have money?"

"I earn a little with the belts. Also, my friend Milek left me some dollars. So now listen… The Menhir gentlemen have introduced me to a fellow who lives south of Paris. He has a Peugeot truck with a fake floor and knows where to cross the demarcation line. Bernard and Armand come to the gate on a certain day, when Salmon is on duty with another gendarme. Armand says Bernard is very ill and should be taken right away to the Pithiviers hospital. All right, Salmon says, I'll drive you to the hospital. He tells the other gendarme to stay there and guard the camp. They leave in the gendarmes' automobile and go to a place where the Peugeot truck is waiting for them. Voilà!"

"Salmon will be in trouble."

"They opened the door when we reached Pithiviers, he'll say. They escaped in the narrow streets and I could not catch them."

I'm sure my plan would have succeeded. Alas, an inquiry about a previous escape reveals gendarme Salmon's involvement. They send him elsewhere, or shoot him, I don't know. They replace most gendarmes, actually. A second roundup of Jews takes place on August 8th. The camp is full. The new gendarmes are not easy-going at all. The Germans threaten them of dire sanctions if they let prisoners escape.

There are ID checkups in the street and in the subway. I don't risk being arrested as a Jew, but I am still a foreigner, which means a potential suspect. What would I answer if policemen asked me: "What is your profession? How do you make a living? What do you do all day?" Although my belt business is less risky than my errands for Docteur Zellermeyer, it is not

altogether legal. With the approval of Docteur Zellermeyer, I enroll as a student in the Sorbonne university in October, 1941. Thus, I can answer the police without lying: “I am a student.” I pass an easy exam and begin to study for a BA in German. Actually, I already know the German language better than most other students in my class.

Oh, I don’t feel like befriending these other students. Why do they study German? Do they like Goethe or do they admire Hitler? As for me, I love Goethe (and Heine), but I think about Hitler, too. I imagine the kind of adventures that befall movie heroines: “You find a job as the secretary of a high German official… You listen through keyholes, you search his papers… He invites you to dinner. You accept and you encourage him to drink until he reveals secrets… You talk to underground fighters, who transmit what you’ve found to London. The allies owe you their final victory!”

1942. Jacques and Jacqueline

Old people say they don't remember a winter as cold as this one. You'd think this was Siberia, or at least Galicia. My hotel room is not heated. Madame Trial turns off water every evening, lest it freezes and the pipes burst. I'm lucky to own warm clothes, to be young and healthy, but I suffer terribly from the cold because I do not eat enough. I lose hours waiting on line to buy the kind of chewy vegetables they used to give to hogs. I file my food coupons by categories in a little booklet. I'm as thin as a string bean. Sitting on my bed, wrapped up in two blankets but still shivering, I try to sew belts with numb fingers. To compensate for my lower productivity, I ask the Menhir gentlemen to find me work as a cleaning lady. I mean, a real cleaning lady.

Towards the end of March, 1942, I'm going back home after selling belts to a store on avenue d'Italie. As I am walking along rue de Tolbiac, a man on a bicycle stops near me and says *bonjour*.

"*Bonjour Monsieur*. Excuse me, I don't think I know you…"

"Lonek Greif, do you remember me? I'm a doctor."

"Oh yes. Strange, but I didn't recognize you. I have a good memory for faces, though. Wait, haven't you changed? Hmm…"

"On our last meeting, I wore a beard."

"That's right. You lived on boulevard Saint-Marcel… Did you celebrate New Year's Eve again this year?"

"Nobody wants to celebrate these dark years. Besides, the people are gone. Do you know that Henek Warner escaped from Pithiviers? I advised him not to go back there…"

"Of course I know. I also advised him not to return! I even found someone who made false papers, but they wanted to save money and went with their regular papers. Wanda wrote to me from Montpellier. She studies French in university. Henek found a job as a doctor on probation in a hospital's radiology department."

"So how are you getting along?"

"Well, you know… I make leather belts, which I sell here and there. I work as a cleaning lady. I hope this war will end soon."

"They attacked the Russians and declared war on the Americans. That's a pretty big gamble. They'll lose the game, eventually."

"Let's hope. In the meantime, many people suffer."

"Someone told me, I don't remember who… You didn't declare yourself as a Jew, is that right?"

"A friend sent me baptism certificates from Poland."

"Can you buy such things over there?"

"I guess he knows a priest with an open mind. What about you?"

"I'm French."

"Ah, sure, I remember."

"Say, as neither of us is Jewish, we could go to the movies!"

We spend several evenings at the movies or in restaurants. Without his beard and his dog (he lost it in the subway), Lonek Greif is quite a pleasant man. He invites me to his home to eat the food his patients bring him from the farm. It tastes better than what the fanciest restaurants serve! His apartment is huge and comfortable, especially when I compare it to my tiny hotel room. He has a maid. Her eyesight must be very poor, as I see lots of dust everywhere. Two locked rooms contain the furniture and belongings of the tenant who fled during the exodus.

A black grand piano stands in the middle of the living-room.

"Do you play the piano?"

"I studied it for years. First in my town, Sambor, then in the L'vov conservatory. I was supposed to come to Paris and begin further studies in the *École Normale de Musique*, but my fiancée threatened to leave me unless I chose a safer profession. She said we couldn't found a family and have children if I insisted on leading the uncertain life of an artist. So I became a doctor."

"And you married her?"

"Yes, but we lived together only four years. My wife was jealous in a very unbalanced way, close to insanity. She gave me hell every day. We stopped seeing each other and in the end we divorced."

"What about this woman I saw at your New Year's Eve party? She lived here, didn't she?"

"That was Yanka, a French friend. We slept in separate rooms, you know. She's gone now."

"Me, I just got married."

"Really? But who with?"

"With Bernard Kohn, who is a prisoner in Pithiviers. He hopes that if he has an Aryan wife, they won't deport him to Byelorussia."

Lonek Greif plays some Chopin piano pieces. I don't know much about music, but Chopin isn't just any music—it is the painful song of Poland's soul. When Lonek plays the *Étude Révolutionnaire*, then the *Grande Polonaise*, I can't help shuddering and applauding.

On a starry evening in May, after going to the movies, we walk along the bank of the Seine river. We worry neither about the Jews' curfew, at 8 PM, nor about the general curfew, at midnight, because Lonek owns a doctor's permit. If the police stops us, he'll say I'm his nurse.

This mellow wind I love, which brings sea scents from Normandy, brushes my cheek to herald the return of the better season. Lonek kisses me. I find it quite pleasurable. "Are you in

love, Malvina? Or do you suffer so much from solitude that you're ready to fall into anybody's arms?"

I sometimes spend whole days without uttering a word. Apart from monsieur and madame Trial and the Menhir people, I don't know any Frenchman. Besides, I couldn't talk to a Frenchman of the distress that seizes me when the authorities announce a great exhibition about the "Jewish race" or when the newspapers mention new roundups, followed by the first deportations towards the East. Tunia Kassar comes now and then. I don't go to Pithiviers with her anymore, because they transferred Bernard to another camp, in Compiègne. She feels lonely, too. She crosses Paris to ask me for advice, to tell me she doesn't receive any more news from Lodz, to hear a few words of comfort. She praises me to the high skies: I am strong like a rock, lively, resourceful, elegant. She says I fear nothing. I try to deserve her compliments, but I often feel awfully fragile—the more so for hiding my weaknesses. Thus, I'm glad I met Lonek.

At the same time, I still distrust men, whom I find cruel and cowardly. He's as big a braggart as the others. He details with the same proud tone his heroic battle deeds and his love feats. Even before separating from his first wife, the crazy jealous one, he cheated on her with a Turkish Jewess. Then he lived with Yanka, the Frenchwoman with the Polish name. She left him (before coming back at the beginning of the war and staying in a corner of his apartment), so he consoled himself with the nurses of his hospital ward. "I grabbed this one and that one, without even looking," he says. Before the war, hearing a man speak in such a manner would have made me very angry. While I considered my father's behavior with great severity, I'm becoming indulgent… Or rather, I suspend my moral rigor until the end of the war. Since I'm pretending to be a catholic… In order to survive, I'm ready to lie, cheat, steal maybe, so I can't reproach Lonek his slight faults.

We spend most of our evenings together. After two or three months, he tells me the following story:

"Towards the end of last year, someone rang at my door in the middle of the night. I'm a neighborhood doctor, so I may be called for an emergency. It was a very pale man, wrapped in a heavy coat. He said you gave him my name and address."

"Me?"

"Yes. He is a doctor. His name is Zellermeyer. A small man with thick glasses. You told him I offered to hide people."

"That's true."

"He opened his coat and shirt. He had a large dressing on his belly. I asked him whether he had been wounded. He answered he had undergone an appendectomy the day before. Operated upon the day before and already walking? I found that surprising. He told me he had fallen into a police-trap. Before the Gestapo could torture him, he simulated an appendicitis. He asked the surgeon who operated on him to use as little anesthetic as possible, pretending he suffered from severe allergy. He woke up in a room guarded by a policeman. After a

while, the policeman went to the toilet. He didn't expect Zellermeyer to wake up, of course. That's when he escaped. I thought this fellow had guts. I changed his dressing and put him to bed. In the morning, I asked him what the Gestapo wanted from him. He said he tried to make himself useful. Do you know what this means?"

"Yes. I carried letters and parcels for him. I hadn't seen him for several months, actually, but that was not unusual. He comes and goes, you never know when you'll see him again."

"I told him I'd like to make myself useful, too. He said he would send me someone. A week or so after his visit, a man came. At first I belonged to a cell with two other people. We put leaflets in mailboxes. Now, I've become the underground network's doctor."

"You extract bullets, like in the movies?"

"This hasn't happened yet. I see swollen tonsils, bronchitis, that kind of thing. These *French Résistance* fighters are mostly clandestine foreigners: republican Spaniards, anti-fascist Italians, Polish Jews. They don't have regular homes, but hide in cold attics or caves, where they catch cold. They advised me to shave my beard."

"They don't like bearded men?"

"It's not a matter of taste. When you're an underground fighter, you must be as neutral as possible. If the police questions a witness, he shouldn't be able to say a *bearded man*. If I hadn't lost my dog, I should have given him away. *A man with a dog*, you understand. As a member of the Résistance, I'm Jacques. The blandest possible name."

Since I have carried parcels for Zellermeyer, Lonek enrolls me as a courier.

"You'll say you're Jacqueline, so they'll know I'm sending you."

The first time I hand a letter to a *résistant*, he says:

"So you're the new Jacqueline?"

One evening in July, as I'm ready to go back to rue Perceval after Lonek played some Chopin and Mendelssohn, a terrible thunderstorm erupts. Lonek suggests I stay for the night, instead of walking for an hour under a heavy rain. I feel that my old fear of lightning and thunder, long ago vanquished, is welling from deep inside me. I'm putting all my energy into controlling other frights, so I don't try to fight it. I take refuge in Lonek's bed.

The last time I spent a night with a man, it was in a Pithiviers hotel—my strange honeymoon with poor Bernard. I can't help comparing my two men… Bernard, who is younger than me and prisoner in a camp, can hardly protect me against pending dangers. Lonek is ten years older than me. He is not as tall as Bernard, but seems much stronger. I remember an expression Wanda used to describe him: a natural athlete. His light brown hair, combed towards the back and flattened by brilliantine, rises above a high round forehead. Behind his glasses (he is astigmatic), he has electric blue eyes. I find the shape of his lips very sensual, or somewhat wobbly, depending on the way I look at them. He lives in a large apartment, he is French. He is not a young student, but an adult who earns a living. A doctor.

His voice has a comforting and secure quality. My father was so weak—maybe I need a strong man in my life. During this first night, his vigor topples barriers that had been standing since my childhood. I feel conquered and subjugated.

In the morning, I take a bath. First one in four and a half years!

The great roundup

On July 16th, 1942, the police take away all the foreign Jews they haven't caught yet: men and also, for the first time, women and children. This is the great roundup that will later be known as the "Vél d'Hiv[1] roundup."

Tunia Kassar is lucky. Her neighbor knows someone who knows a policeman who warns them. Tunia hides with a French friend of hers, Simone Réti. She's an artist, a painter, who inherited a magnificent apartment in Île Saint-Louis. The rooms have high ceilings with painted beams like in the *châteaux de la Loire*. Simone Réti is generous—and lonely: she tells Tunia she can stay as long as she wants. I find false papers for her . Her name becomes Antoinette Cassard. I choose Antoinette because I find it close to Tunia. In Polish, Tunia is short for Estunia, a familiar variant of Esther. With her false papers, she can still go to the hospital and work with her jeweler. She unstitches her yellow star, of course.

The Germans began to deport the Jews in cattle cars towards mysterious eastern colonies in March. They emptied the Pithiviers camp by and by. In July, when the great roundup takes place, there's only one prisoner left in the camp: Armand Kassar! He welcomes the women and children coming from the Vél d'Hiv. One of the women, who is a doctor, helps him a little, as well as a Red Cross nurse. Armand works day and night, with very few tools and drugs, amidst crowds of crying babies and frantic mothers. Several children die. The camp commander says he'll find a way to acknowledge the great services Armand is rendering:

"The Germans owe me a favor. I can promise they won't deport you east, doctor…"

Tunia hopes they might even free him.

