

HEROES ALL

**The Sequel to *In Ways Unimagined* and
*Someone Waiting for You***

Book Three of *When Country Calls*

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HEROES ALL

Prologue

Sadness and exhilaration competed for Jonathan's thoughts as he waited in the visitors' quarters at *Kibbutz Ramah Gan*. This was to have been the week following Efraim and Haviva's wedding and the time for their honeymoon. But the wedding had been postponed as had most civil events. The small country of 3,300,000 was still recovering from seventeen days of devastating conflict and in mourning over the almost 2,800 Israelis who had lost their lives in what was now being called the Yom Kippur War. The wedding would have to wait for a while longer if for no other reason than civilian flight dislocations were preventing overseas guests from attending. Instead, as Jonathan, now fifty-three years old, looked around at the bustling *kibbutz* he had first visited as a boy of fifteen, he was here to discuss a different wedding—his own.

Presently, a *kibbutz* representative introduced himself and asked Jonathan to accompany him to the quarters of Rabbi Chaim Goldston. Jonathan had covered the same distance only two weeks before when Yaron Kreisler, Efraim's father and Jonathan's former brother-in-law, had brought Jonathan to the *kibbutz* for a short reunion with the venerable rabbi. As they approached the rabbi's quarters, Jonathan tried to collect his thoughts. So much had happened in the three weeks since he had arrived in Israel for the wedding. His life had been changed in ways he could not have imagined and now he had come to ask the rabbi to bring to reality a dream he had harbored since 1945 when he was as an army medic at the Stelenberg displaced persons camp.

The elderly rabbi had been given a place of prominence in the *kibbutz*, despite its secular leanings, and from the front of his residential quarters, one could look out onto the sparkling waters of the nearby Mediterranean. On this warm October day, the beauty of the sea and the pungent smell of the last of the Valencia orange harvest gave the *kibbutz* a magical quality. The closeness to the lapping waters of the Mediterranean and the smell of the air drew Jonathan back to his coming-of-age days on the *kibbutz*.

There had been his teenage infatuation with the fetching Kayla Lewis from South Africa that had continued through amorous letters after they both returned home. Later, after Kayla advised she would be following in her two brothers' footsteps and attending McGill University in Montreal, Jonathan had chosen to forego a coveted place at Oxford. Instead, he had accepted a scholarship to study and play soccer at far off Cornell in Ithaca, New York, so that he would only be a five-hour train ride from Montreal where Kayla would be studying. Jonathan wondered what had happened to Kayla. It had been a long time ago since he had last seen her, and the memories of their parting came rushing back.

It had been Christmas break during his first year at Cornell. With the yearning that can only come from the thought of seeing a first love after a long absence, he had taken the train to Montreal with great anticipation. However, his hopes had quickly been shattered when Kayla told him she had just been pinned to a fraternity brother of Kayla's brother, Edgar, a senior named Julien, and that she planned to marry Julien after his first year of law school. She had known Jonathan would be disappointed, but she had nevertheless encouraged him to visit her at McGill because she had wanted to see him in person and tell him how much she cherished the memory of their whirlwind romance at the *kibbutz*. She had hoped she could let him down gently so that he wouldn't be too disappointed, but she had miscalculated. The knowledge that Kayla would be marrying someone else had devastated the star-struck young college freshman and he had left with tears in his eyes, thinking that nothing lay ahead but a lonely train ride back to Ithaca.

There were, of course, other memories of the *kibbutz*, aside from those of Kayla--memories of Jonathan's many conversations with a much younger Rabbi Chaim Goldston. These conversations had cemented Jonathan's love for the land and opened his eyes to the challenges of being Jewish in a world fast hurdling toward the cataclysm of World War II.

The rabbi was sitting in his wheelchair on the small veranda that fronted his residence. A casually dressed young man was at his side. His *kippah*, or head covering suggested he too might be a rabbi as few if any other permanent residents of the *kibbutz* were observant enough to wear the trappings of modern Jewish orthodoxy.

"Jonathan, before we begin, I'd like you to meet Rabbi Shmuel Salter. He will be taking over for me at the *kibbutz* when I'm gone. The role of rabbi has taken on added importance at the *kibbutz* and Rabbi Salter has done an admirable job."

An impish look crept across Jonathan's face. "There's an interesting change from my earlier time here!"

"Now, now! Neither Rabbi Salter nor I wilt easily, especially from sly sarcasm. I still can't claim that my flock has decided to inject religion into their busy lifestyle. Although, they still appreciate the *Kabbalat Shabbat* services we led on Friday evenings and now and again enjoy being reminded they are both Jewish and Israeli."

At this, Jonathan broke into a broad smile. "*Kabbalat Shabbat* was one of my favorite times on the *kibbutz* and, if I recall correctly, it was enjoyed by just about everyone."

"It still is and Shmuel plays an important role in keeping the tradition alive. In addition, due to our proximity to the sea and the small cluster of vacation houses you can see if you look toward the water, we've become religiously entrepreneurial and now serve as a retreat for several orthodox communities. Shmuel understands their customs and, these days, has much more energy than I for dealing with their issues and making them feel at home. In any event, Shmuel is my right hand. Anything you have to say to me in confidence, you can say to him. From our short telephone call, I know you have a few things on your mind."

"I do. It's a long story and I must warn you in advance that I have two requests."

"Even here on the *kibbutz* we've heard of the work you did at Rambam Medical Center in Haifa during the recent war. Your surgical exploits saved a lot of lives and gave hope in a time of great peril and despair. I'm sure there are few things you might ask of me that I wouldn't be eager to fulfill. If I can't follow through, then Shmuel can. So, relax and let's hear your story. But don't make it too long as my nap times have become more and more frequent, just as my days have become shorter."

"Rambam has a lot to do with my visit today. In fact, I've decided to accept permanent privileges at the hospital and remain in Israel."

"I'm overjoyed. Come here. Before we go any further, what you just disclosed requires a hug." The embrace was heartfelt though short, as the old rabbi felt the need to lean back into his chair. "Now that you have titillated every ounce of curiosity in my body, let's hear your story."

Jonathan looked out of the corner of his eye at the young rabbi sitting next to Rabbi Goldston and wondered whether he could be trusted to safeguard a confidence. He then looked at the older man who appeared completely comfortable listening in the presence of his young companion. Jonathan felt reassured and began. "Do you recognize the name Zef Wallenstein?"

Goldston hesitated for a moment and then recognition settled in. "It's been a long time, but Wallenstein was one of the heroes of the War of Independence. I believe he died in the second battle for Latrun while covering the retreat of his men. Now it comes to me. How could I forget. In the first battle for Latrun, Wallenstein single-handedly dragged a wounded man to safety. That man was Sidney Arenstein, who has since taken the name Solomon Ben Aharon and who still lives in the *kibbutz* with his wife Jael. So, what about Wallenstein?"

Wallenstein's widow lives in Haifa. I want to marry her and I would be very honored if you would preside. That is one of the two reasons I came to see you."

To the extent he could, the old rabbi now sat bolt upright in his wheelchair. "Talk about whirlwind romances. You want to marry someone you've known for three weeks? I don't know whether I should be happy for you or cry for you!"

Jonathan wondered whether he should have led up to his declaration more gradually before blurting it out. But, he had said what he wanted to say and the time had come for an explanation. "Actually, I've known her for twenty-eight years. I think that might qualify you to be happy for me."

"Now, I'm totally perplexed. But I expect you're going to explain and I'm pretty confident I'll be able to stay awake while you do.

"As you are aware, when I was here three weeks ago, I was with Yaron Kreisler."

"Yes. It's a shame Yaron and Gila had to postpone their son Efraim's wedding because of the war. Even though they moved from the *kibbutz* some time ago, they return to visit the Aharons and me. In fact, Efraim made a special trip here very recently to introduce me to his fiancée."

"You mean Haviva. She's a very smart and insightful young woman. I enjoyed meeting her just before I left for Haifa. But, I don't want to get off track."

"Of course not. Please forgive my musings?"

"You no doubt know I was married to Yaron's sister, Sarah, for almost seven years. You may also know our marriage fell apart after the death of our only child from what was thought to be Tay-Sachs disease. Her name was Helena and she died before she was two."

"Yaron kept me informed about his sister's and your marriage. As a result, I'm well aware of the circumstances the marriage and of your daughter's death. In addition, Sarah, her husband, Sander, and their two small children lived in Israel in the 1950's while Sander was doing a pulmonary medicine fellowship at Hadassah Medical Center. So, I also got to know them personally and knew firsthand of Sander's helpfulness following the 1956 Suez campaign which resulted in almost 1,000 Israeli casualties, with more than 172 perishing from their wounds. It

was an important time for the country since it almost cut us off from our Red Sea trade routes and thrust us into the center of Cold War nuclear politics.”

“I didn’t know about their visit. I expect Yaron was just being discrete in not saying anything. In any event, I’d love to know more about Sander’s involvement following the Suez campaign.”

“I’m sure you’ll find out before Efraim’s wedding since, as you may have guessed, Sarah and Sander will be attending.”

“I’ll look forward to seeing both of them. I never lost my affection for Sarah. It was clear that the cloud hanging over our marriage wasn’t going to budge. So, I was actually happy for her when she found someone who could transport her away from her heartache and sadness over the loss of Helena.”

“That’s definitely a very healthy attitude. There’s one other thing that Yaron may not have mentioned and that you should know. Sarah’s father, Lorenz, has been very instrumental in obtaining German war reparations for Israel. He and his wife, Agatha, now spend a fair part of each year in Israel and will also surely be at the wedding.”

“That’s wonderful news. I lost touch with Lorenz after the divorce. But he was a great favorite of both my father and myself. I want to catch up on so many things, and what Lorenz has been doing is certainly one of them. But, again, I’m getting off track and I don’t want to overstay my visit today.”

“Overextending your welcome is not even a vague consideration. Putting up with my meanderings is another question entirely. Please continue.”

“You mentioned a short while ago that a three-week whirlwind was a pretty short romance. In Sarah’s and my case, aside from visiting her family in Denmark when she was fourteen and when I was on summer break from college in America, I only knew her for a week as an adult before we got married. It was a rebound romance and, had we not allowed ourselves to be swept up by the moment, we might have both acknowledged it was not a good foundation for a life together. But, I was deeply hurt and vulnerable and Sarah had maintained a crush on me ever since our first encounter when she was a starry eyed adolescent.”

“I have a feeling you’re about to tell me there’s a connection between what had transpired before your marriage to Sarah and the reason for your visit today.”

Jonathan looked appreciatively at the older man. “You may be taking more frequent naps, but your mind hasn’t lost any of its agility. Yes, there is very much a connection, and it began in March 1945. I was with the Sixth Armored Division in Germany. We had just crossed the River Main at Frankfurt and I was looking forward to the end of the war and returning to my medical studies at UCLA. Then, I received a letter from my best friend Charlie Brody who then lived in Los Angeles and earlier had come with me from England to study and play soccer at Cornell. As you may know, Charlie and his wife, Diane, came to Israel with me for the wedding.”

“Yes. I did know.”

“Well, on that occasion, Charlie informed me that my fiancée in Los Angeles had gotten pregnant and was marrying Charlie’s manipulative brother, Randy, a naval architect who had been detailed to the US navy to help out at the wartime Long Beach shipyard near Los Angeles.”

“You have had your moments.”

“Don’t get me wrong. My life has been full of accomplishments and times of soaring happiness. I have no regrets. But, at that moment, I was feeling very low. So, when Stanley Rothman, the supervising doctor at the army field hospital where I was assigned, told me he planned to remain in Europe after the war to help out with the continent’s displaced persons, especially its Jews, I agreed to stay with him. I subsequently found myself at the Stelberg DP camp not far from Patton’s headquarters in Munich. It was there that I met Lara Hoetschl.”

Whatever forces might have driven the old rabbi to submit to drowsiness had now been beaten back by a new alertness that showed on his face. Offhandedly, he noted that “Hoetschl” was not a very Jewish sounding name, but then realized he risked interfering with Jonathan’s story and quickly motioned for Jonathan to continue.

“Lara had just arrived at the DP camp. All we knew about her was that she was a Swiss nurse with a background in obstetrics. Aside from the camp’s few doctors, I was the only medic. So, Lara and I were thrown together very quickly. When I just spoke of the times I have experienced great happiness, I had Lara in mind. We fell hopelessly in love and the joy I felt at being with her was inexpressible. Then I found out Lara was German, not Swiss, and that she was hoping to find redemption from her family’s Nazi past by working in a DP camp populated mostly by Jewish victims of Nazi atrocities. The discovery nearly tore us apart, but we managed to find strength from the bond we had formed.” At this, Jonathan hesitated.

It was not difficult for Goldston to sense Jonathan’s discomfort. Recognizing that his own casual aside may have contributed to Jonathan’s unease, the old rabbi tried to get Jonathan back on track. “Please forgive my prior interruption. I am old enough, and should be wise enough, to realize that a relationship between a man and a woman should never be prejudged before everything is known. I want to hear all you have to say. Please continue.”

“Thank you. Lara had once worked for an English family who had treated her very well in appreciation for the help she had given to their disfigured daughter. Unbeknown to Lara’s parents, the family was Jewish and had included Lara in their religious life. So, she was well versed in Jewish customs and religious behavior. Her empathy for Judaism only added to the joy I felt. I knew we could make it work and I couldn’t have been happier. When I found out that I had been accepted as a transfer student to medical school in Boston, I asked Lara to marry me and return with me to America. Lara was overwhelmed, but delighted. I didn’t have time to buy her a ring. Instead, one night, I gave her my most important possession—a star of David I wore around my neck. The star was a family heirloom my mother’s father had worn. My mother gave it me the last time I saw her, just before she was murdered by Nazi Brownshirts.”

“Alas, I remember you telling me about your mother during your summer on the *kibbutz*. The bittersweetness of that moment with Lara must have been unimaginable.”

“Unfortunately, not as much as what transpired later that evening. Lara’s love for me had always been without limit. But, it had never really dawned on me that the guilt she felt over her family’s Nazi past, was equally limitless. In the end, her belief that her past would always hold me

back and cast a cloud over our relationship got the best of her. When I woke up, I found that Lara had gone and, in the place where she had been sleeping, I found only a note. I do not have the note today, but I can never forget her selfless words. She said she would keep the star I had given her as a token of our love and then she completed her thoughts with words I have memorized to this day, despite their pain:

I have learned so much about Judaism from you and from my English family. I love that you are Jewish and I admire the gentleness of your faith. A few weeks ago, I tried to explain the hostility that led my fellow Germans to commit such heinous acts of depravity toward your people. But the truth is, I really don't understand. Having known and loved you, I wish I were Jewish. But I am not. I carry the burden of being a German Christian. I do not want to add to that burden by complicating your life or by causing you to be the subject of ridicule or contempt. So, my love, in these few poorly expressed words, I must say goodbye.

“Fruitlessly, I searched for Lara, but to no avail, and soon found what I hoped would be an emotional outlet by marrying Sarah. For my entire life, I wondered what happened to Lara and only found out three weeks ago.”

A bird sang in the distance, a truck rumbled by and two small children laughed merrily as they walked hand in hand. But, on the veranda where Jonathan sat with the two rabbis not a sound could be heard. Jonathan continued.

“You may recall that, after our recent visit, I was heading for Haifa to spend time with my cousin, Jakob Ben Avram, and his family before the wedding.”

“Of course. You mentioned your cousin was a survivor of Buchenwald and worked, in some capacity, with soldiers who suffered from battlefield fatigue.”

“Jakob's story is momentous in its own right. Of relevance, he is also a doctor and his work with shell shocked patients is remarkable from a medical perspective. Indeed, it was through his good offices, that I was able to obtain hospital privileges and perform surgery on a young army friend of Jakob's son. The soldier's name was Roni and his surgery was complicated but successful. When I went to check up on him the morning after the surgery, I found a young nurse tending to him. It turned out she was the boy's sister and worked in the same hospital. I introduced myself and she thanked me for tending to her brother. At that moment, the boy began to stir and, as the young nurse bent over to kiss him, a delicate necklace spilled out of her blouse. The necklace supported a small Star of David. It was unmistakably the star that I had given Lara during those love filled days at Stelenberg, so many years ago.”

Only Rabbi Salter stirred, but Rabbi Goldston sat motionless, his faced fixed in wonderment at what he was hearing.

“The young nurse's married name was Channy Gershonsoln, her first name being a close approximation to Hannah, my mother's name. Happily, she agreed to take me to meet her mother who was preparing the Shabbos meal and was eager to hear how her son was doing. When we arrived, it was clear that the woman before me was Lara and that my world had been turned upside down. As Channy's two small children played, Lara, who had taken the Hebrew name Bracha, told us everything.”

Almost inadvertently, Rabbi Salter breathed out the words “I can't imagine!”

A near smile escaped from Jonathan's face. "Nor could I. It seems that, after Lara left Stelenberg, she found out she was pregnant and sought out the only place where she could be sure her child would be treated as Jewish—another displaced persons camp. There, she met an older man named Zef Wallenstein who had lost his entire family in the Holocaust. He treated Lara with kindness and asked no questions regarding her pregnancy. They were married and soon found their way to Palestine. It was a marriage of convenience, but one based on mutual respect. There was enough affection for Lara to give birth to a second child, Roni, the young soldier I treated in the hospital in Haifa. After Zef died in the war of independence, Lara never remarried. She once tried to look me up but found out I was married to Sarah. I think she may have been relieved out of concern that any contact with me might have brought up the past and placed in question her Jewishness and the Jewish authenticity of her children. That's where things stood these many years."

A twinkle shone on Rabbi Goldston's face. "And now you are here so I can help you write the final chapter in this remarkable story."

"Yes. But, if you recall I said I had two requests."

"I do. But, I think I know what you have in mind."

"You do?"

"Of course. You've already spelled it out. Bracha wants to have a proper marriage and, for that purpose, she wants to first undergo a ritual conversion."

"I tried to talk her out of it, knowing no one would question her status after all these years. But she was adamant and, if it helps us with the beginning our new life together, who am I to object. I should also mention that Channy and Roni also wish to have a formal conversion and that Channy would like the same for her two young children. The big issue is that Bracha and her children would like to go forward discretely without too many questions raised. Do you think you could help?"

"Nothing would give me more pleasure. We'll of course need a *bet din* comprised of a panel of three approved rabbis, followed by Bracha and her family's immersion in the *mikvah*, the ritual purification bath. Tell me something: do Bracha and Channy keep kosher at home and maintain the sabbath?"

"They do. Channy's husband, Alon, is observant and both women are very respectful of his religious needs. You may have noticed I'm now wearing a kippah, something I used to kid my father about. I've also taken the Hebrew name Jonatan, though I still have difficulty remembering to use it."

"I've noticed your kippah. Bracha's and Channy's observance should make things a lot easier. Since we've started renting our guest facilities as an orthodox religious retreat, I have come to know a few of their rabbis. They are a skeptical bunch, but even they should have no qualm with the widow of a war hero who has lived here for twenty-seven years, whose son has been fighting for the country and whose daughter has been tending to the wounded. So many people in this country have no surviving relatives and no documented history to vouch for their Judaism. As a result, my friends in the rabbinate should not have much of an issue with a woman who wants to assure her future husband of her Judaism before they are married. Also, because of their regular

visits to the *kibbutz*, we maintain a *mikvah* that will be available for the conversion ceremonies. Give me a few days and I'll be back to you.”

Satisfied, Jonathan expressed his thanks and returned to the *kibbutz* entrance for his drive back to Haifa.

Chapter 1

Israel: Bridal Jitters October 1973

The sun was already low in the sky as Jonathan pulled onto Highway 2, the main north-south coastal highway between Haifa and Tel Aviv. He noted that his small Subaru was indistinguishable from many of the cars on the road. He remembered being told that the other Japanese car makers had capitulated to the Arab boycott in 1968, one year before Subaru began exporting its vehicles to Israel. The car and its smell of cologne belonged to Bracha, who had lent it to Jonathan for the drive to *Kibbutz Ramah Gan*. As Jonathan contemplated the congested, rush-hour journey that lay ahead of him, his mind began to wander.

He was pleased with his meeting with Rabbi Goldston. He knew he had given the aging rabbi a tall order in asking him to convene a *Bet Dein* to preside over the conversion of Bracha and her family prior to Jonathan and Bracha being married. But, borne of his many talks with the rabbi when he was an adolescent summer worker at the kibbutz, Jonathan's confidence in the man had never wavered. Jonathan's real concern was whether Bracha's commitment to go through with the wedding was as steadfast.

Based on the joy Bracha had poured into their rediscovery of one another after so many years, Jonathan should have had little cause for worry. They had spent endless hours talking, punctuated only by long, adoring looks into one another's eyes. Despite Bracha's desire to tease out every small feature of Jonathan's years as a physician in Boston, he had played down his many professional accomplishments and described his life as routine and unexceptional. By contrast, Jonathan's inquiries had led to a huge store of information about Bracha and how she had endured the difficult years as a single parent with two small children in a country constantly under siege.

She had described the years following the War of Independence as both difficult and full of hope. It had been both a wonderfully buoyant time as the ingathering of displaced Jews from all over the world swelled into the country and provided it with both extraordinary variety and a cacophony of needs. It had been a time of innocence as young girls walked without fear, arm in arm, in Tel Aviv's burgeoning neighborhoods. But it had also been a time of fear as the country's leaders scoured the world for armaments that would protect the nation as the next inevitable war caste its shadow across the young nation. For Bracha, it had been both mundane and heady.

For years, she had devoted her life to her young children, working only enough to supply her family's meager needs. As the children got older, she devoted more time to nursing. She had been a rehabilitation nurse. During the Suez campaign of 1956, she had even left her children with friends so she could spend time in the southern part of the country where her services were needed. During the Six Day War in 1967, she had done the same, deploying to Jerusalem to help tend the many wounded from the parachute company that had breached the walls of the Old City. It was only after Channy became a nurse and a mother that Bracha decided it was a good time to retire and volunteer her time at a local rehab center. As the casualties poured in from the recent Yom Kippur War, she had wished that she could again be out in the field. But, she had equally important obligations at home, as Channy's nursing duties during the war were almost unceasing, requiring that Bracha spend many exhausting but happy hours with her two grandchildren.

As Jonathan listened to each of Bracha's tales, his admiration for her had become as boundless as had his passion. Their love making had been as rapturous as it was twenty-eight years ago when Stanley Rothman, Jonathan's supervising physician at the Stelberg DP camp, had finagled a linen room for the two of them to use as a love nest. Just as they had done then, Jonathan and Bracha now spent their nights in one another's embrace—slaking the want that had built up after so many years. After only a few short weeks, they knew they could not bear another separation and they had agreed to marry.

Jonathan was ecstatic. Bracha had only asked for one thing—the validation of her Jewishness by a ritual conversion. Jonathan had agreed, hoping this one remaining act would open the door to a life with the woman whose love he had missed for so long. But, years of evaluating patients had trained Jonathan to look for weaknesses. Even as he drove back to Haifa to report their forthcoming marriage was fast becoming a reality, he was worried.

As his mind tried to reconstruct every aspect of his reunion with Bracha, he lost track of time. Before he knew it, he was pulling into a parking space in front of Bracha's apartment building. As he rushed up the flight of stairs to her apartment, he suddenly saw the door opening. In the doorway stood his beloved. He couldn't believe he had spent almost the entire day away from her and, before saying anything, he took her in his arms and they embraced.

“So, did it go well?”

“Yes. I think it might take a little while for Rabbi Goldston to convene a Bet Din, but he feels confident he can do it and he has agreed to marry us after you and the children are converted.”

“Oh, Jonatan,” exclaimed Bracha, employing Jonathan's new Hebrew name and leaving no question as to her pleasure in hearing Jonathan's news. Then, as if giving voice to Jonathan's brooding concerns, she blurted out: “I'm worried. I'm worried that I might not be worthy of you.”

Gently, Jonathan took Bracha's hand and led her to the worn couch in the living room. Bracha and he sat down. Tenderly, he looked into her eyes. “How can you say such a thing, knowing how much I've missed you and how much I admire the sacrifices you've made for Channy, Roni and me?”

“I know how much you love me, but I can't shake this feeling of being unfit to be your wife.”

“But, why? Once before, you arrived at the same conclusion and I lost you for twenty-eight years. I don't want to lose you again.”

As Jonathan started to wipe away the tears that escaped from Bracha's eyes, she held his hand for a moment and then motioned him to stop so he could listen. “It's not what you think.”

“I don't know what to think. I've sensed something was distressing you and thought about it on the drive back from the *kibbutz*. But, I'm still at a loss. Please don't hold it in any longer.”

Resignedly, Bracha began. “Do you remember how, the night Channy brought you home, I tried to explain my reasons for leaving the DP camp?”

“Yes. It was a painful time for both of us.”

“Do you recall my confession that, before meeting you, I had been raped repeatedly by my despicable fiancée before the cruel man was assigned to his duty post in Poland and killed outside of the Warsaw Ghetto?”

“How could I not! The whole episode sickened me. I have to say I felt a certain self-satisfaction when I told you I thought I knew who killed him.”

“Somehow, we managed to drop that period of my life from our conversations during the time you’ve been here. But the beatings and sexual mistreatment at his hands continue to haunt me. As I felt when we were first together in Stelenberg, I still feel like damaged goods.”

Jonathan began to speak but Bracha put her fingers to his lips. “That’s not all. When I told you that Zef had taken me in and cared for me at the later DP camp, I only told part of the truth. He was respectful and never made any unwanted advances. But, on the night we agreed to marry, I gave myself to him—as much an expression of appreciation as anything else.”

“That was your prerogative. It doesn’t sound so bad.”

“You’re not putting the pieces together. I slept with another man while I was still pregnant with your child. I had crossed the line from damaged goods to goods worthy only of contempt. I had become contemptible. How could such a person be worthy of you?”

“Easily. It was only a matter of weeks before I not only slept with another woman, but also married her!”

“Yes. Except, you hadn’t abandoned me. I had abandoned you.”

Jonathan was now feeling uneasy, but knew there was not much he could say to dissuade Bracha in her current frame of mind. Instead, he lit upon another idea. “There’s little you can say that would cause me stop loving you and what you have said doesn’t meet the test. But, I understand the seriousness with which you have spoken. Do me this favor: Please meet with two people I have in mind.”

“Who are they?”

One is my cousin Jakob Ben Avram who, as you know, lives here in Haifa and who is eager to meet you. Yakob is a doctor who specializes in battlefield stress. Lately, he has branched out to deal with other forms of stress such as from domestic abuse. Equally importantly, he has something to tell you. I think it will help put your mind at ease. The other is a close friend of Yaron Kreisler who still lives at *Kibbutz Ramah Gan*. He also has something to relate that hopefully will make you feel more comfortable. If, after speaking with the two of them, you still have concerns, we’ll delay the wedding until you have worked out whatever is bothering you. Agreed?”

“How could I not!”

Chapter 2

Israel: Reassurance October 1973

Bracha and Jonathan spent the next day together as Jonathan made arrangements for meeting with the two men he hoped would provide Bracha with the reassurance she needed to put her past behind her. By tacit agreement, nothing further was said about their conversation of the previous evening and Bracha's feelings of inadequacy. As night fell, they embraced one another without making love and slept easily. Jonathan awoke the next morning eager to start what would be a long day.

The drive to Jakob Ben Avram's house took only a few minutes. Jakob greeted them warmly and invited them to join him in what he called his study. In reality, it was a small room off of the kitchen that had been intended as a pantry whose shelves now groaned with medical books of all sizes and varieties. As the three sat down at the small table in the room, Bracha and Jonathan could hear the happy sounds of children playing in other parts of the house.

"I'm so glad to meet you at last and I'm very happy to help in any way I can. If it makes you more comfortable, I can treat you as my patient so that everything we both say will be protected by the physician patient privilege."

"Thank you. That won't be necessary. I trust anyone to whom Jonathan may introduce me, particularly when, like you, that person is his cousin."

"I was hoping you'd say that. Jonathan has told me a little bit about the lingering guilt you feel from the abuse you experienced at the hands of your first fiancée. I think Jonathan has also told you that I specialize in stress caused by trauma. Until recently, I've focused on battlefield trauma and the men and women of the Israel Defense Force who have suffered on the battlefield. However, I'm now realizing that the stress that occurs in a variety of civil settings is not very different than that experienced in combat. So, I've begun to take on patients from all walks of life, including women who have suffered at the hands of their husbands or lovers."

"That would seem to qualify you for this conversation."

"In its own right, I would agree. But I believe I have something much more important to pass along to you. Jonathan, why don't you begin."

Jonathan reached for Bracha's hand and was distressed to feel how cold it was. Rubbing it with both of his hands to provide reassurance, he began. "Remember when you first told me about being mistreated by your fiancée and your sense of being damaged as a result of such treatment."

"Yes. It's a moment that stands still in my mind."

"You also told me that your fiancée had been posted to Warsaw and had been knifed to death outside the walls of the Warsaw Ghetto. I believe you used the term "Jewish gutter rat" in referring to his presumed assailant and that he was merely a "waif of a boy".

Bracha now perked up. “Yes. Surprisingly, you said you thought you knew who may have been responsible for my fiancée’s death. But, I never prodded you further because, until I started having misgivings, I was very happy to put the whole episode out of mind.”

“I was happy to drop it as well. However, now that those memories are getting in the way of the life with you I want to live, I thought it best to revive the matter. Let me begin by saying that Jakob lost his entire family in the Warsaw Ghetto and that they were only able to last as long as they did because he devoted himself to bartering for food by navigating his way through the city’s sewer system.”

Bracha now looked at Jakob, recognition written across her face. “Was it you? How can you know?”

“Before I answer, I’d like to ask you a question. How did you find out about your fiancée’s death.”

“Before his death during the Russian campaign, my father had been an officer in the *Wermacht*. Out of respect for his service and sacrifice, we were able to obtain a more detailed explanation than most regarding the circumstances of my fiancée’s death.”

“What did the report say?”

“It described his killer as a young Jewish boy and said an accomplice of the boy had been shot in the back, presumably while fleeing. They knew the assailant was Jewish and from the Ghetto because his dead companion was circumcised and looked thin as a rake.”

“Did the report say anything about finding the weapon used to kill your fiancée?”