The commander doesn't keep his promise. The Germans deport the mothers first, then their children. When the Pithiviers camp is empty again, the gendarmes send Armand Kassar to a "transit camp" in Drancy, near Paris. Every day, Jews leave Drancy in cattle-cars to begin their journey to the unknown.

Bernard Kohn, my husband, also arrives in Drancy, after spending a few weeks in the Compiègne camp. I am allowed to visit him in September. I tell him I've fallen in love with Lonek Greif. This makes him very sad, of course.

"You know, Malvina, they keep me here because I'm married to an Aryan. There are a few dozens of us. In the beginning, we were hundreds. When the Jews' wives came to visit them, the camp commander asked them why they stayed married to *untermenschen*. He said that the status of the Jews gave him the power to grant them a divorce there and then. No need of a

[1] Vél d'Hiv is short for Vélodrome d'Hiver: winter (covered) bicycle racetrack. Many Jews were held there in dire conditions for several days.

lawyer: they just had to sign a paper. Many women signed. The Jews were deported on the next day…"

His tone is bitter. I understand why he tells me about these heartless women. It is a way of saying: "You can repudiate me, let me vanish somewhere in the east, marry your doctor…" I look into his eyes and swear solemnly that I'll stay married to him until the end of the war.

"I'm sorry, Bernard. Believe me, I wanted to make you happy. Maybe I shouldn't have told you about Lonek, but I was afraid you'd hear about it from someone else. I like you, but I'm not sure we would have married if the war had not messed up everything, if they had not enacted this Aryan wife rule…"

Mid-October, a railway worker brings a sheet of paper he found on the tracks, addressed to Tunia Kassar, c/o Hôtel Trial: "I'm leaving Drancy towards an unknown destination and I throw this letter from the train. I hope it reaches you. Let's keep faith in the future. Armand."

The *résistants*

Lonek Greif doesn't tell me the name of the underground network he belongs to. When we talk about it, we say: "the *résistants*". I'll learn the network's name after the war: FTP-MOI, for "*Francs Tireurs Partisans - Main d'Œuvre Immigrée*."[1] This organization was founded by Spanish republicans and Rumanian communists. As long as Hitler and Stalin were allied, the French communist party didn't appreciate these foreigners who wanted to fight the Nazis. It began to support them in June, 1941, when Germany attacked the Soviet Union (but will forget them again at the end of the war).

In Montpellier, my friends enroll in the same network. Many Rumanian communists are Jewish. Polish or Russian Jews who lost their family in the roundups but managed to escape often want to join the *Résistance* out of despair. They have nothing to lose. They usually know a Rumanian Jew, who sends them to the FTP-MOI. The résistants whom Leos Geist met in the Citroën factory belonged to this group. They gave him the name and the address of a "contact" in Montpellier. Thus, Leos, Danka and Bronek put leaflets into mailboxes and become members of the clandestine communist party. Wanda goes along on the leaflets delivery rounds, but Henek won't, because he distrusts the communists.

The résistants have friends who give them news ahead, so they warn everybody that the Germans will soon occupy the "free" zone[2]. The former Hôtel Tournefort students do not wait for them. They move to Grenoble, in the Italian zone, where nobody bothers the Jews. As they're turning into seasoned résistants, wary of taking unnecessary risks, they belatedly follow Milek Roth's advice and acquire false papers. Danka and Bronek Müller, Wanda and Henek Warner, Leos Geist become Danièle and Alain Meunier, Henriette and Philippe Thomas, Yves Gauthier.

The Paris branch of our network is quite active, I think. The newspapers report that "terrorists" are killing Germans soldiers with guns and grenades. Lonek can't hide his joy after the boldest attacks.

Tunia wants to help the résistants, like me.

"I'll talk to Jacques about you. Come again in a week. I'll give you his answer. It will be yes, I'm sure. Then I'll take you to his apartment."

Lonek accepts to meet Tunia. He gives us an appointment for December 7th.

Bronchitis season is back. Lonek sees more résistants. Although he doesn't tell me anything, I suspect the network bosses hide arms in the locked rooms where he keeps the

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[1] Independent Guerillas – Immigrant Laborers.

[2] They did on December 11th, 1942.

former tenant's furniture. What I know for sure is that they also come to take a warm bath (like me) and to wash their clothes. This is very careless. On Wednesday, December 2nd, Lonek comes to Hôtel Trial. He seems as excited as when he plays the *Grande Polonaise* or describes his battles.

"The police is in my apartment…"

"The police?"

"Probably the Special Brigade… Frenchmen who work for the Gestapo… I was coming back from my Hôpital Cochin consultation… A patient who lives in my courtyard was waiting for me at the Gobelins intersection. Docteur, docteur, she said, you can't go home. The police are hidden behind the building's door and they control all the people who enter."

"Is this what they call a police-trap?"

"Of course. I guess they followed a résistant who was coming to my place, unless they received a denunciation. Someone may have noticed all the coming and going."

Several leaders of the FTP-MOI (Spaniards, Rumanians and one Czech)—who were coming for a relaxing bath, maybe—fall into the trap. The police also catches a friend of Lonek who doesn't belong to the network, who just picks up Lonek every Friday evening to go to the swimming-pool. He vanishes without a trace.

Lonek is sitting on my bed. He frowns like a general trying to elaborate a strategy before a great battle.

"I can stay here a day or two, but not more. They can find a link between us…"

"You mean the *concierge*[1] saw us together?"

"Madame Georgeai? She'd never denounce us. She likes me. I look after her husband. She tells everyone I'm a very good doctor. No, I'm afraid they might find something in my desk."

"You hide a small booklet in a drawer, with the names and addresses of all your lovers?"

"I'm not that stupid, but it's impossible to think of all the pitfalls. I shouldn't have treated you when you had that flu in October. I created a file to your name. They'll go through my file folders and investigate all the suspects."

"Why would I be a suspect?"

"A Pole born in Galicia, like me, married to a Jew detained in Drancy. They could suppose we're more than doctor and patient."

Lonek spends the night in my room. In the morning of December 3rd, he calls his Hôpital Cochin nurse on the phone.

"Hello, this is Greif. The police came to my place. I must hide. I'm sorry I can't go on with my work…"

"They've already been here and searched everywhere. They say that you're a terrorist, that your apartment was full of arms. We're all quite proud of you!"

"Hmm, I didn't do much. Thanks anyway…"

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[1] The French *concierge* is like an American doorman, except she is usually a woman.

"One of your patients called. I wrote her name somewhere. Wait a second… Marie-Louise Bossu. She's expecting the results of some X-ray analysis."

"Yes, I've got the results. Give me her phone number. I'll call her."

He tells me this patient has tuberculosis, but doesn't know it yet. They can still save her by performing a procedure called a "pneumothorax." He must talk to her as soon as possible. He calls her and sees her in a café a few hours later.

"For certain reasons," he says, "I can't take care of you anymore, but I'll send you to a very competent colleague. If you hurry, the lesions in your left lung can still be healed."

"Why did you leave the hospital, docteur? Are you in trouble?"

"Well, sort of."

"If you need to hide somewhere, I have a small country house in Enghien, north of Paris…"

"I appreciate your offer, but I must talk to my liaison agent before I can give you an answer."

I am the "liaison agent." He saved this woman's life, she helps him in return. This makes sense.

"At least I won't worry too much if you're staying in a comfortable country house. Better than in a freezing cave with bomb-making résistants. Is she pretty?"

"Madame Bossu? I don't know. I didn't notice. Not very. What I can say is she's not hunch-backed[1]!".

He says she lives near his apartment in Paris, like most of his patients. He doesn't know whether she ever goes to her country house. He forgets to tell me he has known her only for a week.

On the next day, December 4th, he goes to Enghien.

"I'll write as soon as I get there. In the meantime, I need you to do something for me…"

I must go rue Mouffetard and look for his maid. She goes there every day to buy vegetables. I know her schedule, I know her, so I find her easily. I ask her to take down several valuable paintings that belong to Docteur Greif and to carry them to the apartment of madame Bossu on rue Poliveau.

"Don't do it when the police is there, of course. The most important is the woman's head in the waiting-room, and then the small landscape with trees in the hall…"

"Well, at least they won't end in the Germans' paws."

"I don't know about that. Docteur Greif wants to sells them. As he's hiding, he doesn't earn any money and can't get food coupons. He needs cash to buy food in the black market…"

I spend the morning of December 7th in the Sorbonne. I am now a second year BA student. We take a close look at medieval German poets. The teachers avoid modern literature, lest they should explain why the Nazis banned all the good writers.

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[1] This is what *Bossu* means.

Tunia is supposed to come and meet Jacques today. If I could reach her on the phone, I would cancel the appointment, since Jacques is hiding in Enghien. I guess he's not in touch with the Résistance anymore. When I come back from the Sorbonne to the hotel, I see a strange scene: madame Trial is pushing Tunia outside, as if she wanted to drive her away.

"You can't stay here, my child… Go now! They'll be back. You have false papers, it's too dangerous…"

She sees me. She seems to be out of her mind.

"You too, mademoiselle Zien, leave immediately! The police came for you. They said they'd come again."

"Leave? On the contrary: I'll wait for them. I didn't do anything wrong. I am Aryan. I'm not afraid."

I feel quite clear-minded. I know precisely what I must do: "If you go, Malvina, madame Trial will be in trouble. They're stupid and cruel enough to arrest her instead of you. Besides, they'll tell Bernard his Aryan wife went away and deport him to the East."

Tunia gazes at me in fascination. She'll tell me later that she saw flames dancing in my eyes, as if I rejoiced at the prospect of fighting the Special Brigade. She's scared they'll catch her with her false papers, so she leaves right away. A few minutes later, madame Trial says I'm wanted on the phone. I hope Lonek is calling from Enghien to tell me he's safe and sound.

"Hello, Malvina? This is Tunia."

"Tunia? But where are you?"

"Just across the street, in the Menhir. I can't desert you like this. Listen, Malvina, you can't stay and wait for them. Your life is at stake!"

"Other lives are at stake. Me, I run precisely zero risk. You'll see, Tunia, things will turn out all right."

Night and fog

I put my clothes away. I iron a shirt that was drying and I fold it carefully. I comfort madame Trial.

"Don't worry, I'll be back tomorrow. This is just a routine check-up. I guess they find it strange that I'm married to a Jew. I doubt they could detect a link between Docteur Greif and me, but he must not try to contact me. A certain madame Bossu hides him in a country house. It would be a good thing if you could call this woman. I'll give you her number. She should tell him I've been arrested. I'm his patient, nothing more. This is very important."

The Special Brigade comes again at 8 PM. Three heavy-set mustachioed men. Their breath spreads echoes of an afternoon spent in cafés comparing various wines and spirits. They search my room as if I had hidden diamonds all over the place. I think of the time I lost putting things away. They find nothing. They take me to the police headquarters. What could they hold against me? I'm sure they won't keep me for a very long time, so I just take some toiletries and a book: *Jean-Christophe*, by Romain Rolland.

At the headquarters, they bring me into a room where they put handcuffs on one of my wrists and tie me to a policeman. Four men, as well as a gray-haired woman, are already tied to policemen in this manner. Not long afterwards, they call me for a first examination. Three policemen ask questions in turn:

"Your last name?"

"First name?"

"Birthdate?"

"Nationality?"

"How long in France?"

"Jewish?"

"Communist?"

"Do you know Docteur Greif?"

"The terrorist!"

"Your last name?"

"First name?"

They speak fast, rattle short questions endlessly, as if they hoped to stun me. I try to answer slowly, to break their rhythm, but they raise their voice and accelerate. I feel I'm beginning to answer like an automat. Beware of blunders, Malvina! At the same time, these automatic answers free my mind, so that I can think. They probably found my name and address on Lonek's desk or in a file folder. It seems to me they're pretty sure we were lovers, but need a confirmation. Maybe someone told them. They'd like to find the address of his hideout. They

don't know anything, otherwise they wouldn't need to question me. I stick to a few simple answers:

"I visit Docteur Greif when I'm sick, that's all. I'm married. My husband is a prisoner in Drancy. If this doctor was a terrorist, he wouldn't put me in his confidence, would he?"

The French people I've met so far, especially the policemen and other officials, have always been kind and polite: the custom officers who wished me a happy New Year in the train, the policeman who walked me to boulevard Magenta, monsieur Mahé in the Panthéon police station, the gendarme Salmon in Pithiviers… I'm sad to discover that French policemen can be as brutal and scornful as their Polish and German colleagues.