“No. That was one of the mysteries. In addition, since the companion had already been shot, we could never figure out how a rawboned young boy could have overcome a trained soldier with a rifle and a pistol and knifed him to death.”

“Did the report describe the other boy?”

“Other than to say he was Jewish and emaciated looking, the report merely said he was thought to be a teenager.”

“Anything else? Any specific features.”

“Nothing of consequence, except that the boy had black hair, but with a funny white streak that ran through his hair on the left side.”

“I can fill in the details from here. That dead boy’s name was Manfred, Manny for short. But sometimes when we wanted to tease him, we would call him by his Yiddish nickname *Vayser*. It means whitey, owing to his streak of white hair.”

Bracha began to show signs of strain. Jonathan held her hand more tightly as Jakob continued. “On the day your fiancée was killed, Manny and I were outside of the ghetto foraging for food. As we climbed out of the sewer, we stumbled upon a soldier. He was short but he had a rifle that was leaning against a wall, and, as it turned out, he also had a pistol. We knew we were

not supposed to be outside of the ghetto on penalty of death. So, we turned around to run. But, the soldier was too quick. He pulled out his handgun and shot Manny twice in the back. I thought I was a dead man, but the soldier's pistol jammed. As he turned to reach for his rifle, instinct took over and somehow I summoned the courage to jump him. I was bigger and I had a makeshift knife my father had made for me. I planted it in the man's neck and then I ran, taking the knife with me."

"How horrible," intoned Bracha. I guess that's the end of the story."

"Unfortunately, not. Neither for you, nor for me. When the Warsaw Ghetto fell, I wound up at Treblinka and endured a period even darker than my time in the ghetto. I managed to escape and in so doing killed another man. I was so numb that the man's death did not phase me. As the war dragged on, I joined the Polish underground and killed even more. By the time I arrived in Palestine, I was a hardened killer and a top recruit for the extremist *Irgun* resistance fighters."

"How awful," exclaimed Bracha.

"I might have gone on like that except something clicked in my head one day as we were pursuing Arab villagers in the same way I had been pursued when I escaped from the camp. I put down my gun and swore from that day forward, to heal people, not hurt them. Fortunately, I was able to study medicine and here I am. But the hurt from what I have done to others, starting with your fiancée, has never gone away. Many a night I've dreamed of Manny and the circumstances that caused me to plunge a knife into the neck of a fellow human being, albeit a Nazi soldier. I've never gotten over that moment, no matter how much I sought closure.

Now it was Bracha's turn to be comforter. "But you had no choice!"

"I guess that's the point: nor, did you. In a sense, we were both victims of the same man—you as a casualty and I as his forced executioner. Until today, I only saw it as a killing. But now that I've met you, I take solace in the fact that my act of violence prevented your tormentor from surviving the war and returning to inflict further violence on you. When I talk to patients, I try to get them to put their stress in context and appreciate the difficulty they have faced. I think I may now be able to do that with the killing of your fiancée and I hope my own coming to terms will help you do the same."

"Thank you Jakob. You've lifted a huge burden off my shoulders."

Jonathan escorted a palpably relieved Bracha to the Subaru and got into the driver's side of the vehicle.

"Thank you so much. I'm feeling much better; perhaps, better enough that we can call it a day."

"That may be true. But, I want to make sure and I think seeing the second person I have in mind will put your concerns to rest without any reservation or hesitancy."

Jonathan was now heading south on the highway. "We're obviously heading toward Tel Aviv. I guess we're going to visit Yaron Kreisler's friend at *Kibbutz Ramah Gan*."

“Yes.”

“Are we also going to see the rabbi?”

“Not this time. But, I can assure you , you will not be disappointed.”

“If you’re going to keep it a mystery, I’m going to take a nap. Our meeting with Yakob was satisfying, but exhausting.” With that Bracha closed her eyes and, two hours later, was surprised when Jonathan woke her to say they had arrived at their destination.

As Bracha rubbed her eyes, she noticed a man about her age standing in the doorway of a tidy cream-colored cottage. The man was trim looking for his age and sported a well-groomed beard and mustache. Eagerly, he motioned for Bracha and Jonathan to come in.

“Bracha, I’d like you to meet Solomon Ben Aharon. Solomon, I’m happy to introduce you to Bracha. As I mentioned over the phone, Bracha is the widow of Zef Wallenstein, someone you knew during the War of Independence only by the name Zef.”

Solomon gazed at Bracha with a combination of sadness and gratitude. He then turned to Jonathan. “Thank you for coming.”

“You’re very welcome, but the thanks really goes to Yaron. When I first arrived in Israel a few short weeks ago, Yaron drove me to Haifa so I could visit with my cousin Jakob Ben Avram. During our drive, Yaron talked about the War of Independence, its many heroes and how almost every family in the country had been touched by the death of a loved one during the War. He said he owed his life to one such hero, a man he only knew by the name Zef. He described how Zef had singlehandedly rescued you when you were wounded during the first assault on the fortress at Latrun and how Zef had later fallen in battle. That’s how I was able to find you.”

As understanding began to register on Bracha’s face, her gaze met Solomon’s whose eyes were now beginning to tear. “Because I was wounded and in pain, I never had a chance to thank your husband. When I heard he had been killed at Latrun, I tried desperately to find out about him so I could thank his family. But, I never succeeded. Now that you are here, I can tell you how difficult it has been not knowing anything about the man who saved my life and how relieved I am to finally meet you.”

Bracha gently dabbed the tears that had begun to stream down Solomon’s face. “I’m afraid the fault has been mine. You see, my husband took the name Zef Wallenstein when we arrived in Palestine. He was Czech and his real name was Tomáš Valdštejnský, which translates roughly to Wallenstein. He had been a boxing champion in Czechoslovakia, and he brought that same strength to the War of Independence. He never wished to return to the country that witnessed, if not abetted, the death of his entire family. But, in the event of his own death, he wanted word to reach Czechoslovakia. He wanted it known he had survived Terezin and Auschwitz and had died fighting for the liberation of Israel. I respected his wishes and used his Czech name in the obituary. I did mention his Hebrew name in the account of his life, but you must have missed it.”

“I did and have tormented myself ever since. Now, the closure you bring is indescribable, as must be your pride in having been married to a man of such stature and courage. I can only

hope your time with him was both joyful and fulfilling. But you didn't come here to hear me babble. Let's go in the kitchen where my wife Jael has made us lunch."

"What you describe as babble has made all the difference for me as well. It's been a long time since Zef's death, but you've enabled me to see how meaningful my life with him was and to appreciate everything we did together."

Bracha now looked at Jonathan. "Dr. Sternbloom, I think we can declare your patient to have been cured. Now, let's not keep Jael waiting. I'm famished."

Chapter 3

Israel: Remembrances November 1973

It had taken a considerable amount of doing, but, in the end, Rabbi Goldston had persuaded two rabbis from the *kibbutz's* orthodox retreat communities to participate in a *Beit Din* religious court for the purpose of converting Bracha and her children. Of equal importance, the rabbis had acceded to Rabbi Goldston's orthodox ordination and agreed to allow him to sit on the tribunal even though he wasn't a member of their community. Fortunately, the two participating orthodox rabbis had assumed it was Jonathan religious fastidiousness that was the cause for ensuring the Jewish bona fides of his new family. Neither had sought to question the past of a woman of Israel who had been a practicing Jew for the almost three decades she had lived in Israel.

The proceedings were set for the first Sunday in November. On the designated day, the *mikvah*, the ritual immersion bath, was ready for Bracha and her family, the wedding *chuppah*, or canopy, had been garlanded with flowers and the food for the celebration had been prepared. Rabbi Salter had assisted Rabbi Goldston with both the preparations for the religious court and, equally importantly, the various mundane tasks required by the elder rabbi to prepare for a long day.

At the appointed hour, Jonathan, Bracha and her family arrived at the *kibbutz* and were greeted by Rabbi Goldston and the two other members of the *Beit Din*. By agreement, the two visiting rabbis had met with Bracha and Channy earlier in the week and had spoken to Roni at his army base by telephone. These meetings had satisfied the rabbis of the family's commitment to *kabbalat ol hamitzvot*, the "welcoming of the commandments." As a result, the questioning was quick and unintimidating. At the conclusion of the tribunal, the rabbis escorted Bracha, her two children and Channy's children to the *mikvah*. There, Rabbi Goldston observed Roni's immersion in the *mikvah* and the wife of one of the two visiting rabbis observed Bracha and Channy's immersion and then Channy assisted her two small children with their immersions.

At the conclusion of the ceremony, Bracha and Channy excused themselves to prepare for the wedding ceremony that was soon to follow. Jonathan and Roni did the same, while Channy's husband, Alon, watched the children. An hour later, Jonathan stood nervously under the *chuppah*, while his best man, Jakob, casually chatted with Roni, Yaron and Gila Kreisler, Solomon and Jael Ben Aharon, Charlie and Diane Brody and several of the other guests who had come to Israel for the Kreisler wedding had also come to the *kibbutz* for the ceremony.

Owing to the time Bracha spent on her hands and knees caring for Channy's small children, her wardrobe was utilitarian and loose fitting for comfort. So, Jonathan was completely unprepared for the alluring dress Bracha had chosen for the occasion. Purplish in color with a sequined lilac sash around the waste, the dress was beautiful in its own right. However, its main distinction was how it emphasized Bracha's still attractive figure.

As Jonathan Bracha approach the *chuppah*, he couldn't help but recall the gaunt, but hauntingly beautiful, figure nurse Lara had possessed when she arrived at the Stelenberg DP Camp so many years before. She had obviously suffered before arriving at the camp. But, why had been a mystery as she had claimed to be a Swiss national—a citizen of a relatively well-fed neutral

country. The explanation—bearing on the privations she had endured as a German civilian—had been painful, but not painful enough to dampen the young Jonathan’s ardor. Now, twenty-eight years later, they were finally to be united. Bracha’s beautiful wedding dress both underscored the sadness of the long wait and the joy of what was to come. Jonathan stepped forward and took her hand in his as he directed her to where Rabbi Goldston was now seated.

Jonathan exulted as Bracha circled him seven times as a sign of her devotion, with Rabbi Goldston reciting the traditional prayer associated with each perambulation. Many years ago, Sarah had done the same at Jonathan’s first wedding. But, that episode of Jonathan’s life was a distant memory, whereas the combination of excitement and delight Jonathan now felt was almost trance like. When the ceremony had been completed, Jonathan crushed the traditional wedding glass—a remembrance of how the temple of ancient times had been crushed—and the small assembly of guests shouted *mazel tov*, in an outpouring of congratulations.

The *kibbutz* cooks had prepared a special feast for the occasion, with delicious wines made out of locally grown grapes, exotic salads and other middle eastern delicacies. There followed a sumptuous feast replete with *klezmer* music, dancing and the obligatory toasts. After everyone had had their fill and the children had been placed in the care of two young women who took them to the *kibbutz* playground, the wedding party and their guests sat back to relax and reminisce. Channy was the first to speak.

“Everyone here has already congratulated the happy couple whom I am so proud to call my parents. The shock of my father’s appearance in our lives took some getting used to. However, we had little time to reflect as each day brought a new sign of how much my mother still loved Jonathan and how much he had missed her. The only problem was that my mother has spent so much time with Jonathan that the rest of us barely have had much chance to get a word in edgewise. But, now that they’re an old married couple, I’d like to learn a little more about my father, starting with my grandparents.”

Jonathan was not accustomed to the amount of wine he had consumed and was feeling a little woozy. However, he had been looking forward to this moment and was about to speak. Before he could respond, Roni stood up. “As you all know, I owe a lot to Jonathan. For the moment, however, the one thing I don’t yet owe him is my heritage. I’m proud of the man who was my birth father, although someone I never met. But still, I’m jealous of my sister because, with Jonathan’s arrival, she gets to claim a built-in family history. I’d like that, too, so I can also delight in hearing stories about Jonathan’s past. So, in the hope I will not be causing embarrassment, I’d like to make a proposal. Jonathan, if you’ll have me, I’d like to take steps to formally become part of your past and present and take your name.”

Jonathan was now feeling a little dizzy, not to speak of overwhelmed by his good fortune. Somehow, he managed to recover. “I’d be proud to give you my last name, on one condition, however.”

Roni looked momentarily puzzled. However, he happily recovered as Jonathan continued to speak: “It will be the greatest pleasure to share my last name with you, but it will be an equally great pleasure if you preserve the name Wallenstein, your revered birth father’s last name, as your middle name. Now, let me tell you about Hannah and your grandparents.”

Jonathan now looked at both of his children and began. “Although we didn’t know it at the time, my mother was cut down by Nazi Brownshirts just before I turned fourteen. She had been on her way to visit her mother and Jakob’s family in Danzig. It was to be a goodbye visit for my family’s days in Germany were then numbered. My father had been a renowned anthropology scholar at the University of Hamburg, but his service was no longer welcome as Hitler had enacted legislation precluding Jews from keeping their academic posts.”

“Only the start of Hitler’s many anti-Semitic laws!” interjected Jakob.

“Unfortunately, yes. It would still be years before the Nazi leadership settled on a final plan to liquidate the Jews of Europe. But, for my family, the early anti-Semitic legislation was devastating. On the day my mother boarded the train for Danzig, my father and I were bound for England where he had accepted another academic position. We had planned to reunite as a family in England, but it never materialized. Only months later did we find out what had happened to my mother. This was made possible thanks to on the ground inquiries made by Yaron’s father, Lorenz Kreisler, who, at the time of my mother’s disappearance, was a German official married to Yaron’s Jewish mother.”

“Don’t forget my connection,” rang out Charlie. “I’d like to be linked to some of Lorenz’s accomplishments as he is my uncle. After all, it was my father who urged him to investigate Aunt Hannah’s disappearance. That investigation persuaded my uncle to seek safety for his family in Denmark. From there, Lorenz and his family were able to escape to neutral Sweden in the great sea exodus of 1943. Ultimately, Lorenz returned to Germany with my Aunt Agatha where Lorenz has played a leading role in Germany’s relations with Israel.”

Smiling, Jonathan resumed. “There’s no way anyone is going to forget anything about you. You were the one who made it easy for me when my father and I arrived in England and we’ve been best friends forever. But, back to my parents. My mother had studied anatomy in Berlin where she had met my father at the university. She wanted to be a doctor, following in her father’s footsteps, but the path wasn’t then available to a woman. Instead, in Hamburg, she became a schoolteacher and taught biology. But, more than that, she was the one who raised me as a result of my father spending so much of his academic time in the field, usually Africa. My parents had lost a child, my sister Gisela, and, to make up for the void, my mother doted on me.

Jonathan paused to take in the appreciative nods and comments of his listeners, and then he continued. “Not surprisingly, I worshipped my mother and never gave my frequently absent father very much credit. It was only after we arrived in England and I was able to observe his steadfastness, despite losing my mother, that I really began to appreciate him. Luckily, I had help. In England, my father discovered Charlie’s aunt Vanessa, the second love of his life and my second mother. Vanessa’s care and nurturing not only provided a lifeline to both my father and me, but also helped bring us closer together.”

“My aunt was a lovely person,” interjected Charlie one more time, but Jonathan’s dad helped bring out her best attributes.”

“Thank you. My father knew how to endear himself to people and it paid off as he operated at the highest levels both before and during the war. His acquaintances and colleagues spanned the ranks from Churchill and Montgomery to a young Libyan boy he had taught to speak English during his doctoral studies in North Africa. That boy, Mustafa Khalil, was later instrumental in aiding my father’s intelligence gathering on Rommel’s military plans.”

As Roni listened, he became more and more spellbound. “How did he wind up pursuing Rommel?”

“Interestingly, Gila’s father, Alex Braxton, had a lot to do with it. Alex was then a high-ranking figure in Britain’s intelligence community, the SIS or MI6. He met my father through an Oxford classmate. Among other things, he persuaded my father and his future bride, Vanessa, to spend their planned Egyptian honeymoon on a Nile riverboat spying on a German general. The episode had been a great success and began a relationship between Alex and my father that eventually brought my father to Bletchley Park and then, following Vanessa’s untimely death, to the Libyan desert where Rommel was wreaking havoc. The Bletchley episode was of particular interest to Alex as he had just discovered his Jewish roots and wanted my father to be his intelligence conduit for the atrocities that were being committed against the Jews under Nazi control in the east.”

Displaying a broad smile, Gila followed up. “My father, who will be here at our son’s wedding, still speaks glowingly of Jonathan’s father. He never tires of repeating the story of how he persuaded Anton to exchange his honeymoon ticket for a short Nile boat ride for a much longer Nile journey replete with a mission to spy on a sociopathic Nazi general and his wife. At Bletchley, Anton’s discoveries of the Nazi abominations in Eastern Europe reinforced my father’s concern for the plight of Europe’s Jews. His commitment to his Jewish past ultimately led to my embracing Judaism and to finding Yaron as my life’s partner.”

For a moment there was silence. Then, seemingly eager to hear everything about his soon-to-be-father in one sitting, Roni blurted out, “Tell us about California. A lot of Israelis are moving there. So, it must be quite nice.”

“I only lived there for two and a half years before the war—long enough to get engaged, but too short to really get a handle on the west coast. I never returned on a permanent basis after learning that my fiancée, whose name was Leslie Abelstein, had married Charlie’s rake of a brother, Randy. I have been back from time to time to visit Charlie and Diane and I’ve even renewed my friendship with Leslie and Randy. However, I think that Charlie is much more of an expert on the state. What do you say Charlie?”

“It’s a big state and I can only offer views on the Los Angeles area. It’s very different today than when Jonathan and I were graduate students at UCLA, he in the medical school and I in the law school. Back then, the opportunities were limitless even for Jews. I parlayed my law school training into a career that focused on real estate development as much as law and, happily, have had a lot of success as the region has grown beyond all expectation. By contrast, my best friend in the law school was Leslie’s brother, Lester Abelstein. He was very smart and could easily have pursued the same path with me. However, after having been assigned to an important post in Washington during the war, he decided to remain there and make it his career. So, while the Southern California area offered boundless opportunities, it was always a matter of what appealed to each individual. For my part, I still love the climate, the laid back feel of the place and the easy access to the ocean. Apparently, so do a number of Israelis who have made it their home. But, many people have lost their enthusiasm for the area because of the high cost of living and the congestion.”

Making sure Roni’s curiosity had been satisfied, Jonathan now turned in the direction of Yaron and Gila. “My new wife and I are looking forward to Efraim and Haviva’s wedding. First, we’ll be going on our own honeymoon. But, rest assured. I do not have Nile riverboat tickets and

we will not be spying on anyone while we're away." As the laughs died down, Jonathan continued. "But, I do hope we will have stories to tell as I have a surprise for Bracha that involves tickets."

Now it was Bracha's turn to take center stage as all eyes were directed to her. "I'm sure I'll be delighted. But, I have to admit being at a loss. We have talked about a honeymoon. But, everyone knows domestic flights out of the country are almost impossible to come by due to the war. So, my new husband, where are we going?"

"Rank does have its privileges. As I think everyone is aware, I have agreed to accept a surgical position at Rambam. But, I first have to return to Boston to wrap up my practice and arrange to find new medical care for my patients. The chief of surgery at Rambam, a former ranking army combat doctor, appreciates the importance of my taking care of these matters. In gratitude for my agreeing to join his staff, he has arranged for Bracha and me to board the first available government flight to Boston. With Bracha's consent, I'm looking forward to showing her off to my great friend Dr. Stanley Rothman."

"I'd love it," beamed Bracha.

"I was hoping you'd say that. For those of you who don't know, Stanley invested a lot of personal capital in enabling Bracha's and my romance to flourish when I first met her at the Stelenberg DP camp, and I can't wait for him to see the end result of his investment."

As Bracha continued to beam, her two children pulled her toward Jonathan where the newly married couple delighted the attendees with a prolonged wedding kiss.

Chapter 4

Boston: Honeymoon in the States November 1973

As Jonathan and Bracha walked down their plane's boarding stairs in the private aircraft section of Logan Airport, they were greeted by unseasonably warm New England weather. It had taken only a few minutes to retrieve their luggage and pass through customs and now they were in a taxi on their way to Jonathan's home in Newton. As the cab drove along Storrow Drive, Bracha marveled at the beauty of the Charles and of the charm of the cupola-clad dormitories on the Harvard side of the river. Bracha lifted her gaze from the sparkling water of the Charles to look at Jonathan. "It's so beautiful here. How can I make you leave?"

"It is beautiful. But so is my newly adopted country, not to speak of my newly added family. I'll probably keep my house in Newton and rent it out. So, we'll have plenty of opportunity to return here for visits. But, in the meantime, rest assured. I'm looking forward to my new life in Israel and have no regrets about what I'm leaving behind."

"You are a wonder. What are the large buildings on the left?"

"That's Boston University's main campus. It's a large school. I've been teaching at the medical school for many years. Its campus is across town. There are over 150,000 students in Boston. While Harvard and MIT get most of the press, they only represent a fraction of the students in town. On a beautiful fall weekend like this one, about one in five people you'll see on the streets of Boston and Cambridge are students."

"How far is Cornell from here, where you went to college?"

"It's about a five-hour drive. I was hoping you'd ask because it, too, is a beautiful place and I'd love to take you there."

"Of course. Anything you want to do while we're here, I want to do, especially if it enables me to learn more about you."

For the remainder of the drive, Jonathan and Bracha held hands silently as they took in the sights. Before they knew it, they had arrived at Jonathan's house in Newton. After showing Bracha around, Jonathan called Stan Rothman to let him know that Bracha and he had arrived safely. Stan conveyed his eagerness in seeing Bracha again and asked for a little notice as he had a surprise in mind.

After the call, Jonathan immediately set out to tackle the tasks at hand. For the next week, he woke up early so that he could attend to patient and hospital matters and still have time to spend with Bracha. She was an appreciative tourist and Jonathan loved showing her the Boston Commons, Harvard Square and the shops on Newbury Street, where the two of them bought presents for Channy, Roni and the grandchildren.

Finally, Jonathan announced that everything seemed to be in place and that he had attended the last of the goodbye parties his colleagues had put on for him. "That's an amazing feat," observed Bracha as she greeted Jonathan following his last office party, "and in just one week. Now, I'm looking forward to spending a little time with Stan Rothman."

“I am. But, before we visit Stan, I would like to visit the one person in the world I’ve thought about over the years as much as you.”

“I’m a little taken aback,” exclaimed Bracha. “It’s not that I begrudge you. It’s just that it’s such a surprise.”

“I’m sorry to have startled you. I should have phrased my statement a little differently, or at least said something earlier.”

“Well don’t leave me hanging. It’s nice being number one after all these years and I have to confess I’m not eager to share the spotlight.”

“And you shall not. Your competition is a little girl—my sweet Helena who has been gone for more than twenty-five years, but whose memory has always been with me. I’d like to visit her grave since I may not have the opportunity for a while. It’s not something you have to do.”

“Of course, I have to go. She’s part of you and, for that reason, it’s important that I go with you so I can learn about her. The weather is supposed to be nice. Let’s go tomorrow.”

The following day, Bracha and Jonathan set out for the *Mishkan Tefilah* Cemetery in West Roxbury where tiny Helena had been buried at the age of twenty months. Following tradition, Jonathan placed several pebbles on her small headstone and then stepped back as he tried to hold in his tears. Bracha looked on not quite knowing what to say. But she wanted to share the experience in some unquantifiable manner. She thought the best way was simply to ask about the child. “What was she like?”

The question gave Jonathan a chance to pull himself together and even allow the faintest smile to flicker across his face. “She was wonderful. She was bubbly with a hint of curly blonde hair she had inherited from her mother, and she had an infectious smile—that is, until she was eight months old when the disease began to rob her of everything that was beautiful. Her last months were spent in a special needs facility and it tore at the insides of my wife, Sarah, and me.”

“I’m so sorry, but I needed to know. It must have been so hard for each of you.”

“It was. I had married Sarah shortly after losing you. I was in love with love as much as anything. But our marriage needed more than that. We had hoped a child would help reinforce our relationship and, for a while after Helena was born, it did. But, when Helena died, the fissures in our marriage began to show. We grew distant and ultimately Sarah found someone else, another doctor, although one younger than I.”

“Do you know what happened to her?”

“I did at the beginning, but I’ve lost touch. She married the doctor and they moved to Chicago for his fellowship. When last I heard, they had two healthy kids who must be fully grown by now.”

“I once knew a doctor from Chicago. He said it was very nice.”

“A lot of people think so. It sits on a beautiful lake and has some impressive architecture. However, as with all older American cities, it has its problems.”

“Like what?”

“Primary race relations and corruption. But, in case you hadn’t guessed, Sarah and her husband will be at the wedding since their nephew Efraim is getting married. So, if they’re still living in Chicago, you’ll have a chance to hear all about it.”

“I had assumed so.”

“Good. I hope you won’t mind.”

“Not unless you do! In case you hadn’t noticed, I’m pretty self-reliant. As with most Israelis, we have a good instinct about what’s worth worrying about. Your remarried wife of many years ago is not cause for alarm of any kind. In fact, I’m kind of curious.”

“I have to confess, I’m curious as well. Seeing her will be interesting but talking about her and Helena at this special place has been what I really needed. It’s meant the world to me that you came along and were willing to hear me reminisce.”

“Smiling, Bracha took Jonathan’s hand. Let’s go visit Stan.”

Jonathan had called Stan to let him know Bracha and he would be visiting after lunch the following afternoon. Stan again expressed his excitement at seeing Bracha and thanked Jonathan for the notice so he could prepare his surprise.

The next morning, Jonathan noticed that Bracha was spending an unusual amount of time in front of the mirror getting ready for their visit to Stan. Teasingly, he noted that Bracha was spending more time preparing for Stan than she had preparing for their wedding. Bracha accepted the needling for what it was intended to be—a friendly taunt. However, with a look of half seriousness, she turned to her husband. “With you, there was little question of our future together once we rediscovered one another. Stan is another story. He has no reason to be committed to me. What if he doesn’t like me?”

Jonathan knew he had made a mistake in poking fun at his new bride, even in jest. Hoping to defuse the moment, he embraced Bracha and was relieved when she responded positively. As they held one another, their ardor intensified and, before long, they were under the covers making love.

When they arrived at Rothman’s apartment, Bracha knew immediately that she had nothing to worry about as her host took one look at her and then threw his arms around her in a great bear hug. As they separated from one another, Rothman took a long look at Bracha. “You’re as beautiful as I remember, especially your eyes. If you recall, it was those same beautiful eyes on the face of your dying mother that revealed your identity. Now, you look just like her and the memories of that remarkable time are pouring out.”

“For me as well. Remembering how my mother suffered makes me sad. But, remembering how kind you were to Jonathan and me despite discovering my mother and I were German disguised as Swiss makes me very happy.”

“Well, we needed some happiness to come out of that wretched camp.”

As the two visitors entered the room, they were surprised to see a young woman about Channy’s age sitting on the sofa. The woman rose to be introduced. She was tall and of a husky build with a pleasing round face and blonde curly hair. Her Eastern European ancestry was written all over her.

“Jonathan, or should I say Jonatan, and Bracha Sternbloom, I’d like you to meet Lara. On the subject of happiness coming out of Stelenberg, Lara is my cover girl. Lara, why don’t you explain.”

“Let me start with my name. My mother told me she hadn’t named me until she was safely out of Europe and with my cousins in the Dominican Republic. She is there now, but, since her experience in the concentration camps, she has always been frail ever. Otherwise, she would love to be here.”

Bracha sensed something special was taking place, but she couldn’t quite identify what it was. Instead, she could only say: “Lara used to be my name before I arrived in Israel where I later changed it to Bracha. “The name means ‘blessed’.” I changed it in thanks for my daughter’s recovery from a serious illness.”

“Yes. Dr. Rothman explained that to me when he called to say you would be here with Dr. Sternbloom.”

“I’m afraid I don’t quite understand,” replied Bracha still feeling perplexed.

“I think I can explain by telling you that my mother’s full name is Elsa Gabowitz.”

The realization of what Lara was saying finally hit both Bracha and Jonathan. “It can’t be!”, exclaimed Bracha. Are you the baby girl I delivered at Stelenberg with the help of Jonathan who was still an army medic at the time?”

“I am with a few years added on for good measure.”

“I can’t believe it,” exclaimed Bracha. It was such a difficult delivery. You were in breach position.”

“Yes. My mother told me all about it and how you had just arrived and were so confident and caring during the delivery. My mother hated the DP camp and didn’t want to wait forever to get to Israel. So, when she heard our cousins in the Dominican Republic would pay for our passage, she jumped at the chance. Despite her frailty, she spent many hard years working two jobs to repay them. But, she never forgot you and that’s why she chose to name me after you, even though it went against Jewish tradition to name a child after a living person.”

But how did you find us?”

“I think I can answer that,” interjected Stan. “When I heard Jonathan and you were coming, I began to reminisce about Stenberg and started to think about the patients we had treated at the camp. I had forgotten most of their names, but I remembered Elsa’s first name because of the role her delivery played in bringing the two of you together. I have a friend in the Holocaust Studies Department at Brandeis. Together, we went through their source material for the DP camps in Germany and there it was—Stenberg. I found the name Elsa Gabowitz among the patients who had given birth and then I remembered hearing her say she had family in the Dominican Republic. A few long distance phone calls later, and I was talking to her through her cousins who speak English. Remarkably, she told me Lara had studied nursing at Boston College and was now an obstetrics nurse here in Boston. I was flabbergasted. I called Lara, using the number her mother had given me. As you can see, Lara was excited to hear from me and indicated how much she wanted to meet the two of you.”

“It’s true,” underscored Lara. The Jesuits at Boston College must have thought I was Catholic since I came from the Dominican Republic. In any event, they gave me a full scholarship for which I am very thankful. As an additional expression of thanks, I decided to follow in the shoes of my namesake—you, Mrs. Sternbloom—and became an obstetrics nurse.”

Stan, Lara, Jonathan and Bracha reminisced for the better part of an hour when Lara announced she had to leave for her shift. Everyone hugged and Lara said goodbye, leaving the remaining three to continue their reminiscences.

“That was amazing,” offered Jonathan. “Thank you so much.”