They bring me back to the first room after midnight. The four men tied near me have swollen faces. I'm exhausted, but can't sleep. Sitting on a bench, tied to a policeman with handcuffs, how could I sleep? My brain's gears are rotating too fast, anyway. Questions dance like spinning-tops in my head. I try to imagine what will happen tomorrow… "Will they beat you? Torture you? Deport you? Do they beat women? Where do people go when they deport them? You should have followed Wanda to Montpellier. Now she's gone to Grenoble. You've never been in Grenoble. This is near the Alps. I guess you can hide in the mountains to escape the police. Does Wanda have good shoes? They make shoes with wooden soles. If they keep you tomorrow, you'll miss the distribution of food coupons. You should have told Tunia to go and get your coupons. Or Zaza. A Bécassine is a little Bécasse[1], a bird. Also the Britton maid in the comics. Why do the men always come from Corsica? They play cards. They say *Belote, rebelote et dix de der*.[2] They say *Zaza, c'est une gagneuse*.[3] Isabelle? Why not Mirza? No, that's a name for a dog. He had this small dog, whom he called Béton. Shaved his beard to become a terrorist. His patient, nothing more… His patient, nothing more."

I spend five days in the Special Brigade's offices in the police headquarters. They question me twice a day. The policemen ask the same questions again and again. They expect my weariness will erode my willpower. A waiter comes every day to sell sandwiches. On the first day, I am so thirsty that I can't swallow anything.

When I want to go to the toilet, my guardian angel comes with me and stays in front of the door. I would like to wash and change my clothes. I feel filthier and filthier.

Black patches hidden by caked blood are spreading on my neighbors' faces. I had never imagined human beings could change that much. The gray-haired woman says many foreign résistants were caught in a trap. I think about the apartment at 68, boulevard Saint-Marcel, but I say nothing. She tells me about her husband:

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[1] Woodcock. Also: a naïve girl.

[2] *Belote*, where these words are used, is played by four people with 32 cards.

[3] Zaza is a good wage-earner. *Gagneuse* is a slang word, used only for prostitutes.

"He is Spanish. Me, I'm French, but I lived in Spain. I am a secretary in the Chilean embassy. He fought all his life. He fought for freedom, against tyranny, against the bastards. They torture him, but he won't say a word. Not a word!"

A shining pearl appears in the corner of her eye. She doesn't know me, but she needs to talk to someone.

"He isn't young anymore, you know… He isn't strong enough to hold. You need to be young. His heart will fail. He'll die, but he won't talk."

She sits quite straight. I decide to take her as a model. "You'll be as brave as this woman, Jacqueline. Although her husband fought all his life, he won't see V-day. You won't betray Jacques. His patient, nothing more…"

In the morning of the sixth day, they question me again. The policemen shoot their questions like machine-gun bullets. I answer that Docteur Greif is my doctor, nothing more. I have a feeling that they're becoming less harsh, that they're beginning to believe me. I hope they'll let me go now. When I enter their office for the second questioning of the day, in the afternoon, they welcome me with sneers:

"So you were trying to play a prank on us, you slut!"

"Look: your lover the terrorist sends you a love letter!"

They show me the letter, addressed to Hôtel Trial. What happened? Why didn't madame Bossu tell Lonek he wasn't supposed to write?

"You'll read it to us…"

"Hmm… I can hardly decipher it… You know what they say about doctors' handwriting. Wait… *My Yearling*… Why does he call me his yearling?"

"Stop playing stupid. It's *My Darling*, of course."

I'm trying to gain some time and think. Lonek writes that everything is fine, that he sees a graveyard from his window (at least he doesn't say it's Enghien's cemetery), that he loves me. How foolish! He should have disguised his handwriting and signed "your aunt Agatha." He studied piano and medicine, but he never took any courses in underground fighting… All these poor résistants who used the bathroom on boulevard Saint-Marcel behaved like amateurs. To lose your life for a hot bath!

I read the letter as slowly as possible, then I pretend to be amazed.

"I don't get it. My doctor never told me he loved me. I hardly know him. I have no idea where he is hiding."

"So you're a tough one, eh? We'll send you to the Gestapo. You try your fairy tales on them!"

"Thank you. I'd rather be ill-treated by Germans than by Frenchmen."

Soon afterwards, they transfer me to the big jail at Fresnes, south of Paris, which the Germans have taken over. German soldiers open the doors of the police-van and order me to step down. German female guards wait for me in a gray hall. They take my handbag, my watch, the combs that hold my hair, the book I hoped to read—what a simpleton I was! I'm

lucky: they let me keep my faithful fur-lined polish coat. They throw me into a very cold cell. Groping in the dark, I find a bench. I sigh with relief as I lie down for the first time in six days and nights.

Once more, ideas swirl in my head. "What next? Gestapo? Po is *Polizei*, Sta is *Staat*, Ge is *Geheim*, secret. The Secret State Police. They've secreted you away. You're living your last few days, maybe. Not such a great life. Picked up wild strawberries. Passed the high school exam on your own. The tumor in a jar, like cabbage. She willed herself to live until morning, so she could say goodbye to you. At least she hasn't seen this awful war. Even with your five baptism certificates, the Germans caught you in the end. If necessary, you'd be able to recite the Lord's Prayer in Polish. Whereas men, with their missing sliver of skin… *I had an infection when I was a kid, so they operated on me*. The exhibition about the Jews. This was quite funny, I'm sure, but you didn't dare go and see it. The most Jewish-looking man in France is their prime minister, Laval, with his big nose and heavy eyelids. I wonder what it looks like, their thing, when they are not circumcised. Foreskin. You would have married, become a mother. The doctor's wife. *Let me introduce you to my wife, Jacqueline*. He lived next door to a school. This would be have been convenient for your children. You would have taken them to Jardin des Plantes. Like Simon. They went back to Switzerland, they run no risk there. You didn't even try to go with them. Take the train at Gare de l'Est. No, Gare de Lyon. It depends: Basel or Geneva. Before anything else, sabotage rail tracks. No trains, no deportation. You cheated on poor Bernard with Lonek and now he's in danger because of you. Working as a male nurse in the Drancy camp. He's practicing medicine before learning the theory. If the war lasts two more years, he'll be twenty-seven. A little too old to begin medical studies. What about you? If you survive this… Will you go back to the Sorbonne? Capoulade… A large cream with croissants."

What will happen to me? I just can't fall asleep. I hear a cart in the corridor. A bleak dawn light falls from a small window. "Your first day in jail, Malvina." A spy-hole opens in the cell door. Someone hands me a tin cup full of a black liquid. It smells so foul that I throw it into the toilet bowl.

They move me to another cell. Two boards folded to the wall can become a bed and a table. What else? A chair and, in a corner above the toilet bowl, a tap. I feel very weak and wobbly. "Ground to powder," as the French say. I unfold the bed plank and lie down. The door's spy-hole opens at once and a high voice screams: *Verboten!* I pretend not to understand, but another voice lays down the rule in French a few minutes later:

"Opening the bed in daytime is forbidden."

Even with my fur-lined coat, I am so cold I can't stop shivering. "You must eat and sleep, otherwise you'll perish." I decide I'll pretend not to know German. "Maybe they'll say important things during a questioning, not expecting you to understand." More stuff I've seen in the movies. "Yes, but you'll be in trouble if they discover you're studying their language in

the Sorbonne… Bah, there's no risk, Jacqueline. Their famous orderliness isn't so perfect that they'd compare the files of arrested people and Sorbonne students."

I hear quite a din behind my door. Some prisoners are on duty and must clean the corridors. Voices call discreetly:

"Hey, two hundred and eight! Hey, the new one!"

I suppose this means me. I come near the door and answer. They want to know whether the Russians still hold Stalingrad.

"Yes, Stalingrad is still resisting. The Germans haven't captured Moscow or Leningrad either. They can't make it through a second winter."

"Thanks for the good news, two hundred and eight! I'm your neighbor. You'll find a piece of paper and a pencil in your bread tomorrow."

This conversation cheers me up. "You'll be okay, Malvina. You're not alone." But I don't feel cheerful enough to eat the day's only meals: a piece of black bread and a brown soup. At 7 PM, a guard says I may unfold the bed. Once again, although I feel terribly tired, I can't sleep.

On the next day, I force myself to drink the black liquid, as there is nothing else for breakfast. I spend at least one hour doing physical exercises to get warmer. Then, to help time pass faster, I scrub the floor with my spoon as if it was a pad of iron shavings. When I'm quite warm, I wash myself entirely with ice-cold water. A 10 AM we receive the bread, at noon the soup. If I hadn't been warned that the bread would contain a piece of paper and a pencil, I would have swallowed them both, for they're real tiny. I remember seeing such a pencil in the pocket diary belonging to madame Stern, little Simon's mother. The paper is as fine as cigarette paper and all rolled up. My neighbor writes that her name is Anise, that she's been here five months, that she's allowed parcels and books. Me, I can receive nothing, because nobody knows my address. I am *Nacht und Nebel*[1], which means I vanished without any trace. "You disappeared like Leos Geist's sister, Jacqueline. Your friends think you're dead already. The Germans will tell Bernard he's not married to an Aryan anymore and deport him."

At the bottom of the paper, Anise wrote the Morse alphabet. I can communicate with her by banging near the tap with my spoon. At first, I need an hour to exchange three sentences. I find it difficult to distinguish short strokes from long ones. At least, time flies. Anise explains she was arrested with her father, Docteur Girard:

"We… carried… transmitter… My… father… doctor… avenue… Delessert… 16th… arrondissement… He… prisoner… on… men's… side… My… sister… my… three… brothers… also… active… in… Résistance."

After a week, I know the alphabet by heart and I don't need the piece of paper anymore. I call the black liquid coffee and I love the soup. I find the bread so tasty that I can't help

[1] Night and fog.

devouring it as soon as I receive it. I decide to cut it into three parts: “One now, another one this afternoon, the third one before going to bed.” Alas, at noon I’ve gobbled them all, so that I am awfully hungry every night. During the six months I’ve spent in this cell, I’ve never been able to keep a piece of bread until the evening.

I think about food all day. “Do you remember your grandmother’s potato cakes? You grate the raw potatoes and add a little nutmeg. We ate them with the good sour cream from our Carpathian mountains. When you worked in the Puycelsi summer camp, you found a recipe for braised beef with carrots in your cooking book. The longer it cooks, the better it gets, but you must stay near the pan lest it burn. Lonek invited you for dinner in a Chinese restaurant. You couldn’t get the knack of holding the chopsticks. They cut all their food into small pieces. They mix up sweet and sour. Wanda refused to eat oysters. Their look disgusted her. The French also eat snails and frog legs. If you ever get out of here, you’ll be able to try. And also countryside pâté, pie pâté, pâté de foie gras, rillettes, black blood sausage, white blood sausage, turkey and guinea-fowl, pot au feu, vol au vent, bœuf mironton, petit salé aux lentilles, tournedos Rossini, sauce gribiche. For dessert, a peach Melba, a chocolate éclair, a religieuse, a tarte Tatin, a financier, a Belle Hélène pear, a mille-feuilles. There are not really a thousand leaves. Maybe six or seven…”

A dozen days after my arrival, they offer us a Christmas package containing food sent by the Quakers: sugar, chocolate, cheese, a dry sausage and biscuits—and also, to feed our spirit, a little Gospel of Luke sent by the “War prisoners’ Chaplain,” which I know by heart before the end of the week. I decide to apply the utmost severity to myself: “Jacqueline, these goodies should last you at least three months. I order it! Please promise…” I am so far from being able to subdue my hunger that I don’t even have a crumb of chocolate left to celebrate the New Year.

When I go to bed on the evening of December 31st, 1942, I think that I’m not sure whether I’ll see the end of year 1943. “Five years ago, on December 31st, 1937, you were crossing Germany and gazing at the housewives in their kitchens. On December 31st, 1938, you saw Lonek for the first time in a gymnasium on rue Mouffetard. You thought his beard and his dog looked dirty. On December 31st, 1940, you met him again. He gave a New Year’s Eve party in his apartment on boulevard Saint-Marcel. A German soldier came and complained of the noise, but Lonek sent him balling. On that night, you invited Bernard Kohn into your room in Hôtel Tournefort. On December 31st, 1940, you drank champagne at the Menhir bar with Tunia Kassar, the Bécassines and their protectors.”

1943. The Lorelei

On January 1st, a guard opens the door.

"Take a towel. Shower!"

I see Anise for the first time: a tall blonde with strong peasant-like features. Speaking is forbidden: *Sprechen verboten !* The guards push us and bark: "*Schnell ! Schnell*![1]"

I enter the shower booth. I take off my coat and begin to remove my jacket. Just then, a stream of hot water drops from the ceiling without any warning. My clothes are all wet. I am furious. I feel humiliated. I spend the next three days naked under my fur-lined coat—which escaped the downpour, thank God—while my underwear, my shirt, my jacket and my skirt dry slowly at the four corners of my cell.

I dig a tunnel of sorts around the tap with my spoon, so that I can talk with Anise without the handicap of the Morse code.

"My jacket is nearly dry, but it would look better if I could iron it."