“It was wonderful for me as well. It got me to thinking about the ugliness of the war, but also about the many lives we managed to save. Do you remember that day in Bastogne during the Battle of the Bulge when I was hit by shrapnel and you took over the surgery of that soldier’s leg.”

“How could I not. It was a seminal moment in my life when I decided to be a surgeon. Don’t tell me you’ve also been in touch with that patient!”

“I wish I could say I had. The combination of my wounds and our breaking camp blocked out just about everything else. But, it was such a special day for both of us that I often think about that soldier and hope he used his repaired leg to good advantage. There were so many others who passed through practically unnoticed except for the treatment of their wounds. I guess we’ll never know what happened to them.”

“Sadly, there were so many that they often became a blur. A few, however, do stand out,” intoned Jonathan.

“I guess for all of us that’s true. You’ve tapped into my curiosity,” interjected Bracha. “Who do you have in mind?”

“None more so than Roni of course, but I do have a few in mind. There was the emaciated Buchenwald prisoner whose arm Stan and I treated when the camp was liberated. His name was György Frankel and he had been at Auschwitz and had endured the death march from Auschwitz to Buchenwald. He was no more than twenty-five but, in his emaciated state, looked years older. He was suffering from unbelievable malnutrition but had managed to stay alive largely because a bunkmate, knowing he was dying, had given him his rations. Later it turned out that the dying man was the rabbi who had married Frankel’s parents. But the one episode that stands out most

occurred before I met Stan. I was a medic with Mark Clark's 34th Infantry Division at Monte Cassino during the Italian campaign."

"I remember you telling me about this experience. It was pretty moving. I know Bracha will want to hear about it. But forgive me. I'm interrupting."

"No offense taken. It was a terrible time as we marched through the Liri Valley on our way to Rome. At Monte Casino, one of the last Nazi strongholds on the Italian mainland, the casualties were almost as numerous as at Bastogne. One night when the fighting had quieted down, another medic and I ventured out to look for wounded soldiers. Fortunately, we were aided by a full moon. After trudging for a few miles, we discovered a wounded American soldier. Surprisingly, his wound had somehow been dressed though no GI medic from our field station had preceded us to the area. Curiosity got the best of me. So, I spent a few minutes scouring the area while my fellow medic prepared the wounded soldier to be carried back on a field stretcher. As I looked around, I heard some murmuring from behind a bush. We didn't carry any weapons. So, I was quite concerned for my safety. But, when I looked, I found a wounded German army medic who had dressed his own wound. His dressing and the dressing applied to wounded American soldier were clearly the same and the solution to the mystery of who had aided the wounded American was obvious."

"But there were only two of you and the American needed stretcher bearers. What could you do for two wounded men?", interposed Bracha.

"Our first allegiance was to the wounded GI. So, we brought him in, leaving the German behind. When we got back, I couldn't sleep wondering about the German medic. The area was well marked. So, I knew where we had left him. Finally, under the subterfuge of looking for more of our wounded, I was allowed to leave our compound and I returned to where we had left the German. He could walk with my help. So, I brought him in."

"That must have been quite a surprise."

"It was a big enough surprise that I was summoned to the quarters of our commanding officer, a colonel from Alabama named Blaine Stewart. I knew I was in for it because I had left under false pretenses to look for the German medic, and, indeed, I got dressed down pretty severely by the Colonel. However, as I was getting ready to leave, a smile crept across his face, and he put his arm on my shoulder. First, he thanked me for rescuing the wounded American, a young man named Jimmy Wilkins, who, as it turned out, was the son of the colonel's best friend in Birmingham, Alabama. But, even more importantly, he thanked me for bringing a little humanity to our battalion. I've often thought about that day, but, somehow, never got around to inquiring about either the colonel or Jimmy."

At that, the three agreed that additional story telling would have to await another day and Bracha and Jonathan said goodbye. On the short drive back to Newton, Jonathan turned to Bracha and asked playfully: "Enough surprises for one day?"

"I guess so. I have to say, I'm feeling a little overwhelmed. This is turning out to be quite a trip. But, for our next outing, maybe we should aim for something a little less stupefying."

“I quite agree. The weather is supposed to be nice the next couple of days and, because it’s a late fall, the leaf colors should be beautiful. Why don’t we get in the car and go for drive in the country?”

“What do you have in mind?”

“As you had expressed an interest in visiting Cornell, I was thinking of driving west to Ithaca.”

“That sounds really nice. If I recall, you said it was about a five-mile drive.”

“Yes. As you know, years of early morning surgeries have made me an early riser. So, we could start early in the morning and you could sleep in the car for however long you want. In that way, we’ll get to the school while it is still daylight outside.”

“When shall we go?”

“I have to make a call first. But, if all goes well, how’s tomorrow morning sound?”

The next morning Jonathan and Bracha were in the car by 6:00 AM with plenty of food and clothing packed for an overnight. As anticipated, Bracha slept while Jonathan drove. Two hours later, he woke her to take in the beginning of a new day as they drove along the Mohawk Trail through the beautiful Berkshire Mountains of western Massachusetts. After an hour or so, Bracha dozed off again, but only after repeatedly commenting on the beauty of their surroundings. The next time she woke, they were already in Ithaca, climbing the winding road up to the Cornell campus.

Jonathan parked the car in the visitors parking lot and they started walking around the school, beginning in West Campus at the neogothic Baker Dormitories where Jonathan had lived for most of his years on campus. “The dormitory buildings are so stately,” exclaimed Bracha. “I’ve seen pictures of Oxford and these buildings look like they came right out of England.”

“They were built early in the century in the Gothic style. Do you see the two impressive towers at the north and south ends of the complex?”

“Yes.”

“They are twin memorial towers, one for the army and one for the navy, and serve as a memorial to the 264 Cornellians who lost their lives in the First World War. I was required to learn that when I lived in the dormitory.”

They next came to the university’s classic Arts Quad, its lawns teeming with students. Beautiful in its own right, the quad was made more resplendent by splashes of color from the variety of trees surrounding the quad. As they passed by northern red oaks, American elms, sweetgums, basswoods and several varieties of maple, Bracha couldn’t stop raving about the campus. “It’s so lovely here. You must make this trip often.”

“Actually, I haven’t been here since I was on leave from Camp Shanks downstate in Orangeburg just before setting sail in 1942 for the war in Europe.”

“That’s surprising? How come?”

“I’ll explain after we walk over the Triphammer foot bridge where you can look down into one of Cornell’s most impressive gorges. I also want to show you where I played soccer, my ZBT fraternity house and the reading room of the law school library where I did much of my studying. You won’t be disappointed.”

Indeed, Bracha was not disappointed. After visiting the soccer field, the ZBT fraternity house and walking along Fall Creek and Beebe Lake to the gorge overlook on the Triphammer Bridge, Bracha was grateful to sit down in the law school library reading room. As her eyes darted from the room’s chandeliers to its vaulted ceilings, she tried to imagine Jonathan’s joy in studying in such a surrounding. As she did, the question again entered her mind why he hadn’t returned to this beautiful place of his youth. “I’m ready for my explanation.”

“I thought you might be. Bear with me for a couple more minutes as we head to the chemistry building. There’s somebody there I want you to meet.”

“Don’t tell me; another surprise!”

“I’m afraid so. As a feeble apology, all I can say is I didn’t even know about this meeting until I called the university after we got home yesterday afternoon and found out that my old professor, Andrew Dalton, was still around. It wasn’t until last night that I reached him. By then, you were asleep. He insisted we visit and said he had a lot he’d like to get off his chest. When he started telling me what was on his mind, I asked him to hold off so you could hear. So here we are.”

Bracha frowned. But then she relented and smiled as she acknowledged to herself that life with Jonathan was likely to be full of surprises. When they arrived at the lobby of the building, Jonathan looked at the directory and found the name he sought—Andrew Dalton, Distinguished Professor of Chemistry *emeritus*. After walking up one flight of stairs, they spotted Dalton’s office and knocked.

A much older Andrew Dalton greeted them at the door. At seventy-four, he still had good posture and a full head of hair. Most impressive, however, were his eyes which still shown with the intelligence and intensity of a younger man. “Jonathan, it’s so good to see you, and congratulations to Bracha and you on your recent marriage. It’s been more than thirty years, but I’m so happy to have the chance to clear my conscience and try to make amends.”

Now, Bracha was on high alert as she realized a part of Jonathan’s past previously unknown to her was about to be revealed.

Jonathan was about to protest that amends were not necessary, when Dalton put up his hand squelching the protest in midstream. He then looked at Bracha as he addressed both of his guests. “As Jonathan will tell, Cornell in the 1930’s was not as friendly a place for Jews as it is today. Sure, we still have separate Jewish and gentile fraternity houses, although they are not nearly as rigidly separated as they were then. But, by and large, we have become a much more open place especially since the civil rights movement and the Viet Nam war.”

Bracha was now listening intently, eagerly waiting for Dalton to continue.

“Jonathan was one of our best students when he was here. He not only excelled in the classroom, but he also did double duty as a star athlete on the soccer field. He should have had no worries about getting into medical school. As head of the pre-med program and his advisor, that’s what I told him at the beginning of his senior year. I also told him that the pre-med department would unanimously back his application and urged him to apply to our then new medical school campus in New York City without the need to apply elsewhere. In so doing, I almost ruined his life and I’ve been ashamed ever since. You see, Jewish slots at the medical school were then subject to a rigid quota and I hadn’t taken that into account when I built up Jonathan’s expectations. Frankly, it hadn’t crossed my mind since none of our prior premed students had ever been rejected by the medical school after receiving the unanimous endorsement of the premed faculty.”

Again, Jonathan tried to interject, but again Dalton held up his hand. “Just before Christmas, when it was almost too late for Jonathan to apply to another medical school, I had to tell him that his application to Cornell’s medical school had been rejected because all of the Jewish openings had been given to children of Jewish doctors who had graduated from the medical school. That was bad enough, but what I didn’t tell him was that the last such Jewish slot had been given to a student who was poorly qualified. I later found out that the student never made it through his first year. Fortunately, by then, Jonathan had found another place at the UCLA Medical School. But, to this day, I still chastise myself for having been so blind and for almost having snuffed out a highly promising medical career due to my naiveté. Now, after so many years, I’m honored and humbled to see Jonathan in my office under infinitely more favorable circumstances. I’ve had a chance to check out Jonathan’s career. It’s a shame that UCLA and Tufts get all the recognition because you would have been a sterling credit to the Cornell Medical School.”

Jonathan could only shake his old professor’s hand. “I’ll admit, I was quite taken last night when you started to tell me how happy you were to hear from me and ease your conscience. But, to hear it expressed the way you just did has been immensely restorative. I’m so grateful. I guess I’ve been carrying a grudge for a long time and holding it against a place I loved so dearly for most of my four years here. Now, thanks to you, I think I’m ready to put my resentment behind me.”

“As you should since you’ve managed to shame all of your former detractors at the medical school with the career you’ve enjoyed. In any event, I know you wanted to hear what I had to say both for your own benefit and so that Bracha would have a better understanding of your past. I hope I’ve accomplished that.”

Smiling, Bracha gave Dalton a hug. As they separated, she said what both Jonathan and she had been thinking. “I think we’ve all benefitted from this meeting.”

When they got to the car, Bracha looked at the man whose presence she had missed for more than twenty-eight years, smiled, and could only say, “I think I’m beginning to like surprises.”

Chapter 5

Nice, France: War and Diversification August 1939

From his third-floor office suite situated above Nice's elegant *Promenade des Anglais*, Bernard Krauss could look across the palm-tree lined boulevard to the Hotel Negresco and its private beach on the sparkling French Riviera. Bernard never tired of watching the parade of dignitaries and *bon vivants* as they entered and left the hotel, entranced more by the hotel's legendary Royal Lounge with its Baccarat 16, 309 carat, crystal chandelier than by the cruel and devastating depression that had overtaken the country and most of Europe. Bernard had managed to weather the economic forces of the times, but had never given way to the showy display of obliviousness exhibited at the hotel. Rather, as a Jew who appreciated the need for understatement in an increasingly inhospitable world, he had chosen to parlay his business success into prudent investments rather than anything that might draw attention to him.

Bernard and his brother Maurice and their families were third generation residents of Nice. Their grandfather Horace had moved to the city in 1860. It was shortly after Victor Emanuel of Sardinia had started his campaign to unite the Italian peninsula. In return for the promise of French Emperor, Napoleon III, to support Emanuel's campaign, the Sardinian had promised Nice to Napoleon, thereby breaking off Nice's centuries old relationship with the Italian House of Savoy. Horace had started a manufacturing and export business focused on the area's leather industry and on the perfumes and fragrances produced in nearby Grasse, the country's perfume capital.

Bernard and Maurice had no difficulty dividing up the day-to-day responsibilities of the business, as Maurice was a connoisseur of leather, while Bernard loved the world of perfume and the flower farms and orchards of Grasse. Often during growing season, Bernard would make the short drive from Nice and watch the early morning flower picking, morning being the time when the flowers were at their aromatic height. Even from a distance, Bernard's heightened sense of smell could distinguish between different varieties of jasmine, lavender, mimosa, myrtle, orange blossom and rose.

The Krauss family business had managed not only to survive, but to flourish over the years, despite hardship, war and economic reversals. First, there was the loss of France's industrial base of Alsace-Lorraine in the Franco Prussian War of 1870 and the political tumult that followed culminating in the brutal suppression of the Paris Commune of 1871. Then there was the blow to the country's wine industry caused by the crop-destroying phylloxera epidemic of the 1880's, and the destruction of so much of the country heartland and the flower of its youth during the Great War. In all these episodes, there had been a scrappy perseverance and an ability to adapt to conditions no matter how dispiriting.

However, starting with the rise of the National Socialists in Germany in the early 1930s, Bernard's fears had begun to mount. For years, he had had reliable Jewish clients in Germany who had been the backbone of his business in central Europe. But, as Hitler's decrees against the Jews of Germany had grown in their severity, so had the difficulty of communicating with Bernard's German affiliates. Following the Nuremberg decrees of 1935 that disenfranchised Germany's Jews leaving them without citizenship or involvement in the social fabric of the rest of the country, communication had all but terminated. Since then, Bernard had worried about the

future of his country, not to speak of his family's business. Hitler's early-1936 seizure of the Rhineland, the demilitarized zone along the Rhine River, in violation of the Treaty of Paris that followed the Great War, only added to Bernard's anxiety.

Bernard was aware that France had hardened its boundaries with Germany. However, he had little faith in the line of defense that France's leaders had heralded as their bulwark against German invasion and that had cost the stupendous sum of three billion francs. Named after French Minister of Defense André Maginot, the Maginot Line consisted of a series of fortifications and anti-tank barriers positioned about 15 kilometers apart and interspersed with machine gun casements, all positioned along the would-be route of an invading German army. However, Bernard's experience as an officer in the Great War had persuaded him that the instruments of war, such as the newly-introduced tanks and aerial weapons of the Great War, were ever changing and that there was no guaranty the Germans would limit themselves to invading along the Line and not find another route such as through the seemingly impenetrable Ardennes Forest.

Bernard's solution to his anxiety had been to diversify. First, after consulting with Maurice, Bernard had sought out Angelo Mordechai Donati, an Italian Jew who was then living in Paris and with whose bank Bernard and his family had conducted their finances for several decades. He had proposed to Donati that he purchase part of the Krauss family's manufacturing and export business. Their negotiations had gone on for the better part of two years, but Bernard sensed that Donati was now ready and he had gone to Paris in the hope of cementing a deal. Before meeting with Donati, he had walked around the city and could not help but observe the lack of concern on the faces of the Parisians.

"How could they not be concerned," he thought. In the preceding year, he recounted to himself, "Germany had incorporated Austria in a bloodless coup in what had become known as the *Anschluss*, the so-called great European powers, England, France and Italy, had timidly acceded to Hitler's demand that the Czechoslovak Republic cede its German-speaking region, the *Sudentenland*, back to Germany. Then, under pressure from the *Fuhrer*, the Czechoslovak Republic's Slovak region had declared its independence from the rest of the country, allowing Germany to step in and claim a protectorate over Bohemia and Moravia, the remaining portions of the former republic. This it had done the preceding March as German soldiers marched into Prague, the capital of Bohemia. With Germany now at its border, Poland panicked and Neville Chamberlain, had seen enough. England would take action to discourage Hitler from overrunning another country. The result was England's guaranty, joined in by France, of the integrity of Poland's borders."

At length, Bernard had reached Donati's offices. The well-groomed banker greeted Bernard whom he had previously met on numerous occasions. "How is your stay and how have you spent the morning?"

When Bernard responded by describing his observations about the Parisians he had seen on the streets, Donati merely shook his head in acknowledgment. "I trace my family's European roots back to the sixteenth century when my ancestor Donato Donati settled in Modena. My grandfather was an advisor to Victor Emanuel and my father took our bank through the Great War without losing a franc or a lira."

Bernard nodded appreciatively. "Thankfully, with your capable financial assistance, my family has prospered with yours."

“Yes. We have had some good times. But now I’m afraid. I worry for our fellow Jews who have suffered greatly under the Nazi regime, but I worry that a demagogue like Hitler could bring the whole continent to its knees and cause incalculable suffering. We have talked about the Maginot Line in the past and I know your views. Sadly, I have come to the same conclusion and fear for the future of Paris. For that reason, I’m arranging to transfer most of my affairs to the south and, you’ll be interested in knowing, I’m now thinking about moving to Nice.”

“That is a pleasant surprise.”

“From your point of view it should be even more pleasant because my bank has decided to accept your offer for a substantial interest in your family’s business. So, you and I will be able to conduct our affairs in close proximity to one another.”

At the same time Bernard had first approached Donati, he had also begun thinking about his second approach at diversification--investing in more stable economic environments than Central Europe. It might never have occurred to him to invest in Canadian mining companies. However, the idea had come to him two years earlier. Bernard and his wife Collette had traveled to Canada during the summer of 1938 to attend the wedding of their son Julien, a rising second-year law student at Montreal’s McGill University, to Kayla Lewis an undergraduate beauty from South Africa.

The wedding had been stunning as had the reception that followed. When it came Julien’s time to toast his bride, he recounted how Kayla’s brother, Edgar, who was also a fraternity brother of Julien’s, had introduced him to Kayla shortly after she had arrived on campus from Cape Town as a freshman. It had been love at first sight proclaimed Julien, as his beaming bride shook her head in approval, and noted how they had become pinned shortly after the close of Kayla’s first semester. But, even then, Julien admitted, he had been worried. As he looked at Kayla, she smiled knowingly.

“You see, we had just gotten pinned, but Kayla was expecting a Christmas break visit from a former beau named Jonathan whom she had met two years previously at *Kibbutz Ramah Gan* in Palestine. I tried to get her to call off the visit, but she was too considerate for that. She said that Jonathan was a St. Paul’s grad and had given up going to Oxford for Cornell, so he could be closer to her, and that he was entitled to an explanation in person. Even worse, she mentioned he was an athlete and a premed student. I thought I was a big shot because I was headed for law school here at McGill, but, even at that, I was more than a little bit nervous. I had to think fast and the best I could do was insist that Edgar be present when Jonathan arrived at McGill.”

“A rather unfair position to put me in,” yelled out Edgar, an affected look of mock hurt on his face.

“Exactly, and it worked. Edgar later reported that Kayla had been gracious but firm with Jonathan. But, to keep me on my toes, he also mentioned, quite mischievously, I might note, that I had good cause to worry as Jonathan was a good looking fellow. Well, I guess I didn’t have that much to worry about as Kayla stayed with her end of the bargain and soon accepted an engagement ring in place of my fraternity pin. And, now here I am, toasting as beautiful a bride as has ever graced the halls of our venerable university. Let’s raise a glass to Kayla: may she always be gracious and firm, especially to former suitors.”

Bernard had heard the story several times before, but still delighted in its retelling if only because it emphasized how good a catch Kayla had been. As he sat down to dinner, he discovered he had been seated next to one of Kayla's relatives from South Africa. Kayla's father and most of his South African relatives had found success in the clothing and haberdashery business—among those few enterprises that had been opened to South Africa's small but growing Jewish community. However, uncharacteristically, Bernard's table mate had ventured into the mining business and was now regaling his fellow guests with stories of his success in the country's diamond industry. At the same time, however, the man had opined that opportunities in South Africa were beginning to decline. By contrast, he had suggested that the mining industry in Canada offered limitless possibilities for anyone bold enough to take the plunge.

Bernard had not only listened with attention, but had chosen to remain in Canada for two weeks following the wedding so he could explore investment opportunities in the mineral industry. With Julien by his side, Bernard had looked into investing in copper, nickel and gold mine properties and eventually had identified three promising young companies in need of capital. He had been troubled by the remote location of the properties operated by the companies. He had great confidence in his son's ability to look after matters, but wondered how even Julien could keep an eye on the properties, given their distance from Montreal. Bernard's solution had been to encourage his son to take flying lessons and obtain a pilot's license.

On this warm August 1939 afternoon, Bernard had ample cause to be thankful for the investments he had made in Canada and for having just arranged for a large bank draft containing the funds received from Donati to be sent to Julien for deposit in Canada's venerable Bank of Montreal. Hitler and Stalin had just announced a non-aggression pact that had become known by the name of the pact's negotiators, the Russian Vayecheslav Molotov and the German Joachim von Ribbentrop. Under the pact, the two countries had divided Poland into spheres of influence. Bernard knew that the division would enable Hitler to begin his quest for the subjugation of western and central Europe unimpeded by the Russian bear. "A German invasion of Poland cannot be far away," Bernard thought, "and, with such an invasion, France will be called upon to uphold its promise to defend Poland's borders."

Sadly, his fears were well founded as one week later, on September 3, 1939, Germany invaded Poland. Immediately, England and France declared war on Germany. But, neither country was able to make good on its promise to protect Poland. France did mount one offensive action in early September when it sent thirty French divisions toward the Saarland in Germany's western frontier in the hope of penetrating the enemy's defenses and continuing on to help the stricken Poles. However, the French columns were able to advance only eight kilometers before they encountered resistance at the German line of defense known as the Siegfried line and were forced to back down. By September 23, 1939, nearly 200,000 Poles had fallen to the Nazi onslaught and Warsaw had capitulated.

In Canada, Parliament was not scheduled to return to Ottawa until October 2. However, immediately following the British declaration of war against Germany, the government of William Mackenzie King called back Parliament on September 7 for the purpose of debating a war resolution against Germany. On September 9, both the Canadian Senate and House of Commons authorized a declaration of war. The following day, Mackenzie King's cabinet drafted the declaration and directed that it be presented to King George VI. Canada had entered the war.

However, in keeping with the views expressed earlier in March by both of Canada's major political parties, the declaration was not accompanied by a bill calling for conscription for overseas duty.

In Nice, as Bernard was trying to piece together the most recent wartime news, he read of the Canadian decision not to introduce overseas conscription. He breathed a sigh of relief as he thought about his son in Montreal. Julien's well-being was of course of primary concern to Bernard who still carried scars from the Great War and didn't want to see the same inflicted on his son. In addition, Julien's services were needed to oversee the family's new mineral investments in Canada's back country, and, of equal importance, Julien had just entered his last year of law school at McGill and Bernard was relieved to know his son would be able to complete his studies without having to worry about conscription. Even so, Bernard knew of his son's propensities and worried that Julian, who had become a Canadian citizen at Bernard's urging, might yet take up arms against Germany once he completed his studies, especially if Canada was then actively engaged in the war against the Hun.

Chapter 6

Nice, France: As the “Phoney” War Comes to an End, Danger Lurks September 1939-May 1940

For eight months following France’s ill-fated Saarland offensive, Europe’s western front remained relatively quiet as Hitler’s army, the *Wermacht*, and his air force, the *Luftwaffe*, focused their attention on Poland. There were skirmishes as German and French forces squared off from their respective vantage points on the Siegfried and Maginot Lines, and France and England instituted naval blockades. However, the only significant fighting outside of Poland occurred when Russia invaded Finland in November, causing three months of wintry fighting that came to be known as the Winter War and giving rise to discussions about England and France invading Scandinavia so as to cut off Germany from its main source of wartime steel.

During this uneasy and unpredictable time, life in both England and France managed to go on without great disruption aside from the substantial troop buildups in both countries. As Canadian troops began entering England, a kind of fatalism set in characterized by both fear and a sense of inevitability.

In Nice, Bernard anguished over the difficulty of conducting an export business when maritime transport was subject to the vagaries and dangers of modern submarine warfare and surface blockades. However, Maurice and he managed to salvage much of their flower interests in Grasse by looking inward and selling domestically rather than through exports across the Mediterranean or by selling to Germany and Central Europe.

Their reduced activity gave each of them greater opportunity to spend time with families, allowing Bernard to devote himself more to his wife, Collette, and their teenage daughter, Gabrielle, and permitting Maurice and his wife, Jacquelyn, to dote on their teenage son, Leon, and his much younger sister, Natalie. But it was Leon who took up most of the time of both families.

Born deaf, Leon had always shown great intellectual ability. Julien was five years older than Leon and, therefore, had not formed a close attachment to him. However, Gabrielle was the same age as her cousin and had always shown him great kindness and patience.

Leon had received training from local specialists in Nice and every summer, Jacquelyn spent six weeks with him in Paris so he could attend one of the Parisian day schools for the deaf. Consistent with the prevailing practices, his instructors had taught him using the oralist approach to speech education. Under oralism, deaf students like Leon were taught through exposure to oral language, lip reading and by replication of mouth positions and breathing patterns employed by hearing speakers. Despite his instruction, Leon had never developed more than a marginal command of verbal communication.

Oralism had replaced the manualist approach to teaching the deaf through a system that employed sign language, with the manualist approach having been frowned upon since the Second International Congress on Education of the Deaf held in Paris in 1878. Even so, Leon’s real success in communication was through a system of signs he and Gabrielle had developed over the years.

Often, they would stroll by the waters of the Mediterranean discussing all manner of teenage concerns through the medium of their own silent system of communication. Gabrielle’s

attachment to her cousin and her willingness to communicate with Leon through their private signing system had benefits that extended far beyond their Mediterranean strolls. Gabrielle was a crack student and Leon had an eager and agile mind. At a time when many deaf students were relegated to a tedious academic experience, if that, Leon was able to progress academically in lockstep with Gabrielle. Their afterschool study sessions were legendary at the school they attended and a source of great pride to both of the Krauss brothers. Leon felt so comfortable with Bernard and Colette that he often stayed with them and Gabrielle when Leon's parents were away. For her part, Gabrielle was proud of her success in aiding Leon and their bond was unshakeable.

Despite Leon's progress in school, his parents were worried about his verbal communication and harbored a gnawing and understandable concern that their son's disability would interfere with him leading a meaningful life. As the Phony War continued to take its toll on the nerves of the country, Leon was able to continue with his schooling, even as his parents' worries were intensified by the uncertainty facing the country. Then, one day they read about a new academy for the deaf that would soon be opening in Nice. The newspaper article noted that qualified students like Leon who were enrolled at mainstream educational institutions would be permitted to continue their studies, while receiving deaf instruction at the new institution.

Zealously, Maurice and Jacquelyn spent hours looking into the credentials of the professionals described in the newspaper article, in the hope of identifying a prospective staff member whose approach might benefit Leon. Among those described in the article was a young doctor named Pierre Durant. Happily, the two parents concluded that Durant's approach to oralist instruction could benefit their son. For, contrary to the prevailing reliance on oralism as the sole method of deaf instruction, Durant's writings suggested a willingness to draw upon sign language as a means of communication while emphasizing the oralist method to enhance speech. As they eagerly waited for Durant's arrival, their enthusiasm was overshadowed by events that were playing out far to the North.

As word of a possible English invasion of Scandinavia worked its way through Hitler's intelligence channels, the Fuhrer had become increasingly alarmed and finally ordered an invasion of Norway and Denmark. On April 9, 1940, German warships sailed a course for Norway's major Baltic ports. Evading minefields, the German vessels took immediate control of the port cities and demanded that the country surrender. The refusal of the Norwegians to capitulate held briefly, but only until Nazi paratroopers descended on the defiant country. In short order, Hitler established a puppet regime in Norway headed by Norway's pro-fascist former foreign minister, Vidkun Quisling. Soon afterward, the Danes, fearing a bloodbath, also capitulated.

In Nice, Bernard and Maurice read of the Nordic invasions with alarm. Each knew that Hitler's moves against the Scandinavian countries were motivated by a need for Scandinavian steel. The implications of how he would use the steel were terrifying. However, they consoled themselves by the reassurance that the Maginot Line had held since France had declared war on Germany some eight months earlier. Sadly, these expressions of mutual reassurance were short lived.

With the Scandinavian countries in check, Hitler had focused on the lowland countries of Belgium, Holland and Luxemburg. Control of the lowland countries would provide the *Fuhrer* with a buffer against any attack on the German industrial Ruhr Valley, as well as afford him a

launching pad for attacking England. Equally important, control of Belgium would serve another and more devastating purpose. As some of Hitler's fighters were engaged in an epic act of misdirection by feigning an all-out assault along the Maginot Line, his generals in Belgium were preparing for a different invasion of France. Known as "*Fall Gelb*" or "Case Yellow," this invasion would be waged through southern Belgium's lightly defended and seemingly impenetrable Ardennes Forest.

The attack on the Netherlands began on May 10, 1940. The Dutch ground forces were no match for Hitler's *Wehrmacht* and paratroopers. Even more so, their cities were defenseless against the remorseless aerial attacks of the *Luftwaffe*. On May 14 the Fuhrer's airplanes unleashed a merciless bombardment on the city of Rotterdam. Hitler warned that more aerial destruction would follow unless the Dutch capitulated. After surveying the damage, the Dutch general staff surrendered.

On the same day, Hitler followed suit in Belgium and tiny Luxemburg. As Hitler had anticipated, France came to the aid of Belgium. Quickly, its crack Seventh Army was directed to support the Flemish defenses along the Dyle Line, a second defensive line running east from the River Dyle, east of Brussels, to the River Mass in Holland.