"I'm sorry. I forgot to tell you: the first day of every month, you must be naked under your coat to go to the shower…"

Towards the end of January, two SS policemen take me to the Gestapo headquarters in Paris. Through the car's windows, I see Parisians who are walking about, buying bread, talking, laughing. They're free to browse in the book stalls along the Seine and sit at outdoor cafés.

A Gestapo officer and an interpreter question me. The officer doesn't understand why an Aryan woman would want to marry a Jew. I feel my five baptism certificates are protecting me, keeping me away from Drancy (is Bernard still there?) and other places farther east. When the officer puts an end to the session, I ask a question myself.

"Do you know what became of that jerk, the doctor who put me in such a mess? Did you arrest him?"

"The doctor of the terrorists? No, he's still hiding somewhere."

I need all my willpower to keep myself from smiling.

While I'm waiting for the chauffeur who'll drive me back to Fresnes, an SS orders me to follow him. He takes me to a room where I see a man tied to the back of a chair. His face is terribly swollen, as black as a negro's. His noisy breathing sounds like a death-rattle. The SS pushes me towards him. I hear indistinct mutters. It seems to me he is speaking Polish. I talk into his ear:

"I'm Polish…"

He half-opens an eye. Straining my ear, I make out a few words:

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[1] Quick! Quick!

"I have nothing to say."

I translate his answer into French. The SS shrugs and sighs, as if to say: "I've done my best, but you can't get anything out of such a hard-headed fellow. I won't waste my time getting angry and hitting him even more." He utters but one word:

"Kaput!"

I guess the poor man will die soon. I ask for permission to wet a handkerchief and wash his face.

"Do what you want!" the SS says.

The coolness of the wet cotton wakes up the dying man. He thanks me and mumbles a few more words:

"I told them nothing… Remember me… My name is Adam Rawicz."

I understand that "I told them nothing" means "not even my name." I find this quite moving: "He kept his name from them, but he tells you before dying, because he trusts you." I decide I'll honor this brave man someday—if I escape his fate myself.

By and by, the days grow longer and my cell gets warmer. We hear a rumor that the Germans are suffering setbacks on the eastern front. These news upset the two guards of the women's corridor. Weichenwider, whom we nickname *La Vache*[1], becomes nastier, as if we were to blame for Germany's defeats. Schmidt, whose home in Hamburg was destroyed by American bombs and whose husband is fighting in Russia, becomes sadder.

La Vache is very skillful. She opens the spy-hole noiselessly every now and then, so eventually she surprises me in the middle of a conversation with Anise through our tunnel. To punish me, they deprive me of soup during a week. They move Anise to another cell. Now I'm all alone. Since my childhood as a single child, I've always been alone: in my parents' house, with my deaf grandmother and my bear Stanislas; rue du Sommerard, in a hotel room barely larger than my cell; by a hot stove in the kitchen of a summer camp; in my room in Hôtel Trial, making leather belts…

Schmidt pities me. She brings me food and tries to make conversation in clumsy French. She gives me wool and knitting needles, which is a great help to while the days away.

I don't know why, I always feel very tired in the evening. I go to bed early, I sleep like a log at first, then I wake up in the middle of the night to interrupt the nightmares that torment me. I run towards the hospital where my mother is dying, but I don't recognize the streets of L'vov and I get lost. No wonder: I'm looking for the hospital in the neighborhood of Gare du Nord… I go down to the basement of the café where I lost my bag. Monsieur Mahé! What are you doing in the ladies' room? "You've lost your papers again!" he shouts. "Go away at once!" I run away, but I take the wrong train. The passengers in my compartment rejoice at the prospect of reaching Berlin and seeing Hitler in a few hours. I want to get up and change

[1] The cow. In slang, the word also means a vicious and brutal person.

trains, but I seem to be stuck to my seat. It's not even a train, actually, more of a taxi. I strain my muscles and my will… Oh yes, at last, the door opens. I run on the boulevard, trying to avoid the automobiles and trucks that rush around me… I hear a terrible roar. I do not need to turn around to know that Germans tanks are catching up with me. Tanks, tanks… *Blitzkrieg*!

I wake up, sweat running all over my body, heart beating like a crazy clock. Phew! "Everything is just fine, Jacqueline. You're in jail…" My cell won't start rolling in the wrong direction!

I take to knitting in the dark to wait for dawn. My fingers do not need any light to feel the needles and guide the strands of wool. I remember Babudia, who taught me how to knit. She thought the Eternal sends us calamities to punish us. "You married, then you cheated on your husband, so you deserved to go to jail…" I like to listen to the silent night. I'm not scared of the dark anymore, but I haven't forgotten the fears of my childhood. "You just wait quietly, Jacqueline. Day is stronger than night. It always prevails. The sun will dispel night and fog. The war will end, peace will come back."

I think about Jacques. "Can a pianist play in the dark? You too, Jacqueline, you're a virtuoso, but nobody ever applauds a woman who knits! The woman or the man who invented the moss-stitch isn't as famous as Beethoven… Someone did invent all this, though. The two needles, the ball of wool that turns into a row of stitches by and by. During the French Revolution, women came to watch the beheadings on Place de la Concorde and knitted under the guillotine… What is he doing? He wakes up in his house in Enghien, above a graveyard. He's locked up, like you. He must find it very boring… He should knit! You think about him every day, but does he think about you every day? Perhaps he thinks you're dead. He's forgotten you already…"

I try to imagine Wanda in Grenoble, Tunia in Île Saint-Louis, Hélène in Normandy. Tender new leaves must be growing on trees everywhere. While the Jardin des Plantes gardeners gather flowers in the glasshouses and plant them in the flower-beds, happy sparrows chirp to greet the new season. Having put away their heavy winter coats, Parisian women open their cupboards and chose light dresses that will soon flutter in the spring breeze. "What a pity, Malvina! You only own your two old Polish suits. You've grown thinner in jail. You'll need to adjust the skirts and maybe also the jackets. You should ask the seamstress on boulevard Edgar Quinet to do it. Madame Contini. Against a belt, as usual. You know what? If your offered her one of your knitted pullovers, she might give you a light dress that one of her customers dislikes. With a flower pattern, for summer. The first pullover for Schmidt, the second for Madame Contini."

I remember the apartment of the seamstress. She can see the Montparnasse cemetery across the boulevard. I asked her whether it bothered her.

"On the contrary, it puts me in a jolly mood. I tell myself I'd rather be here than on the other side. When I break my pipe[1], I'll just have to cross the street…"

I found this strange. A woman who smokes a pipe? Do they repair pipes in French cemeteries? Her apartment didn't smell of tobacco, like Jacques's. I looked for a pipe-holder, similar to a tree covered with big varnished fruit. Noticing my confusion, she added:

"When I cash in, when I cop out, when I croak, when I bite the dust, when I kick the bucket, when I turn up my toes to the daisies!"

"Oh, I see… In Polish, we say: when I become maggot-candy."

The Montparnasse cemetery, the Enghien cemetery… "He also thinks he'd rather be there than on the other side. In fact, living above a graveyard is a good idea. Turns you into a philosopher."

Motionless in my cell, I travel in imagination. I loaf in Montpellier, I stroll along the Tarn river in Puycelsi, I walk down the Boul'Mich. Sometimes, I go back to L'vov and look for wild strawberries in the Carpathian mountains. I take the train from Cracow to Vienna, then from Ljubljana to Venice. I glide under the Bridge of Sighs in a gondola, I admire the goldsmiths' stalls on the Ponte Vecchio, I pick up ceramic shards in the Roman Forum, I buy olive-oil-flavored bread in a Genoa bakery. Then one day, I don't know why, I widen my perspective and sail with Lusia to Bolivia. "You're a fool, Jacqueline. Why didn't you think about that earlier?" I feel I've pushed the walls of my cell farther away—at no great cost. We've exchanged few letters, because Lusia always took a long time answering. She lives in a city called La Paz, which probably means Peace. An amazing town, hard to imagine: "If you lived there, you couldn't breathe… Just think: 11,000 feet high! You might as well live on top of the Mont Blanc. Lusia didn't sleep at all during several months. Her husband, the doctor, is sicker than his patients! She says the Indian women wear a striped blanket with a hole for the head—and a bowler hat. Is that possible? Lusia likes clothes. Do you remember she bought a Tyrolian pullover in Vienna and went window-shopping in Rome?"

While in Vienna, I pay a visit to porter number 67. "That was a close shave, Jacqueline. You stepped out of the Switzerland-bound train at the last minute." I tend to consider it "the wrong train," the more so as it plays an unpleasant part in my nightmares. But then one day, just for the pleasure of exploring a new track, I decide to call it "the good train" and see what happens. "Luck derails your fate… You're so tired that you fall asleep and don't get off the train. A passenger invites you to walk in the Swiss mountains with him. You accept, since you don't really want to go to L'vov. You fall in love with him and marry. Instead of withering in this jail, you live in Swiss comfort and eat as much chocolate as you want!" I perform this trip inside my mind every day, even several times a day. After a very short period, I discover that the Swiss policemen do not let me cross the border: "You lack a visa, so they turn you back. The only consequence of your mistake is that you reach L'vov two or

[1] A French expression meaning "When I die."

three days late." On the next round, I stop in Vienna without even trying to catch the L'vov train. "Your best chance is to accept porter 67's invitation to dinner. Don't tell him you're Jewish. He falls in love with you and proposes. You answer yes to save your life. Hidden in the very heart of the hellish empire, you do not risk anything! After the war, of course, you divorce." His thick glasses gave him a scholarly look, but he wasn't very clever if he believed that L'vov was in Switzerland…

Maybe he died long ago, this poor porter 67. Somewhere in Russia, a vague bump on the snow marks the location of his frozen body. His mother pulls his cap—embroidered with the number 67—out of a paper bag and buries her tear-flooded face into it… "Stop, Jacqueline, this is beginning to resemble the Polish tearjerkers you used to see in the L'vov movie-theaters!"

I never know where my trip is going to take me. One day, in Rome, I'm held up by the expression "window-shopping."[1] As in the case of Bolivia, I am amazed that I've neglected it so far. "The French really make up picturesque expressions! I couldn't translate it into Polish, that's for sure." I look for other expressions and I find *soupe-au-lait*.[2] My father was *soupe-au-lait*. His anger overflowed suddenly, without warning, like boiling milk. Our PCN physics teacher was an old Billy-goat who put everybody to sleep with meaningless formulas. It would have been better if he had explained why boiling water doesn't overflow, but boiling milk does. In Puycelsi, they put glass rings at the bottom of milk pans. They called them "anti-milk-rise." I thought it was magical.

"It keeps the milk from rising?"

"No, but when the milk begins to boil, the glass ring shakes at the bottom of the pan. You hear the noise, so you come running and turn the gas down."

Jacques told me the sad story of a cousin of his, who studied medicine in Rouen. She wanted to cook fruit preserves on a gas stove in her hotel room. She fell asleep. The boiling fruit sauce overflowed and put the fire off, then the gas asphyxiated her. She never woke up.

Drinking my coffee in the morning, I think about the expression "coffee-pusher." The French think that coffee is hard to digest, so they drink a small glass of brandy to help it go down. "What about the sugar cube they dunk into brandy or coffee… Why do they call it a duck? Does it look like a duck floating on water? No… More like a seagull who dives into the sea and comes out again… The cookbook you brought to Puycelsi contained a recipe for duck with oranges. Seagull with oranges. Chekov wrote a play called *The Seagull*. Jacqueline, maybe you'll die but you've hardly ever gone to the theater. If you get out of here, promise me you'll go to the Comédie Française, the Châtelet, the Sarah-Bernhardt theater… You know, I bet they changed the name of this theater, because she was Jewish." I try to go to place du Châtelet in thought and look whether they changed the name of the Sarah-Bernhardt theater. This is a very difficult endeavor, which never comes close to succeeding but helps me

[1] The actual French expression is "window-licking."

[2] Milk-soup. The meaning is given in the next sentence.

pass an hour pleasantly. I turn around the Egyptian fountain, I walk up boulevard de Sébastopol, I explore the Belleville and Ménilmontant neighborhoods… I always end up ordering a big cream and croissants at Capoulade.

I find a beautiful French expression to describe my walk: "Mon esprit vagabonde…"[1]

One day, I burst out laughing when I think of the Indian women with their blankets and bowler hats. La Vache opens the door and asks me whether I really find life that funny.

(Lusia wrote to me after the war. While I imagined her sleepless and asthmatic in La Paz, she had moved with her husband to Buenos Aires long ago. Jews from Eastern Europe felt like sticking together in these cruel times, so they regrouped in the capital of Argentina. They opened beer-halls, pastry-shops, bookstores, movie theaters and concert halls similar to those in Vienna, Prag and Warsaw. This European setting became even more realistic after the war, when the fleeing Nazis, attracted by the beer-halls, joined the Jews. Lusia told me that you could find anti-Semitic newspapers next to Yiddish ones in kiosks and bookstores.)