Assisted by the French troops, the brave Belgians fought valiantly but in vain. But, even as Belgian fortifications were falling under the German ground and air offensive along the Dyle Line, the Germans were unleashing the main thrust of *Fall Gelb* further to the south. With the main Allied forces bogged down in a defensive posture along the Dyle Line, Nazi infantry and tank panzer units were already underway as they dashed through the Ardennes Forest. Forging streams and rocky terrain with remarkable agility, the German tanks overcame obstacle after obstacle as they smashed through what the Allies had believed to be an impenetrable forest.

Soon, the Nazi objective, the critical bridge crossing over the River Meuse at the French city of Sedan was in their sites. Aided by overwhelming air superiority, the German units met little resistance at Sedan and quickly overwhelmed a disorganized French effort to halt the Germans from crossing the river.

On May 13, Nazi Panzer units began crossing the Meuse under continued aerial cover, with French counter attacks proving worthless except for a brief foray at Montcorne, led by an intrepid young colonel named Charles de Gaulle. With astonishing speed, the German panzers sped northwest in the direction of Amiens and Abbeville in an epic advance that covered 200 miles. By May 19, German armored and infantry units had reached the Channel waters and by May 22, the Germans were marching north up the coast toward Boulogne and Calais. Their goal was now the encirclement of the British Expeditionary Force near Dunkirk as well as their French counterparts who had retreated from the Dyle Line westward toward the River Scheldt. As the British Expeditionary Force found itself hopelessly squeezed, Churchill made the heartbreaking decision to evacuate. Soon after, Belgium capitulated.

With Hitler holding sway over the Low Countries, streams of Jewish refugees entered France. As many as forty thousand of such refugees entered the country with most remaining in the north, alongside tens of thousands of other Jews who had fled to France from Germany and Poland in the 1930's during Hitler's rise to power. Most of the immigrant Jews were happy to find shelter anyplace and did not care if they were not naturalized as French citizens. However, unlike France's *Israelites*—its population of native-born Jews who accounted for about one-third of the

country's Jewish population, the unnaturalized immigrant Jews would soon discover that their indefinite status had left them exposed to increasing hostility at the hands of the Nazis.

As these events were unfolding, Bernard and Maurice's anxiety was reaching a fever pitch as the radio blasted reports of the French army's ineffectual attempt to hold off Hitler's forces and of the encirclement of the Allied troops at Dunkirk on the northern French coast. As they waited for the other shoe to drop, Bernard and Maurice wondered how long it would be before Hitler regrouped and set his sights on Paris and the French mainland.

They didn't have long to wait. For a short period, a lull in the ground fighting occurred as Hitler directed his invading army to halt in place while supplies were replenished. Only then did he give orders to the *Luftwaffe* for mopping up the encircled French and British forces. However, even as the German planes swept down unceasingly, the British under Churchill were marshalling every craft available for a massive evacuation. In all, more than 338,000 soldiers, mostly British, managed to evade the Nazi noose and escape to England.

The French army was now alone and no match for the replenished German ground forces. On June 14, *Wehrmacht* infantrymen goosestepped through the streets of Paris, as the disheartened French Prime Minister Paul Reynaud resigned. France's president Albert Lebrun then appointed the 84-year-old Marshall Henri Philippe Pétain, the Great War "Hero of Verdun," to replace Reynaud as Prime Minister. Pétain immediately sued for an armistice.

Concluding it would be in Germany's best interests to have a French government administer the part of the country not occupied by Germany, Hitler agreed to an armistice, pursuant to which France would be limited to an administrative army of 100,000 troops. Other terms of the armistice specified that Germany would occupy northern and western France along the Atlantic coastline, comprising about 60 percent of the country, with France paying the cost of the German occupation. The remaining forty percent of the country would be administered by a French government under the leadership of Philippe Pétain.

On June 22, Pétain's government accepted the terms of the armistice and made plans to move to a provisional capital in the center of France near the small city of Vichy. On July 1, the French parliament, having relocated to Vichy, began the process of ceding full power to Pétain. One of the Vichy government's first acts under Pétain was to review the naturalization of persons who had taken refuge in France, with many having fled from the civil war in Spain. The review resulted in the denaturalization of 15,000 persons, of whom 6,000 were Jews.

As the new government was organizing itself to the south, Angelo Donati took stock of what was happening in occupied Paris. As he surveyed the stern faces of the occupying Nazi forces, he made a difficult decision. Quickly, he summoned several confederates. Together, they assembled his company's records and transferable assets, and, at a tremendous cost in bribes, arranged for the transport of his affairs by train to the south of the country. Then, taking what personal items he could, his family and he escaped from Paris. They first stopped at Marseilles to retrieve his company's assets and records and make plans for the future. The process took longer than expected and, before long, the days were shortening as summer turned to early fall. Then, after completing their arrangements in the third week of September, the family finally headed eastward along the Mediterranean to Nice.

Weeks before their departure, Donati had sent word to Bernard that his household would be arriving in Nice sometime in September and would appreciate Bernard's assistance in finding

appropriate lodging. When Donati and his family arrived in Nice, they were delighted to find that Bernard had made all of the necessary arrangements and that a very acceptable apartment was waiting for them at the end of a windy mountain road that offered lovely views of the surrounding hills. After they were settled in, Donati sought out Bernard to thank him and to discuss business.

Sitting on the balcony of Bernard's apartment overlooking the ocean, Donati took in the salty Mediterranean smell and allowed himself, if only for a few minutes, to forget about the upheaval now taking place in his life and in the life of his country. Donati knew of Bernard's mining interests in Canada and inquired whether Julien was able to look after the family's Canadian business affairs. It was a perfect segue for Bernard who used the opportunity to boast about his son's recent graduation from law school and of his piloting proficiency that enabled him to keep tabs on the family's far north mining interests. However, as Bernard enthused about his son, a concerned look suddenly overcame him.

"What's the matter?", inquired Donati.

"The truth is that communication with Julien has become more difficult since the Nazis invaded France. We're able to reach one another, but only sporadically."

"I can understand how that can be a problem, especially if there are business decisions to be made."

"It's more than that, I'm afraid. As you know, Canada has declared war on Germany."

"Of course. But aren't their draft laws limited to domestic conscription for defending the country?"

"Yes. However, Prime Minister Mackenzie King has made it a personal mission to take on the lion's share of the British Commonwealth Air Training Program. As compared to the other Commonwealth countries, Canada has many advantages because of its size, proximity to England and relatively well-educated workers. All over Canada, new training programs are being started and many Canadian men have taken advantage to provide for the day they may be needed to come to the aid of the mother country."

"I take it, this has something to do with Julien."

"I wish I could respond one way or the other. Julien has been busy most of the summer preparing for the Canadian bar. We spoke last month following his taking the exam. I asked him if there was a branch of the military he was planning on joining now that his deferment has run out. I assumed he would identify some office within the military's legal division. However, to my surprise and concern, he expressed interest in capitalizing on his flying experience by attending one of the air training programs. I tried to persuade him that he could serve his newly adopted country just as well by drawing upon his legal training, and that, by remaining in the country, he would be able to keep tabs on the family's business affairs. However, he expressed ambivalence, particularly since his wife Kayla's brother, Edgar, a former fraternity brother of Julien's, was now helping out with the business. He expected Edgar would be involved for a while as his own family's plans to expand their South African department store business to Montreal had been put on hold due to the war."

"What did Julien decide?"

“That’s the problem. I don’t know for sure. Soon after we spoke, overseas communication became very difficult, and I’ve not had a chance to speak to him again. I’m sure he’ll act intelligently, but he’s a very headstrong young man.”

“I know it’s an agonizing dilemma, but I’m confident communication will be restored and, at least, he is free to act without having to wonder about a maniac like Hitler or even a stooge like Pétain.”

As the two business colleagues were about to get up and leave, Collette opened the door to the balcony, a grave look on her face. According to a radio broadcast she had just heard, the Nazis had just issued an ordinance requiring all Jews in the occupied part of the country to declare their Jewish status. Little imagination was required to determine that the self-declaration of Jewish status was intended only as a starting point. Soon, the Jews of occupied France would have to wear yellow badges denoting their religious status.

The potential for harm caused by singling out the Jews under the new identity laws was undeniable. Everyone knew of the existence of the deplorable internment camps that France maintained at dreaded places such as Camp Gurs, where “undesirable” foreigners, and members of the French Communist Party sent to rot. Already, these camps were increasing in number and were overflowing with foreigners under suspicion. In recent months, many of Vichy France’s recently denaturalized citizens, especially those who were Jews, had wound up in one of the dreaded camps. Now, as Collette finished describing the new German ordinance, Bernard wondered out loud whether one day, perhaps very soon, these internment camps might be used for those declared Jews whose naturalization status was not in question.

As it turned out, there would soon be more immediate concerns with which the Krauss and Donati families would have to contend. Unforced by their Nazi overseers, on October 3, the Vichy government promulgated the infamous Statute on Jews. Pétain was showing his true colors and it filled Bernard and Donati with dread. Now, the Jewish community of southern France would be relegated to underclass status, as the Statute deprived Jews of involvement in the armed forces, the arts and many of the liberal professions. Those Jews who violated the Statute would be declared criminals and would wind up in one of the internment camps.

Nice was under Italian occupation. Nevertheless, for Bernard and Donati, the Statute had far-reaching effects on every aspect of their business, personal and cultural lives elsewhere in southern France. For Bernard, it also raised the painful question whether he would be able to maintain contact with Julien.

Chapter 7

Montreal, Canada: The RAF Gets a New Recruit October 1940-November 1941

Only three months before, Julien Krauss had walked down the few steps from the dais at McGill Law School and into the arms of his adoring wife, Kayla, herself a recent graduate of McGill's economics faculty.

In a more optimistic time, his future would have been determined only by his choice of career paths. However, these were not normal times. On September 10, 1939, only days after the beginning of the school year, Canada had declared war on Germany, following, by a day, England's own declaration of war in response to the German invasion of Poland. Since that time, tens of thousands of young Canadian men had enlisted, 58,000 in September alone.

In the aftermath of the draft protests at the end of the Great War, both of Canada's political parties had agreed to put off overseas conscription. However, shortly after Julien's graduation, Parliament had enacted the National Resources Mobilization Act providing the government with emergency powers to mobilize Canadian society in defense of the country. Nationwide registration was required, with government officials given the power to conscript registrants for critical industries as well as home defense. War fever was in the air throughout the country, even for those who had not already enlisted, Julien among them.

Though he was busy preparing for the bar examination, Julien couldn't help but take stock of where he stood now that he had registered under the NRMA. One evening, he sat down with Kayla to discuss his circumstances. Together, they agreed that Julien's best option was to enlist for military service rather than wait to be conscripted for defense of the home front. They reasoned that, among other things, Julien's enlistment would most likely lead to a job with the military's law department. The next morning, he got up early and headed for the local enlistment office.

In England, what was now called the Battle of Britain was being waged with deadly consequences. Begun as an interdiction of shipping convoys in the English Channel, the Nazi air war against England had sharply intensified. The *Luftwaffe* had initially focused on attacking coastal radar installations and port cities on the Channel. However, as the plucky Brits dug in, the Nazi aerial attacks had expanded to British airfields and aircraft on the ground. Now, Hermann Goering's planes were bombing London, itself, in an effort to demoralize a British population strained to the hilt. Night after night, the Nazi invaders flew across the channel aided by *Funkmeß* range and detection finding, and night after night they were met by uncommonly brave Royal Air Force resistance pilots, many of them trained in Canada or seconded from the Royal Canadian Air Force.

In France, the life of Julien's family had been turned upside down ever since Paris fell to the Germans shortly after Julien's graduation in June. In the south, the Pétain government had just enacted its Statute on Jews. Julien had discussed with his father the possibility of Jewish rights being stripped away in the German occupied northern part of France, just as they had brutally been taken away in Nazi Germany. But Pétain's move to disenfranchise and subjugate the Jews of the Vichy south had come as a surprise. Equally badly, as the situation had deteriorated in the South, so had communication with the outside world. Julien had been accustomed to discussing the family's Canadian mining interests with his father on a regular basis, even at the

substantial cost of a long-distance phone connection. But, of late, telephone calls and even cables had become increasingly difficult, and it had been a number of weeks since he had been able to get through to his father. The mail did trickle in, but only after infuriatingly long intervals.

As Julien waited for his military posting, his mind became more preoccupied with concern for his family. As his thoughts turned to the plight of his family, so did his desire to do something more concrete on their behalf than sit behind a desk while the war was being waged.

He had discussed his growing desire to serve in a combat role with Kayla. The conversations had not been easy. Kayla's life had revolved around Julien and school for four years. But the two of them had been so busy that time seemed to have passed them by. Now that they had both completed their schooling, Kayla had hoped that Julien would at least remain in Canada during the war so they would have an opportunity to spend time together.

She had remembered the day when their paths might have veered in another direction—the day that Jonathan had visited her from Cornell just after Julien and she had become pinned. She had been resolute that day, but her thoughts—undisclosed but pervasive—had belied her calm demeanor. As she had looked upon her suitor in the foyer of her dormitory, her mind harkened back to their halcyon summer on the kibbutz in Palestine. How could she forget how Jonathan had saved her from the two Arab youths who had been working at a *kibbutz* wedding ceremony and who had lost control after helping themselves to some of the wine intended for the celebration. Kayla's and Jonathan's lives had intertwined after that in a way reserved only for those enjoying the miracle of first love. There had been the stolen kisses, the trips, their youthful conversations and declarations of love, and that magical moment of discovery on the Tel Aviv beachfront.

As she looked at her erstwhile lover on that occasion, she had almost broken down. She longed to throw her arms around the hero of her youthful dreams and the writer of the countless love letters she had received ever since their summer together. But something had prompted her to hold back. Perhaps, it had been the reinforcing presence of her brother Edgar. Whatever it was, it almost hadn't held as she considered chasing after her youthful and forlorn beau as he turned around prepared to say goodbye forever. Somehow she did catch herself and Jonathan had left. For weeks after, she had considered telephoning Jonathan, perhaps out of guilt or the draw of a diminishing fantasy. But she hadn't and, as the semester wore on and winter turned to spring, she was glad of it for her affection for Julien had returned. In the days leading up to his graduation, everything that had attracted her to him seemed to grow just as the foliage around them was resplendent with growth.

When, later that summer, Julien proposed and, as they had planned, suggested they marry after his first year of law school, she had happily accepted. Now the prospect of losing her husband to an overseas war terrified her in a way she couldn't imagine. She had done her best to convince him to pursue the legal track that had been accommodately laid out for him by his local enlistment office. But she knew Julien and the level of commitment he felt both to the country of which he was now a citizen and to the need to rid the world of the tyrant whose unending Jewish hatred was now placing his family in Nice in grave peril. So, she relented and almost felt the release of a pressure valve when Julien received a letter advising he was to report to his enlistment office for assignment.

After showing the letter to Kayla, Julien's first act was to get in touch with Kayla's brother, Edgar. Edgar had suffered from a spinal problem since his childhood. While not debilitating, it had disqualified him from military service both in Canada and in South Africa. Instead, he had

focused on laying the plans for the department store his family hoped to open in Montreal along the lines of the store they currently operated in Cape Town. However, as with all things, the family's plans had been disrupted by the war effort and by the impossibility of safely transporting merchandise across the ocean. To occupy his time, Edgar had been helping Julien monitor his family's mining interests in the north. On several occasions, Edgar had flown with Julien on the Noorduyn Norseman bushplane he enjoyed piloting, and Edgar had liked the experience. Now, he was taking flying lessons of his own.