I'm afraid I'll turn mute if I don't talk. I set myself a task: to find every line of the *Lorelei*. The first Nazi crimes were their lies. They decreed that Heine hadn't written the Lorelei, then they started burning books. I also lie, since I pretend to be catholic. "They forced you to lie, Jacqueline." I recite the poem in a very low voice, as I don't want La Vache to discover I know German.

Ich weiss nicht was soll es bedeuten
Daß ich so traurig bin;
Ein Märchen aus alten Zeiten
Das kommt mir nicht aus dem Sinn.

Die Luft is kühl und es dunkelt,
Und ruhig fließt der Rein;
Der Gipfel des Berges funkelt
Im Abendsonnenschein.

Die schönste Jungfrau sitzet
Dort oben wunderbar,
Ihr goldnes Geschmeide blitzet,
Sie kämmt ihr goldenes Haar.

Sie kämmt es mit goldenem Kamme,
Und singt ein Lied dabei;

[1] My mind wanders.

Das hat eine wundersame,
Gewaltige Melodei.

Den Schiffer im kleinem Schiffe
Ergreift es mit wildem Weh;
Er schaut nicht die Felsenriffe,
Er schaut nur hinauf in die Höh'.

Ich glaube, die Wellen verschlingen
Am Ende Schiffer und Kahn;
Und das hat mit ihrem Singen
Die Lorelei getan.

"You'll translate it into French. A good exercise. Do you remember translating Pindar from the Greek? With a first dictionary for Greek and French, a second one for French and Polish." I pat myself on the back for this excellent idea: this job keeps me busy for a whole week!

Je ne sais ce que signifie	I don't know what it means
Mon étrange mélancolie;	That I'm so sad;
Une histoire des temps anciens	A tale of olden times
Dans mon esprit vient et revient.	Won't leave my mind.
Le soir tombe, la fraîcheur gagne,	The air is cool and it gets dark,
Le Rhin coule tranquillement;	And the Rhine flows quietly;
La lueur du soleil couchant	The top of the mountain sparkles
Rougit le sommet des montagnes.	In the setting sun's light.
La jeune fille la plus belle	The most beautiful maid is sitting
Se tient là-haut, tout près du bord;	Up there, a wonderful sight;
Sa parure d'or étincelle,	Her golden jewels shine,
Elle coiffe ses cheveux d'or.	She combs her golden hair.
Elle coiffe ses longs cheveux	She combs it with a golden comb,
Avec un peigne merveilleux ;	And sings a song along,
Or en même temps elle chante	That has a fantastic
Une mélodie envoûtante.	Powerful melody.
Le batelier dans son esquif	It grabs the boatman in his little boat
Saisi d'une douleur sauvage,	He feels a wild pain,

Ne voit plus falaise et récif,
Regarde là-haut le mirage.

La vague a, je crois, englouti
Le batelier dans sa nacelle ;
Voilà ce qu'elle a accompli,
Lorelei de sa voix cruelle.

Doesn't see the cliff,
Only looks up in the high.

I believe the waves swallowed
In the end boatman and skiff;
And that's what she did
The Lorelei with her song.[1]

[1] The English version is translated from the German. The French translation has classic French metrics and rhymes.

Reunion in Île Saint-Louis

Around the middle of June, 1943, they pull me out of my cell without any explanation. They order me to take my things. They give me back my handbag and *Jean-Christophe*. Two French police officers are waiting for me and drive me away in their automobile. I am so happy to see French policemen again that I laugh and joke like a madwoman. They drop me at the French police headquarters. Two other officers ask me for my papers and fill up a form.

"K, o… Wait, there a h… Before or after the o? Your residency card is all crumpled and torn."

"The Germans borrowed it for a while. They're not very tidy!"

"Oh, but no. Kohn is your married name. Your birth name is Zien. Strange name…"

They take me to *Camp des Tourelles*, in a suburb called Les Lilas. This is a former military barracks where they keep foreigners lacking proper papers and common law prisoners: pickpockets, prostitutes. Once more, policemen or guards inspect my papers—a task that bureaucracy is very fond of.

"Zien… Well, when we'll distribute mail in the alphabetic order, you'll be served last!"

They take me to barracks containing two long rooms separated by a corridor. I remember seeing such barracks through the barbed wire in Pithiviers. They give me a bed in one of the room. My twenty roommates gather around me and congratulate me.

"Escaping the Gestapo, wow! This doesn't happen every day. How long did you stay with them?"

"Six months."

"You don't say… Here, you'll see, it's something else altogether. They treat us nice. We can receive mail and parcels. If you're a good girl, they give you permission to go into town."

"Alone?"

"That would be too much. No, two policemen go with you."

A young woman asks me whether I'm Jacqueline. She's Polish, a member of the Résistance. Well-informed people told her about my transfer.

"The Germans haven't found Jacques," she says. "They invaded the Free Zone. They're retreating all over the Russian front."

She gives me a piece of cheese. She smiles when I eat also the crust. (After the war, I'll live near rue Mouffetard, where you can find the best cheese mongers in Paris, but I'll never buy such a delicious morsel of cheese.)

The thieves and prostitutes are friendly but noisy. A cacophony of screams, insults, quarrels, runs and fights, shakes the barracks from dawn till late at night. After six months of solitude, I find it hard to bear all this turmoil. My cell was pleasantly peaceful… I scrubbed

the floor, I chewed my bread for hours, I knitted, I went around the world in eighty thoughts. Life was simple.

One of the girls reminds me of Zaza la gagneuse. The Menhir gentlemen didn't say "a girl," but "a chick" or "a wench." They had nicknames: Blade, Bantamweight, the Corsican (which is silly, as most of them were Corsican). They didn't speak the same variety of French as my Greek teacher:

"Hey, Blade, are you onto a shot?"

"Meboy? No dice! Do you think I haven't had enough with two years in the can? I've pulled up my car."

"You did well. Better to let your moll bring in the dough!"[1]

Whereas I'm in jail, they went to the clink, to the slammer, to the big house.

I sleep little. Pola brings me a wonderful breakfast: coffee with cream and real croissants! At 10 o'clock, monsieur Humez, the camp's commander, calls me to his office. He is a former out-of-favor police commissioner, a good man. Like everybody else, he's amazed to see someone who emerges from the night and fog. He asks me many questions about my months in Fresnes. He offers me a job as his secretary. I'm glad to accept, as his office seems much quieter than my barracks. His second in command shows me how to use the typewriter. I type letters and reports.

I write to madame Trial and Tunia Kassar. I bet they're quite shocked when they receive news of a dead person. Madame Trial sends me a gigantic package that contains not only clothes, but also a dry sausage and biscuits.

I request a permission to go visit my husband in Drancy—if he hasn't been deported.

Thank God! He still works as a male nurse in the camp. Seeing me again moves him to tears. He thought I was dead, of course. We do not mention Lonek Greif at all, because I'm afraid he might blame me: "See, your affair with this doctor didn't end well…"

Tunia comes to Les Lilas. We kiss and weep for joy.

"Listen, Malvina, I am in contact with your Lonek. After you vanished, he lived with his patient."

"Madame Bossu?"

"Marie-Louise Bossu, yes. At first, he hid in Enghien, then he thought he could stay safely in her Paris apartment. They even came to visit me in Île Saint-Louis. Marie-Louise wore a fur coat. She's a beauty."

"Does he still live with her?"

"No, he went away. Her brother was friends with the Germans. Lonek fled one evening by climbing on the roof of the building."

"I can imagine that. He must have been delighted to run on the roofs like a character in the movies."

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[1] I have replaced some of the French slang by literal translations for local color.

"He told me the brother, who was having dinner with them, went out suddenly, saying *I'll be back*. Lonek had an intuition that the brother would come back with the Gestapo… Then he hid here and there. He even spent a week with us in Île Saint-Louis. Marie-Louise came and begged him to return to her. They had a fight. He wanted some valuable paintings he had left at her place. She became angry. You leave me without a word of warning or apology, she shouted, and now you want your paintings! She cried a lot."

"You know, the thought of our love helped me endure the loneliness in my cell. Meanwhile, he was consoling himself with this woman… After all he promised me! I'll try to forget this fellow."

I feel so stupid. How could I trust him? "He warned you, Jacqueline. He told you about all his women. When he sees a dab of red lipstick, he rushes like a bull. He swore he'd change. You were so naive to believe him…"

Hélène and Wanda send me parcels from Normandy and from Grenoble. They had given up on me and here I am—risen from the dead! This gives them some hope for their parents in Poland, who haven't written for a long time. I distribute food to all my roommates.

Tunia invites me to Île Saint-Louis. As monsieur Humez is quite satisfied with my work as a secretary, he lets me go there with two policemen. They drop me at Simone Réti's door, where Tunia is waiting for me.

"We'll pick you up in a couple hours."

I won't flee, because monsieur Humez, having solicited higher authorities on my behalf, hopes he can set me free quite soon. I climb the stairs with Tunia, enter the apartment, open the living-room's door… Just then, a man sitting in an armchair stands up and walks towards me. Jacques Greif ! I didn't expect this at all. Tunia considers we ought to make it up, even though Jacques has a fickle character. She leaves us together in the room.

"Jacqueline… Forgive me!"

He weeps like a child who did something wrong and got caught. He seems so wretchedly desperate that if I didn't control myself I would laugh. I find him pitiful, but I have taken a decision…

"It's all over between us. I don't want to see you ever."

"Listen to me, at least… When they arrested you, I felt a terrible distress. I believed you were dead. I've known many women whom I didn't love. But then, when at last I find one I love, the Germans take her from me! I thought life wasn't worth living anymore. I didn't care about anything. Marie-Louise took advantage of my disarray. She put me in this house in Enghien, then she came into my bedroom. I was trapped!"

"She raped you?"

"Let's say she tried to comfort me. Nobody can reproach a widower if he marries again. I did leave her, after all. Tunia must have told you!"

I'm far from convinced he's sincere, but I accept to see him again. He moved something deep inside me when he began to cry. My father cried, too, when he wanted to touch my

mother. I hardly understand what's happening to me. "You have a fine honest husband, Jacqueline, who loves you and you alone, who would become a good father… You trust him fully… Yes, but is he the love of your life? A good friend, rather… Ten minutes with him and you feel bored already! Whereas Jacques… You thought him a bourgeois, a serious and prosperous doctor, but he is a hoodlum! If he hadn't studied medicine, he could have made a living like the Menhir's Corsicans. When you see him, you heart beats faster. Bernard resembles a good dog, Jacques a wild horse. You'll never be able to tame him. He'll bring trouble. You'll live a beautiful adventure!"

I've spent months alone in my cell. His arms attract me like magnets. I remember a song the Bécassines used to hum: *I've got him under my skin… He's my man!*

If it's a boy, we'll call him Jean-Jacques

They free me on September 23rd, 1943, a little more than three months after my transfer to les Lilas. I'm so happy I could scream. I kiss monsieur Humez. Nothing beats nine months in jail if you really want to appreciate freedom! Madame Trial, the Corsicans and the Bécassines welcome me like a queen. The owner of the Menhir says he's got a surprise for me. He closes the shutters with great care. His wife enters slowly, carrying a huge plate on which a real mutton's leg is displayed like a trophy. She explains that she cooked it in a closed stew-pan, according to a special recipe, so that the smell wouldn't drift all over the neighborhood.

Lonek Greif (the name on his false papers is Émile Nougier, but I still call him Jacques) lives here and there like a gypsy. He can't take the risk to come and stay in Hôtel Trial, where the police may be watching over me. Madame Jeunesse, a woman I sold belts to, rents a small room to us in an old building on rue Saint-Amand, a ten-minutes' walk from Hôtel Trial going towards the Vanves suburb.

I resume being a leather worker and a cleaning lady right away. We need to eat and pay the rent, but Jacques doesn't earn any money. I receive food coupons for one person only. Once a week at most, I buy a little food in the black market. Otherwise, I cook oatmeal in water for breakfast, lunch and dinner. In order to regain my official status as a student, I begin my second year of German in the Sorbonne anew.

My dear Lonek, aka Émile aka Jacques, is too clumsy to make belts. He tries to prepare lunch a few times while I spend my morning in the Sorbonne, but he forgets the oatmeal on the stove. A strong smell of burnt food and a sheepish Jacques welcome me… He gets bored. He wants to go for a walk, or even go to the movies. I don't let him:

"For one thing, we're not rich. Then, you might escape a roundup on the boulevard by running into a side street, but if they control the entrance to the movie-theater and the emergency exit, you're done for!"

"If I'm to be caught, I'll be caught."

His pent-up energy makes him nervous and cranky. *Soupe-au-lait*, like my father! He doesn't sleep well, but still gets up at 6 AM.

"Why don't you stay under your blanket? You know the French expression: a fat morning[1]… I'll bring you breakfast in bed."

"I've never had a fat morning in all my life. I won't begin now."

On Fridays, he sighs and whines:

"I used to go to the swimming-pool every Friday evening with the externs and the nurses."

[1] Meaning: staying in bed late.

"You want to go to the pool? That's even worse than the movies. Just imagine the police coming to check up IDs… You'd have to flee in your swimming trunks! You'd look pretty."

In Grenoble, all my friends have become full-time members of the Résistance. One morning, as I'm picking up my mail at Hôtel Trial (which makes a convenient mailbox for my belts business), I meet a young woman who arrived from Grenoble the day before.

"Are you Malvina? She told me I'd find you here."

"Who told you?"

"Wanda Warner. She gave me this hotel's address. She's got a new name, actually. My name on my papers is Marguerite Mary, but in fact it is Monette Meyerbeer."

She is tiny and edgy. She might be somewhat younger than me, but she looks like a child. The only big part in her body is her mouth, which cuts across her face. She speaks very fast, mumbling a little, with no accent at all.

"Are you French?"

"No, Belgian. I mean, Polish. I came to Brussels when I was real small, with my parents. You know what? I've forgotten Polish completely. In '39, when the Germans invaded Belgium, we escaped to France. They sent us to camps in the South, then they deported my mother and my brother. They talk about colonies in the East, but my mother was dressed in her nightgown and her slippers when they took her away. Not the Germans, mind you! French gendarmes… The Jews were in the truck with the gendarmes, they sang the Marseillaise[1]! In Grenoble, with the Italians, the Jews were safe. But now, the Germans are there[2], it's awful. Wanda and I, we try to save Jewish children. The parents do not want to let them go, you bet, but we tell them it's a question of life and death. We hide the girls in a convent and the boys with peasants in the mountain."

"A good thing you do that. Really good."

"I have a friend, his name is René Berger, a Frenchman. We lived together, though we were not married, you understand. Last week, for November 11th, the bosses of the Résistance ordered the militants to demonstrate in front of the Great War monument in Grenoble. René went. The Gestapo must have been glad: the underground fighters were coming out in full light, all of a sudden! They arrested everybody. More than a thousand of them! Me, I was in the mountain with Wanda, checking that the peasants fed our kids properly. They say they took them to Compiègne. So then I came here. I'll try to go and see him."

"Compiègne? I've heard of that camp. You can't just visit it like the Louvre museum."

"I've got the address of a high-ranking fellow in the Gaullist network. I'll ask him whether he can find a fake German pass for me… Wanda told me you were a prisoner in a Gestapo jail."

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[1] The French national anthem.

[2] The Germans invaded the Italian zone in July, 1943.

"Nobody came to visit me with a fake pass."

"Everybody thought you were dead, except Wanda. She said you were stronger than the Germans."

"Are they all right? Do you know everybody? Henek Warner, the Müller, Leos Geist ?

"Leos? Don't you know? But he is dead!"

"Leos, dead? My God! When? What happened?"

"Last June. The Résistance sent him to set fire to boxcars in a biscuit factory."

"They set fire to biscuit boxcars?"

"Biscuits for the German army. There are a big actions and small actions. Perhaps it was a small action. Leos entered the factory. He met a night watchman, then the night watchman killed him."

"Didn't he carry a gun, for this small action?"

"He did, but I don't know whether he knew how to use it. Me, the men in the Résistance tried to show me how to shoot a rifle. I was so scared that I closed my eyes when I pulled the trigger!"

"Anyway, I can't imagine our Leos, who was so sweet, shooting a biscuit factory's night watchman in cold blood. I guess he wasn't German. An old man, maybe. What sad news!"

Monette Meyerbeer can't stay put. She visits her Gaullist man every day and eventually she gets her fake pass. She goes inside the Compiègne camp and sees her René.

"He has yellow teeth. What do you think? He left without his toothbrush! Ah, he was quite surprised when he saw me. There was a German interpreter in the room, we couldn't say much. René told them he demonstrated in front of the Great-War monument out of patriotism. There's no proof he was a member of the Résistance. They have nothing against him, in the end. I hope they'll set him free."

We celebrate Christmas in Île Saint-Louis. There are five of us: Tunia Kassar, Simone Réti, Monette Meyerbeer, Jacques and I. The dinner is frugal, but we drink some wine and listen to records of music. I tell them about my previous Christmas:

"The Quakers sent us a food parcel. I promised myself it would last three weeks, but I ate everything in three days! I had a French neighbor whose name was Anise. I learned the Morse code to talk with her. Then I dug a small tunnel between our cells and we could speak to each other."

Monette Meyerbeer gives us news about René:

"It seems they'll send him to Germany, even though he did nothing wrong. They need factory workers. According to the Gaullists, they pull prisoners out of French jails to enroll them as workers in Germany."

"They lose lots of people on the Russian front. They lack workers, now."

"Bernard Kohn, my husband, stayed in Drancy a full year. He was a male nurse. They transferred him to another camp… Still in France, happily, but I don't know where. They say they need the prisoners to build the Atlantic Wall or something."

While I was detained in Fresnes, Jacques rode a bike all the way to the Vendée coast. He wanted to strengthen his legs and swim in the Ocean.

"I've seen German workers all along the Atlantic coast. They build concrete fortifications called pill-boxes. This means they expect an American and English landing…"

We're sure this new year will bring the end of the war. I spare a thought for poor Leos Geist, who died for biscuits.

As Jacques can't use his doctor's pass anymore, we have to go back home well before midnight. We walk up our dear Boul'Mich all the way to boulevard de Montparnasse. The winter night is clear and cold. The stars sparkle above the dark city.

"Do you remember, five years ago, Viktor's party on rue Mouffetard? That's where we met for the first time. You with your horrible beard and nasty dog…"

"Flip? What are you talking about? He was a good dog."

"He clawed a ladder in my stocking."

"Do you hold a grudge after all this time?"

"If he wasn't dead, we could eat him!"

"You pretend to be a naughty girl, but I'm sure you couldn't eat a dog you knew, even if it clawed a ladder in your stocking."

"Well… I guess I wouldn't dare kill it, for a start."

"You know, last year, when I was still practicing medicine, patients asked me whether they could eat cat or rat meat."

"Did you tell them to do it?"

"No. I said rats often carry very dangerous germs and parasites, and cats likewise, since they eat rats."

When we come back to our tiny room under the building's roof, when I lie in bed with the love of my life, I feel I'm nearly happy. This Christmas party was wonderful—especially if I compare it to last year's gloomy night in my cell. I whisper:

"I want a child from you…"

"What do you mean, a child? You know that if they arrest me, they'll shoot me."

"Precisely!"

I feel he is quite moved. He tells me his last will:

"If it's a boy, you could call him Jacques, so there would be at least one Jacques in the family."

"I hope you won't be shot, my darling. In that case, I would have two Jacques. I suggest Jean-Jacques, rather."

"Ah yes, that's perfect. Jean-Jacques, fine… If it's a girl, what do you think of Isabelle?"

1944. The denunciation

I'm sure I'm pregnant.

"After three weeks? It's too soon to know," Jacques says.

"You're a doctor, but I'm a woman. We feel these things."

I decide to go visit my friend Hélène in Normandy, to drink good milk and eat real eggs for my future baby. I beg Jacques not to leave the room while I'm away, I ask Tunia Kassar and Monette Meyerbeer to watch over him, but I know he'll only listen to his own counsel.

I return from Normandy on Saturday, June 20th with fantastic treasures: a rabbit, sausages, cheese, butter, eggs. When I enter our room, my heart jumps in my breast. Not only is Jacques not there, but there's mail under the door, which means that he's been away for several days already. This time, I won't wait for the police. I pack up my things into my suitcase and I go to Hôtel Trial. Ever since I've arrived in France, six years ago, all my earthly possessions have fit inside one suitcase… Madame Trial kept it while I was in jail. She still keeps in a closet Bernard Kohn's suitcase, which I brought from Hôtel Tournefort.

After the war, I'll learn what happened to Jacques.

He often mentioned the paintings he had left in Marie-Louise Bossu's apartment:

"If I could get but one of these paintings and sell it, we would have enough money to live in comfort for one year."

"It seems quite risky to me. You told me her brother does shady deals with the Germans. Please give up that idea!"

He was ashamed to live on my money. Always this stupid male pride. He didn't want to be the protector of a *gagneuse*. Besides, if he had to stay locked in all day, he preferred to rent a bigger apartment. He wanted to buy books, listen to the radio, smoke his pipe, eat steak.

As soon as I left, he went into a café and phoned Marie-Louise. She said she had grown quite fond of these paintings, wanted to keep them as a memento of their great love, was ready to buy them. He was elated. He'd prove I was wrong. They decided to meet on January, 17th in the big Dupont café near Gare Montparnasse, where she would give him the money. She brought the Gestapo to the meeting.

I don't know whether she denounced him out of jealous spite, or to keep the paintings, or both. Maybe she thought: "I won't get him, but neither will my rival." I guess she suffered when he left her suddenly. He didn't apologize or ask her to forgive him.

What's for sure is that he never told her why he was hiding. The Germans tortured him without discovering he was the famous terrorist "Jacques," otherwise they would have shot him immediately. He had an inspiration that saved his life: he declared he was hiding because he was Jewish. Instead of executing him as a terrorist, the Germans deported him to the East.

I eat the rabbit (my first rabbit!) and the rest with Monette Meyerbeer at Hôtel Trial. Madame Jeunesse, who rented us the room on rue Saint-Amand, says the Gestapo came to the apartment:

"They broke the door on Saturday around noon."

"To think that I was there at 11! I was very lucky."

Monette asks a pertinent question:

"But tell me, sweetie, how did the Gestapo find the room on rue Saint-Amand?"

"I don't know. Maybe he went for a walk and was caught in a surprise roundup. He was so eager to go out… He is a Polish hussar. He dreams of wild horse rides, mountain conquests, ocean crossings. Staying inside the room day and night was more than he could bear. If he just went out to walk around the block, he didn't prepare for the worst… He may have carried a letter with our address in his pocket. He isn't very careful. When I visited him on boulevard Saint-Marcel, I used to spend hours putting away papers and things, even though a cleaning lady was coming every other day."

Monette Meyerbeer has lost track of René Berger. She runs everywhere, asking members of various Résistance networks whether they know anything.

"I've seen a Rumanian fellow who knew you when you were Jacqueline. He heard the Germans arrested your Jacques. He says they deported him."

"This is marvelous. It means he's still alive! You know, Monette, I'd like to meet this Rumanian man. I'd be happy to help them again, if possible."

Thus, I become Jacqueline again. I carry messages, sometimes arms too.

Tounia Kassar comes visit us, or we go to Île Saint-Louis. Three widows… Me, widow and a half, since the Germans have taken my two men. Ah, but I bear a tiny substitute in my entrails, a seed of hope, a child for peacetime!

Early February, Monette Meyerbeer receives a word from Grenoble. René Berger's parents tell her a railway worker brought them a note found on the tracks: "Leaving towards unknown destination. Health fine. Don't worry. René." Monette has no more reason to stay in Paris. She returns to Grenoble, to take care of the hidden children with Wanda Warner.

We know nothing of this mysterious place where cattle cars take thousands of people every week. Bernard Kohn talked to me about it when I visited him in Drancy. Awful rumors pretended that the Germans deported the Jews somewhere in the Russian wilderness, far from possible witnesses, and let them die of hunger… The Drancy detainees made up a name for the end of the railway line: *Pitchi Poï*. Soon after Monette is gone, as Lonek Greif and René Berger may have reached Pitchi Poï, Tounia Kassar receives a postcard from Armand, her husband. He's just written: "I'm okay. I hope we'll see each other soon." The main thing it says, of course, is that he's still alive. The word *Waldsee*, which means Woodlake, is stamped on the card inside a large blue seal. Another stamp, half erased or scratched, hides under this one. I decipher a name as strange as Pitchi Poï: *Auschwitz*.

A moss-stitch overall

Towards the end of May, I also receive a letter: "I'm staying with friends in a farm in Normandy. Could you bring me some clothes? Raymond." I recognize the handwriting of Bernard Kohn, my husband. He wouldn't need to disguise his identity if the Germans had set him free; so I guess he escaped. He gives the address of the farm, near Rouen.

I pick up Bernard's suitcase in madame Trial's closet, then I take the subway to Gare Saint-Lazare. I am five months pregnant, stuffed with bread and potatoes, as round as a balloon. If gallant[1] gentlemen didn't help me carry the suitcase, I wouldn't be able to climb the subway stairs. In the Rouen railway station, I take a bus. Then I have to walk three miles to the farm. I need to stop constantly to put the suitcase down and catch my breath. My pregnant woman's dress is drenched in sweat… It reminds me of the day I took a shower without removing my suit!

Bernard cries when he sees me. Maybe I should say: when he sees my huge belly.

"You're pregnant? Lonek's child?"

"His name is Jacques now, and I am Jacqueline."

"You bear his child and his name! This is hard to take… I paid a visit to Hélène, she lives close to here. She told me the Germans got him… Lonek, or Jacques. I hoped you'd become my wife again. I was lucky to escape, life smiled at me, I hoped everything would turn out all right."

"Forgive me, Bernard."

I try to comfort him, without much success. The farmer, who belongs to the Résistance, takes him along to spy on some German outposts, as a way to distract him. Rumors let us expect a landing soon. The Germans have heard the rumors, too; they build up their defenses. Allied airplanes fly over Normandy and drop bombs that fall sometimes over the Germans, sometimes over the poor civilians.

I spend the night in the farm. Bernard comes back from his trip at dawn. I recognize the Bernard I used to know, a decent fellow who prefers to see the good side of life. He's sorry he's lost me, but happy to be alive and free. He has plenty to tell me:

"They pulled us out of Drancy last October. They put a concentration camp on Aurigny, an English island located near the coast of Normandy[2]. We built concrete pillboxes that contained gigantic cannons. They hope to sink the English and American ships when they come near the French coast for the great landing."

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[1] This was a very common word in French until recent times. It meant a man who helped women, who opened the door for them and let them walk through first, etc.

[2] Better known today under its English name, Alderney.

"While I'm as fat as a cow, you're so thin I can nearly see through you. Didn't they give you any food?"

"Not much. Already in Drancy, you remember. In Aurigny, they also forced us to work like slaves. We poured concrete sixteen hours a day, often also all night. The comrades died of hunger and exhaustion. I'm lucky I made it alive."

"How could you escape from an island?"

"On May 10th, they emptied the camp. Either we had built enough pillboxes, or there was no more concrete to be found anywhere. We sailed to Cherbourg, then they put us on a train. Cattle-cars, the usual thing. They were transferring us to another camp in Germany. My pal, who worked in Aurigny as a carpenter, had been able to hide a small saw. Nobody wanted to go to Germany, of course. The train often stopped for hours, because airplanes were bombing the tracks. So then my pal says, Hey, we're close to my home! He began to saw the car's floor. The train stopped for so long that the night fell. We went through the floor as silently as possible and ran into the night; The farmer, here, is my pal's brother-in-law. My pal, the carpenter, spent a few days here, then went to Rouen to fetch his wife and kids. He'll be here tomorrow."

The farmer drives me to the station in his automobile. I take the train. As I am slumbering in the pleasant warmth or a May afternoon, a clash of brake squeaks, screams, airplane-engine throbbing, explosions, wakes me up. For the first time in five years, I hear the din of war! The passengers jump out the windows without even waiting for the train to stop (although posters advise us against endangering our lives in this manner). They run away. Some fall and roll into a ball. Did shrapnel hit them or did they just stumble? The bombing lasts one hour, but it seems to me this hour contains more minutes than usual. The passengers lying in the grass do not all stand up.

What should I do? Before taking a decision, I consider my situation: "With your belly, Malvina—I mean, Jacqueline… Jumping out the window, running, falling… You know, I believe this car is the very safest place. A steel shelter. Do you remember leaning outside to face the thunderstorm?" I do not lean outside. I get my knitting, a moss-stitch overall for my baby. I send a thought to Schmidt, the guard who gave me needles and wool. The baby wriggles to protest the noise of the explosions and the vibrations of the car. "You missed a stitch again, Jacqueline. Better undo the end of the row and begin again. Stay calm. You were able to knit in the dark… Breathe slowly. Soon, they won't have any more bombs and they'll stop."

With all this, the train is three hours late.

Liberation

On June 6th, 1944, the allied troops land in Normandy. Their hearts filled with a fantastic feeling of hope, Parisians dare stand high and smile. The German army isn't ready to surrender, though. It fights terrible battles in June, July and August.

An unexpected visitor in Hôtel Trial: Danka Müller. I haven't seen her since I left Montpellier, four years ago. She doesn't look like a shy bride anymore, but like a woman who has seen many things.

"Malvina, it's wonderful… I didn't know you were pregnant!"

"My name is Jacqueline, now."

"Ah yes, comrades told me… I've heard, for your Jacques. It's awful…"

"I'm sure he's still alive. The war will soon be over. The Germans can't hold very long against the Americans."

"In the meantime, German troops are rushing toward Normandy. It took my train twenty-four hours to come from Lyon to Paris. It stopped all the time to let military convoys pass by."

"You come from Lyon?"

"Bronek has become a Communist Party official. He is in charge of a group of young communist Jews in Lyon."

"Now I remember… Monette Meyerbeer told me you went to Lyon after Leos Geist died."

"Poor Leos! He's buried in Grenoble."

"His sister is dead too, probably."

"Yes, it's all very sad. But tell me, when will you have your baby?"

"On September 25th—if my pregnancy lasts exactly nine months. Look at me, I'm so fat… I eat only potatoes."

"Listen, everybody is skinny, and you look great. You can't complain!"

"I should go visit Hélène in her farm to eat eggs and meat, but Normandy isn't the most pleasant place in the world right now! I was there last month to see Bernard. He escaped from his camp. He joined a troop that planned to ambush the Germans to help the Americans. I hope he's safe and sound…"

"Are you still married to him?"

"Yes, but he knows I'll live with Jacques when he comes back."

She wants to know how I met Jacques, and so on. I tell her everything: my arrest, my months in jail, the surprise reunion set up in Île Saint-Louis by Tunia the matchmaker.

"Yes, I've heard about this Tunia from Monette. She was with you when Jacques vanished. Her own friend, Pierre, had been arrested."

"I thought his name was René."

"Pierre is his name as a Résistance fighter."

"So you're a member of the Communist Party, now."

"We enrolled in Montpellier, at the same time as Leos. Bronek and I already admired the communists in Poland, because they wanted to suppress all the discriminations against the Jews, as they'd done in the Soviet Union. But we weren't ready to become communists in Poland. You know, live underground, go to jail…"

"What about Wanda?"

"She attends meetings, she agrees with what is said, but Henek won't let her become an actual member. He is very prejudiced. He's ready to believe the worst slanders about the Party…"

After giving leaflets to a certain Gaby, she goes back to Lyon.

The Allies move slowly forwards. Bernard Kohn and his comrades ambush retreating Germans and even capture a Mercedes. On August 20th, he sees his first Canadian soldiers.

On August 25th, 1944, general Leclerc and his men enter Paris. I'm having lunch in the Menhir with Tunia Kassar. I want to see the army of our liberators.

"Come, Tunia. They'll march on Avenue d'Orléans. We just go to the end of Avenue du Maine and we're there."

"Are you sure, Jacqueline? You can hardly walk."

"You'll carry me if necessary. This is a historical event. We can't miss it, can we?"

A dense crowd is lined on both sides of Avenue d'Orléans. People shout: *Vive la France! Vive Leclerc! Vive le général de Gaulle! Vive la liberté!* They applaud the Senegalese Sharpshooters, who answer with great white smiles. The women cover the soldiers with kisses. Everybody congratulates me: "Your baby will never know war!"

Suddenly, someone calls me:

"Mademoiselle Malvina!"

A suntanned soldier breaks rank and walks toward me with a slight limp. Stiff-leg Viktor!

"I'm glad to see you, mademoiselle. They told me you had vanished."

"I spent six months in jail, then they let me go."

"Are you pregnant?"

"As you may see. I carry the child of your friend Lonek, except now his name is Jacques."

"Is he okay?"

"The Germans caught him and deported him, but I'm sure he'll come back."

"We'll free him soon."

"Have you been a soldier for a long time? Wanda told me you were living in Tarbes with Renée."

"When we heard the Germans were ready to enter the Free Zone, I went to Spain. Renée remained in Tarbes. As she's French and catholic, she didn't run any risk. The Spaniards took

me and put me in jail. I didn't stay there as long as you. After three weeks, the Americans gave the Spaniards money so they'd let the French refugees go to North Africa."

"You come from Africa? It explains your suntan."

"We fought in the Tunisian desert, then we landed in Juan-les-Pins… I must leave you and catch up with my battalion. Good luck for the birth of the baby!"

The allied troops arrive on the next day. Simone Réti and Tounia Kassar lodge two American giants in Île Saint-Louis.

Wanda Warner comes back from Grenoble. Henek, the only man in our group who didn't enroll in the Polish army or the Foreign Legion in '39, just put on a military uniform.

"He's a doctor for a FTP battalion that fights with the regular army. They're supposed to liberate Lyon. Everybody told Henek it was very dangerous. I'm scared, Malvina."

"Jacqueline."

"Yes, Jacqueline. Henek changed his name, too."

"Let me remember… Philippe Thomas?"

"No, that's over. He wants me to call him Henri. We won't return to Poland, you understand."

"If he fights with the French army, he'll be able to get the French nationality easily."

"This is not the reason he went. He wanted to enter the last battle, to contribute his own little part to the victory—to avenge all our people who are certainly dead in L'vov."

Bernard Kohn imitates Henri Warner. He volunteers for a battalion made of foreign Résistance members who fights in Alsace, near the Eastern border of France. I think he doesn't want to see me have a baby.

His sweet little fingers

Danka, Bronek and Monette return from Lyon and Grenoble. While they decide to stay in Hôtel Trial with Wanda, I leave and take back my room under the roofs on rue Saint-Amand, which is much cheaper than the hotel. On September 22nd, I invite Danka and Bronek Müller for dinner. Around 10 PM, I feel painful contractions. Danka panics:

"Are you going to have your baby? We must call a doctor right away! Bronek, do something…"

"What do you want me to do? You can see that there is no phone."

"Don't worry. I've reserved a room in a clinic near Place Denfert-Rochereau. The midwife knows her business. The contractions just began, so it leaves me time. Okay, I'll pack his little overalls and vests…"

Danka and Bronek help me walk—very slowly—to the clinic. The midwife leads me to my room. Nothing should happen before tomorrow morning, she says. The contractions become more frequent and painful. I talk to myself to take my mind off the pain: "Relax, Jacqueline… The morning will come… Think about Bolivia… Don't shout!" I do call the midwife eventually. She scolds me:

"You should have called earlier!"

My baby enters this world on Saturday, September 23rd, 1944 at 4 AM. The obstetrician, called by the midwife, arrives in a rush at the last minute. All of a sudden, the pain goes away. What a delicious feeling! It's a boy. The midwife lays him on my belly. He thrived on my potato diet: he weighs eight and a half pounds. There's a big bump on his head, but the midwife says it should disappear soon. I name him Jean-Jacques and Adam—as a tribute to the brave Polish résistant who died in my arms without having talked to his torturers. I think he looks like his father. "Are you sure he'll come back, Jacqueline? They say terrible things about these camps in the East. That they kill all the Jews there…"

Danka, Wanda, Tounia and Monette never get tired of coming to visit me, to admire my baby, to take him into their arms, to kiss him.

"Look, he smiles…"

"He seems to understand us."

"His sweet little fingers…"

"And his tiny slippers!"

"Jean-Jacques, Jean-Jacques! Smile again to your aunt Wanda!"

During five years, they gave up any idea of motherhood. A mother with a baby could not flee, hide, survive. The gaze of my little Jean-Jacques, this quiet and questioning gaze he lays upon the world, awakens a desire hidden in the deepest reaches of their heart.

I declare him as Jean-Jacques Adam Kohn, since I'm still married to Bernard.

Bronek becomes editor-in-chief of *Gazeta Polska*, a magazine published by the communists for the Poles living in France. He takes Danka as layout editor. They change their name once more. Instead of going back from Meunier to Müller, they become Mlynarz[1]. Henri Warner, during a leave in Paris, makes fun of them.

"Are you ashamed of Müller or what?"

"Well, you know, we try to reach the Poles who work in the mines in the North of France… They think all the communists are Jewish. No need to play into their prejudices…"

"So the result of this war is that the Jews still do not dare be themselves."

"Communism means the end of antisemitism, but we have to convince people to become communists first. This may entail some sacrifices…"

The Russians have liberated our province. Reports begin to appear in the newspapers. The traditional Jewish villages, which we called *Shtetl*, are deserted. In our city, L'vov, one third of the population was Jewish. Most of the shopkeepers, doctors, lawyers have vanished. We must get used to the idea that we won't ever see our relatives and friends again. In spite of myself, the people I knew in L'vov are still living in my mind. Every time I think about my father, my schoolmates, Kazik, the director of the cigarette factory, I have to tell myself: "Hey, but you forget they're dead!" Moreover, we know we're foolish to expect the return of Armand Kassar, René Berger and Jacques Greif.

We've all become orphans, but we survived the war together. We're as close to each other as brothers and sisters. Indeed, we have founded a new family to replace the lost ones. That's why our political quarrels can't put a dent into our friendship.

I also work in a communist magazine, *Assistance Française*, as a technical editor. Wanda Warner becomes a legal adviser in a Jewish foundation. She helps Jews returning from the camps to resolve conflicts, for example when someone is living in their former apartment. Then Bronek puts her in charge of the "Mother and Child" page in *Gazeta Polska*. She also signs her column with a Polish pseudonym. A communist official even examines her to check that she has "good facial features." When she goes to the North of France to interview a miner's wife, she has to pass for a catholic Pole…

Wanda and I both enroll in the Communist Party. We sell *L'Humanité-Dimanche*[2] together. We're very successful vendors. We've become our former selves again: two little Polish women, lively and joyful, whom all the men fall in love with.

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[1] These names mean *Miller* in French, German and Polish. In Poland, a person with a German name was usually Jewish. Jews came to Eastern Europe from Germany in the Middle Ages. They spoke a German dialect, Yiddish.

[2] The militants sold the Sunday edition of the communist daily.

I need someone to take care of Jean-Jacques while I go to the office. Madame Trial recommends a woman who looks like a good grandmother and seems to know children. She comes every day at 8 AM.

I get up at 6 to prepare my baby's milk bottles and porridge. As there is no water in my room, I must go to the end of the corridor. I borrowed Bernard Kohn's stove when I left Hôtel Tournefort. I boil water on this tiny stove, which takes ages. I give Jean-Jacques his first feeding-bottle and I change his diapers before I entrust him with the grandmother. I come back at 7 PM. I spend the evening heating water to give Jean-Jacques his bath, then wash his diapers. I seldom go to bed before midnight. I'm exhausted, but my baby's first smile renews my strength every morning.

Towards the end of December, the weather turns very cold. The good grandmother says she's afraid to slip on the frozen snow and ceases to come. Every morning, I look for a concierge willing to keep my baby. I bang on their lodge's window, I insist, I beg. They're reticent, because Jean-Jacques cries a lot as soon as I'm gone.

1945. Jacques is alive!

On January 27th, 1945, the Soviet army discovers a huge camp outside a village called Oswiecim, near Cracow. As the Germans annexed the whole province, they gave the village a German name: Auschwitz. The Russian soldiers find a few survivors who look like moving mummies. The newspapers publish interviews of these survivors that confirm our worst fears: the Nazis murdered millions of Jews, deported from all over Europe. "You'll have to accept it, Jacqueline: you won't see him again." For exactly one year, I kept alive a tiny flame of hope, fragile and flickering. The time has come to let it die.

On February 10th, someone knocks on my door after midnight, as I'm hanging my baby's diapers to dry. It is Tunia Kassar.

"Jacqueline, Jacqueline, it's incredible: Jacques is alive! I've heard him on the Polish radio! I was listening, hoping to hear some news of Armand. They announced *the first survivor of the Auschwitz camp, a French doctor, born in Poland*."

"Are you sure it was really Jacques?"

"I heard his voice, I tell you… He said the Germans evacuated the camp on January 18th, but he took the risk, with a few others, to hide and wait for the Red Army. The Germans could blow up the whole camp, you understand. He came out before everyone else to take care of a dying Polish priest. He explained the Germans killed old people, women and children with gas. Younger men, whom they used as slaves, died quickly of hunger and exhaustion. He survived because he found a job as a doctor in the camp's infirmary."

"Armand is a doctor, too. He could have survived like Jacques."

"May God hear you! In the end, he said: *If anybody is listening to this program in France, please tell Jacqueline Kohn that Jacques is alive! I do not know where she lives, but you can send the news to Hôtel Trial, rue Perceval in Paris.*"

I am quite flustered. I weep. So does Tunia. Jean-Jacques wakes up and adds his cries to ours. I kiss him:

"Your father is alive, my baby! He'll come back! You'll see him soon!"

The radio emitted the program from Lublin, Poland's temporary capital. Because of fierce battles taking place in Germany, Jacques can't return now. I must wait patiently.

In the following weeks, I receive about a hundred letters and postcards from all over France, sent by people who heard the call on the Polish radio. They all contain the same words: Jacques is alive!

A gray ghost

Although I'm tired when I come back home after a day's work at the magazine, I must still spend hours taking care of my baby. My colleagues say that I overwork myself and will fall sick if I don't get some rest. Even my boss notices my state of exhaustion eventually. He grants me a week off at the beginning of April. I decide to stay at Hélène's place. I'm sure the good air of Normandy will invigorate Jean-Jacques, who looks rather pale. He caught cold several times during the winter. He spends his life in dark and damp concierge lodges, so what can you expect?

He is delighted to discover hens and cows. As soon as the first day, his cheeks acquire a nice rosy tint. Hélène would love to become a mother, too, but Jean-Pierre says they should first begin again—and complete—their pharmacy studies.

On the third day, the mailman brings me a telegram. Tunia tells me that Jacques is to arrive in Paris on that very evening. On the one hand, I rejoice: "He's back! You'll see him again!" On the other hand, I wail: "You're so stupid! You left at the worst time!" I want to go back at once, of course, but trains are still scarce. Jean-Pierre borrows a car from friends. As the war is not over yet, we need a special permit and petrol coupons. I run to city hall, I implore the employees to assist me. They're as helpful as good monsieur Mahé: I get my permit and my coupons right away!

We reach rue Saint-Amand around midnight. I rush up the stairs. Jean-Jacques, who slept in the automobile, doesn't understand what happens…

From the story below, I already hear a multitude of voices, as if a great party was taking place in my room. Coming near, I see Tunia, Simone Réti, Danka and Wanda, as well as a woman whose face is vaguely familiar. An old man is sitting on my bed. He resembles a gray-skinned ghost. His mouth doesn't seem to close properly, his hands tremble. I believe I recognize Milek Roth, who looked older than his age because of the years spent in jail. Just as I'm going to say: *Bonjour Milek*, I understand suddenly… I recognize… I begin to tremble, too… My strength is ebbing, so that I can't carry my baby anymore. I hand him to the man:

"Here is your son!"

This is a solemn and dramatic instant. Nobody dares utter a word… The silence doesn't last long: as soon as his father holds him in his arms, Jean-Jacques begins to scream and everybody bursts out laughing!

I take back my baby and soothe him. "You too, Malvina, your father saw you for the first time when you were six months old. You probably wondered who was this unknown man suddenly irrupting in your life. That was the other war… Will there always be wars to prevent fathers from seeing their children?"

Tunia tells me what happened:

"Jacques landed in Marseille yesterday night. He sailed from Odessa, can you imagine that? As he didn't know where to find you, he sent me a telegram in Île Saint-Louis. Me, after sending you a telegram at your friend Hélène's address, I thought I'd go and take a look at his apartment on boulevard Saint-Marcel. I guessed he would be happy to come home, you understand. There, I met madame…"

Of course! The woman whose face is familiar—she's Yanka, the Frenchwoman with a Polish name who used to live with Jacques. I saw her on December 31st, 1940, when Jacques gave a party in his apartment, then in May, 1941, when she started shouting on rue Mouffetard instead of hiding Bernard and Henek. As she knows the concierge of boulevard Saint-Marcel quite well, she moved in the apartment after the liberation of Paris.

"I figured it would be better to take possession until Lonek's return," she says, "lest somebody else grabbed the apartment… I rented the office and waiting-room to Docteur Rosen, a Jewish doctor who spent the war in the Free Zone. I warned him he should leave when Lonek came back."

"We went to Gare de Lyon," Tunia says. "The three of us: Simone, Yanka and I. The train was full of soldiers and officers in uniform. I saw three men wearing civilian clothes. One of them was Jacques! You know, Yanka recognized him before me. I was in a state of shock. I thought about Armand… He asked where you were, Malvina. We took a taxi to Hôtel Trial. I knew Wanda kept a key of this room."

Wanda dabs her eyes with her handkerchief…

"I told him his son was the most beautiful baby in the world! I insisted on coming here to wait for you with him."

Jacques doesn't listen to our chatter. His head is falling on his breast and he can't keep his eyes open. When he begins to snore loudly, my friends depart on the tip of their toes.

He wakes up several times in the middle of the night. He wants to tell me about his year in Auschwitz, but he uses meaningless words: kapo, kommando, blockältester… Then his sentences become garbled and he falls asleep again. On the next day, he can't get up. He spends the day describing the camp in bits and pieces and slumbering.

I go to boulevard Saint-Marcel. Yanka is packing her things. Docteur Rosen, who seems a very nice man, is getting ready to leave, too.

"Just tell me when you want to move in. It's fantastic that he came back. I'll find another place to practice medicine. Yanka told me that if one person was to survive, it was him. An exceptional man, if I understand well. His patients are eager to have him back!"

"I'd rather you stayed a little while, Docteur. I think Jacques is not strong enough to work yet. He can't even stand up… He needs rest. If you could pay a rent to us as you did to Yanka, it would allow us to wait until he's fit."

So we settle in the boulevard Saint-Marcel apartment. I bring my suitcase and my baby. Jacques has no suitcase, of course. Docteur Rosen only uses the three professional rooms. This leaves us two bedrooms, a dining-room, a kitchen and a bathroom. There is another

bedroom and a smaller room for a maid, but the furniture of the former tenant fills them up to the brim. She's supposed to remove it soon.

I give my little Jean-Jacques the best bedroom. He is seven months old, a very alert child, who seems to understand everything I say.

Jacques is still terribly thin and gray. He has no muscles. He doesn't sleep well. He talks gibberish in the middle of the night. As he has always loved the sea and the sun, I suggest we spend a week on the Riviera:

"The sea air will do you good. We'll find a small hotel near the beach…"

"If you want."

Madame Georgeai, the concierge of 68, boulevard Saint-Marcel, recommends a woman to take care of Jean-Jacques while we're gone. Wanda Warner and Tunia Kassar, who consider themselves his godmothers, promise they'll go visit him every day.

Jacques sleeps a lot in the train. We find a hotel near Nice. I expect him to lie down for another nap after the long trip, but no: he puts on his bathing-trunk to swim in the sea.

"Are you sure? People don't swim in May. The water is still cold."

"Bah, I'm used to it. In the camp, I dug a swimming-pool for the Red Cross and I swam in September. It was freezing already…"

He speaks of the camp all the time, but doesn't explain much. Why would the Red Cross need a swimming-pool? I can't ask him questions: he doesn't listen to me. He seems to float half-way between the camp and our ordinary world—beyond my reach. He'll dive into the Mediterranean sea whatever I say. I can just hope he doesn't sink to the bottom or catch pneumonia.

Someone else falls sick. I receive a telegram from Tunia: "Jean-Jacques very ill. Come back quick." This is frightful. I so hoped that my life would turn out all right… I try to hearten myself: "Don't worry, Jacqueline. You know that Tunia panics easily." I don't have to hearten Jacques, because he doesn't seem to care about anything. Today is May 8th. The war has just ended. People kiss each other and dance in the streets, but Jacques remains lost in his memories of the camp.

We catch the first train to Paris. Tunia is with Jean-Jacques.

"Wanda called me," she explains. "Because I'm a doctor, you understand. I found our little Jean-Jacques in a worrisome state. High fever, vomiting… I thought it might be a kind of nervous shock, provoked by your disappearing suddenly. That's why I asked you to come back. I'm sorry I interrupted your vacations…"

When he sees me, Jean-Jacques cries in such a pitiful way that I can't help bursting into tears myself. His wide blue eyes are full of hot tears and mute reproaches: "Why did you leave me?"

All is well that ends well. Jean-Jacques becomes his own sweet self again, Jacques regains his former great strength, the previous tenant removes her furniture, Docteur Rosen lets

Jacques have his office and his patients back. We get a maid, who rolls Jean-Jacques to Jardin des Planes in his pram every morning. I'm quite busy: while still going to the magazine every other day, I work for Jacques as medical secretary.

Bernard Kohn and his regiment return from Germany. He goes to Court to file a "paternity disclaimer." He has a good alibi: in December, 1943, he was pouring concrete in Aurigny! We divorce. Soon afterwards, he meets a charming young woman…

Jacques acknowledges his son legally, but we can't get married right away, because his first wife contests the conditions of the war-time divorce.

The police arrests Marie-Louise Bossu. She dies of her tuberculosis two months before her trial. The paintings belonging to Jacques are nowhere to be found.

On December 25th, 1945, I give birth to a second boy, whom we name Noël[1]. I'm as happy as can be—with two wonderful children, a husband I love, a large apartment. It seems that fate, after ill-treating Malvina, is smiling at Jacqueline. As soon as Jacques earns a little money, I pay a visit to madame Contini, the seamstress on boulevard Edgar Quinet, to order a fashionable suit and two light dresses for spring. I get a new haircut. I look at myself in the mirror and I like what I see. I don't think about the war anymore. A new life is beginning.

[1] This means Christmas. It is a common name in France.

Author's afterword

When I was a child, I used to play cops and robbers in the schoolyard. The cops caught the robbers and put them in jail. Going to jail meant losing. Adults who did wrong didn't get bad marks, but were imprisoned. A person who had spent time in jail wasn't to be trusted. My mother, though, bragged of having spent nine months in jail as if it was a great honor… But this happened during the war, a time when everything was topsy-turvy.

Long after I had given up playing cops and robbers, I thought about this old story and asked my mother to write it for her grandchildren. She filled a blue notebook with her careful handwriting. She was ill with the same cancer as her mother. She died in 1978, aged 62. Having found the blue notebook in a drawer after her death, I used it as a starting-point for this book.

After the war, my parents never used the names Lonek and Malvina, but only Jacques and Jacqueline.

[50,000 words]