As Julien walked into his office, Edgar greeted his brother in law with a bear hug. "Well, old man, I guess your time has come to get measured for a uniform."

"Kayla told you about my upcoming appointment?"

"Of course! I guess you'll now be honing your skills at throwing legal pads at the enemy."

"Perhaps not. The reason I'm here is to let you know I don't find that wartime outlet an attraction."

"What do you mean?"

"I know I could sit at a comfortable legal desk and help the war effort and still manage my family's mining interests on the side. But I don't want to sit out the war armed only with a legal pad, as you so aptly put it. My family in France is in danger, as are people all over the world. I want to be part of the fighting force that rids the world of that danger as fast as possible. You're no doubt aware that Canada provides extensive pilot training facilities for British and Canadian flyers as part of the British Commonwealth Air Training Program, what they call the BCATP, and that, once Canadian pilots complete the program, they are assigned to RAF units in England."

"I am."

"Well, I'm going to use all of my legal skills to persuade my local enlistment office to allow me to start training as a pilot. If I succeed, I expect to start training right away and to be assigned to a British air unit as soon as possible. That's where you come in."

"How so?"

"You'll be getting your civilian pilot's wings shortly. I'd like you to monitor my family's mining interests and to do whatever is needed while I'm away. That, of course, is in addition to looking after Kayla."

Edgar couldn't help but feel admiration for his brother-in-law. "I'm happy to do it. In addition, if need be, I can draw upon Kayla's skills. Her degree in economics should come in handy, as it has so far in helping me plan for the expansion of my family's department store business to Canada."

Once Julien made the local recruiting office aware of his skills as a pilot, the office was quite willing to assign him to a training spot in the BCATP. In late September, the first class of 39 Canadian airmen received their wings. Now all were serving as instructors at the BCATP training facility in Toronto on the grounds of what had been a hunt club founded by British army officers

in the nineteenth century. Now there was a need for new trainees and the need had worked in Julien's favor. Almost before he knew it, he was on his way to Initial Training School at the Eglinton Hunt Club in Toronto.

As Julien looked around on his first day of training, he could not help but marvel at the hunt club's beautiful grounds. Encompassing a club house, polo grounds and hunting path, the facilities evoked a pleasant sensation of an earlier time. However, that sensation would be the last bit of pleasantries Julien would experience for the next twenty-six weeks. During that time, his days and nights would be filled with course work in navigation, meteorology, officer training and trigonometry, interspersed with psychiatric interviews, decompression chamber sessions, physical examinations and a final test flight in a flight simulator known as a link trainer.

Julien had entered the training program believing he knew a lot about flying. However, at the end of the twenty-six weeks of training, he emerged from Initial Training School realizing how much he had not known and how much better off he was with his initial flight training now behind him. After a one week leave that enabled him to visit Kayla in Montreal, Julien headed for his next duty post at the airport in the northwest Toronto suburb of Malton. There, Julien would spend the next eight weeks training on a de Havilland DH.82 Tiger Moth light bomber.

The Tiger Moth was a single engine, fixed-wing biplane. Its classic two wing design made it suitable as primary trainer aircraft. However, it could also be outfitted to serve as a surveillance craft as well as a light bomber. At first sight, Julien was charmed by the small aircraft and easily imagined himself at the controls of the plane. For the next eight weeks his imagination became reality as he spent fifty hours of flight training in the cockpit of the small plane.

Following Malton, Julien's next stop on the training circuit was in Alymer, Ontario, where he would spend fourteen weeks undergoing fighter pilot instruction on the North American Aviation T-6 Texan, an advanced single wing training craft named the Harvard by the Royal Canadian Air Force. Designed for both launching air strikes and providing air cover, the Harvard was a workhorse fighter craft. Merely sitting in its cockpit thrilled Julien and, under normal circumstances, that thrill would have concluded his training, except for a two-week stint in bombing and gunnery school. However, Julien's instructors saw additional potential in Julien's piloting skills and recommended that, in the interest of versatility, he complete the bomber pilot training program in Brantford, Ontario.

At Brantford, Julien trained on a twin-engine Avro Anson bomber. Built by Avro, a British aircraft manufacturer, the Anson was equipped to fly by instrument and was the first warplane built with retractable landing gear. The plane was designed for compactness with accommodation for a crew of four consisting of a pilot, navigator/bomb aimer, radio operator and gunner. The bomb aimer occupied a prone position in the forward part of the plane which was equipped with a bomb sight. Just behind the bomb aimer, the pilot sat in an upright, although only slightly more comfortable, position in the cockpit. The navigator and gunner were positioned behind the pilot. Week after week, Julien practiced with his crewmates so that the functions performed by all four became a well-honed medley of activity. Julien enjoyed the camaraderie of being part of a bomber crew and was grateful he had had the experience of bomber pilot training. But he was drawn to being a fighter pilot and hoped he would be assigned to a fighter craft unit. It did not take long for his wish to become reality as he found himself part of a group of RCAF airmen preparing to leave for England and fighter pilot assignment.

Chapter 8

England: Above the Clouds October 1941-September 1942

At first, Julien could not believe his eyes as he observed the state of devastation on the streets of London. It had been a number of months since the Nazi bombardment of England had ended and, yet, everywhere Jonathan looked, the aftershock of the German bombing campaign was all-pervasive. Whole city blocks had been reduced to piles of rubble while, ironically, buildings remained intact just a few feet away. Little had been spared. Everywhere, there were gaping holes and jagged concrete edifices--reminders of the 27,000 tons of bombs that had torn apart the country's roads, infrastructure and every imaginable variety of building. Nothing had been spared as elegant church windows and townhouse edifices had shared the same fate as the more ordinary structures of civilization--bridges, warehouses, factories, roads and municipal buildings.

In all, more than sixty thousand English men, women and children had been killed or grievously wounded by the bombing and, in many parts of the country, the tears continued to flow even as the overwhelming task of rebuilding had already begun. Yet, just as they had during the bombing, the spirited Brits managed to pull together amidst a nonstop stream of gallows humor. In pubs across the country, both ordinary and extraordinary men and women gathered to salute one another and celebrate the country's determination in the face of overwhelming adversity.

In the dance halls of London, there were no more raucous celebrants than the airmen who had fought against all odds during the blitz and whose attention was now being drawn to other aerial campaigns. Day and night, Royal Air Force bombers patrolled the Channel with a view to interdicting German supply convoys, risking enemy fire as they did so. Theirs was a lot that required the outlet of a dancing partner or drinking companion

But, at greatest risk were the bomber crews and their fighter escort pilots who flew payload after payload of heavy bombs to the Nazi heartland, with the goal of devastating German industrial cities such as Bremen and Hamburg. The crews from these excursions were well aware of the risks. As Julien discovered, these flying men were equally capable of blowing off steam when they returned home.

Now in the country for well over six months, Julien had already experienced his share of flying time. Initially, he had been assigned to Number 401 Squadron whose predominantly Canadian fighter pilots, flying workhorse Hurricane fighter planes, had distinguished themselves during the Blitz. Three had won the coveted Flying Cross. However, Julien had recently been transferred from 401 Squadron's base at RAF Digby near the North Sea coastline to an airbase closer to London where he was training to fly the more modern Spitfire fighter jets.

The Spitfire MK IX had just been released and it was a significant upgrade over its predecessor, the MK V. As Julien was given a tour of the plane's capabilities, he could only marvel at its potential as a fighting machine. It had a top speed of 409 miles per hour at an elevation of 28,000 feet, a more than ten percent upgrade over its predecessor. It could climb to a ceiling of 43,000 feet and do so at the rate of four thousand feet per minute. Most importantly, at its rated speed and elevation, it more than equaled the feared German Focke-Wulf Fw 190A War Thunder, which flew at a top speed of 396 miles per hour but at a lower elevation of about 20,000 feet. For

four weeks, Julien learned every aspect of the aircraft until he felt like a medieval warrior mounting a reliable and trustworthy steed.

Following his training, Julien had been given a weekend leave to go to London where he now found himself in the teeming bar of the Haynesworth Hotel, a favorite among Canadian airmen. All around him, men drank and tried to outdo one another with stories of aerial dog fights, bombing missions and narrow escapes. The complexities of long range bombing operations required numerous interlocking parts, each one filled with danger and the potential for endless story telling.

For these fliers who were now making long distance runs into enemy territory, weather was always an unpredictable variable. But fatigue, too, was always a built in enemy ready to overtake even the most time-tested pilot, navigator or bomb aimer. Cramped conditions led to cramped muscles with little opportunity for relief. In addition, any aircraft flying over German-controlled shorelines had to avoid enemy search lights which seemed to improve in range with each passing month, anti-aircraft flak fired from countless enemy flak towers and the ever present threat of enemy fighter planes. Those fighter escorts and bombers that were able to penetrate the enemy's shore defenses then had to plot a course different from those employed in predecessor runs to avoid detection, with immense pressure imposed on the planes' onboard navigators. Once within range of their targets, pathfinder bombers, exposing themselves to immense risk, had to mark the targets with incendiary bombs and then slip away in time for the heavy bombers to drop their payloads. If all went well, the pilots of the bombers, pathfinders and escorts had to reverse course with extraordinary precision so as to stay out of one another's flight paths in a delicate act of aerial choreography. Tired and low on fuel, all them had to repeat the whole process but in reverse, hoping that no enemy defenses lay in the wait.

As Julien listened to his fellow countrymen, he thought about his decision to become an airman. As with everyone else, he was frightened, tall tales notwithstanding. But, he had never regretted his decision. He had enjoyed the missions he had flown in the Hurricane with most involving Channel reconnaissance or escort services for vulnerable convoys as they approached their English destinations. Being in the air with at least momentary mastery over what lay beneath thrilled him to no end. But he had not yet had a taste of real combat and, as daunting as was the prospect of real warfare, he longed to experience it. His chance was about to come.

The Germans had not crushed the Soviets during the murderous winter of 1941. However, as the weather warmed, the Nazi *Wehrmacht* had resumed its murderous march into Russian territory and was swallowing up huge swaths of territory in the south, straining the Red Army and menacing Stalingrad. Stalin had demanded that the Allied forces take the initiative in the western front so as to draw essential German divisions away from their lunge toward Stalingrad. In response, British war planners had set their sights on a small invasion that would demonstrate British resolve for coming to the aid of the continent and test the feasibility of an amphibious invasion.

During the spring and summer of 1942, all elements of the British command plotted such an attack. The coastal town they chose was Dieppe in the northern part of France. Built on a cliff overlooking the waters of the Channel, the town was defended by German harbor forces and would not be an easy target. However, it was within range of the RAF fighters that would be needed to provide an umbrella for the invading transport ships.

The second Canadian Infantry Division had been chosen to lead the ground invasion with armor support from the 14th Army Tank Regiment, employing the newly released Churchill Tanks. RAF bombers escorted by fighters would strafe the German defenses. However, aside from providing a huge armada of 217 ships and landing craft, British naval fire support would be limited owing to the risk of such vessels coming within range of the enemy's coastal emplacements. So much of the burden for providing protective fire would have to come from the seventy-four squadrons of bombers and fighters assigned to the mission.

Due to the central involvement of Canadian ground forces, the RAF had drawn a number of Canadian pilots from its ranks as a means of demonstrating solidarity. The fighter squadron to which Julien had been assigned boasted a number of Canadian flyers and, in consequence, was given one of the key fighter escort missions in the planned invasion.

As Julien awoke on the morning of August 19, he was full of excitement and optimism. He would be part of an immense air armada of fifty-six fighter squadrons under the command of 11 Air Group Fighter Command. Julien's squadron had been tasked with escorting two dozen bombers assigned to attack preemptively the nearby German airfield at Abbeville-Drucat. The mission was an essential one. If successful, it would put out of commission, or at least, delay, one of the enemy's most deadly defensive capabilities. In addition, it offered the opportunity for the Air Group's fighter pilots, sitting at the controls of their new Spitfire MK IX's, to test the capabilities of their new aircraft against the enemy's vaunted 190A War Thunder fighters. However, as the day's events began to unfold, Julien's optimism quickly changed to wariness and then horror.

From the start, the invasion had gone sour. The Germans had suspected an attack as a result of an unusual amount of radio traffic on the northern French coast and had substantially reinforced their shore defenses, believing that the anticipated attack might be the beginning of an invasion. As a result, the success of the mission would require both surprise and sublime coordination. However, neither was to be. As the first troop ship approached the French mainland and its troops disembarked onto one of the six targeted beaches, it was spotted by a German convoy. Immediately, the convoy's torpedo boat escort fired on the invading landing craft. Even worse, the convoy had had ample time to warn Nazi defensive batteries positioned along the other targeted beaches of the invading ships.

At another landing area, the invading landing craft had drifted too far from the intended beachhead forcing the frustrated invaders to reposition. But, in so doing, they had been required to cross over a nearby bridge. The exposure of tanks and troops crossing an exposed expanse without protection had had predictable results with men and machines chewed up mercilessly.

As these events were unfolding, Julien's squadron was pouring down covering fire as two dozen Boeing B-17 Flying Buttress bombers unleashed their deadly payload on the targeted airfield. The attack had gone well, with the German fighters on the ground having had little time to scramble. Now, as the squadron commander watched the ground crews trying desperately to clear debris from the airfield's runways, he directed the squadron to return to the beaches where the main Canadian landings were to take place. As the squadron approached the two invasion routes, designated Red and White Beaches, Julien looked down on the enemies well protected positions overlooking the shoreline. His eyes then moved from the defensive positions on the high cliffs to the invading forces on the beach and what he saw was devastating.

The invasion plan for Red and White Beaches had assumed that the ground soldiers would be covered by the massive fire power of the Fourteenth Army Tank Regiment's Churchill tanks. But the tanks had been delayed and, on the ground, the Canadian fighting forces were left to scale a massive sea wall defended by machine gun emplacements without the benefit of armored air cover. The scene sickened Julien as he observed helpless infantrymen mowed down by the hundreds.

As he was observing the carnage below, he noticed out of the corner of his eye a small formation of German 190A's heading in the direction of his squadron. The wing commander had also noticed the German fighters and directed Julien and his fellow pilots to climb to a higher elevation where they could fly faster than the invaders. As Julien willed his plane to climb as fast as it could, the seconds felt like hours as the plane finally reached an elevation where Jonathan would have an advantage over the enemy. On the wing commander's signal, Julien and his fellow pilots then swooped down on the Germans. With great satisfaction, Julien observed all but one of the German planes fall from the sky. Then he realized that the one remaining 190A was on his tail, just as he felt a ripple of fire tear through his wing.

Quickly, the enemy pilot was mowed down by the other pilots in Julien's squadron. As Julien looked at the damage, his plane shuddered slightly. From his position, the damage did not look overwhelming and he was happy to see a thumbs up from his wing commander who directed him to return to base while the remaining Spitfires attempted to aid the Canadian infantrymen who were still falling in nauseating numbers.

Relieved to be heading back to his home airfield, Julien set a southwest course as he continuously checked the condition of his wing. The wing had gotten a little more ragged but seemed to be holding up. Then, to his horror, Julien's eyes drifted to a flashing light on his instrument panel. His fuel tank which should be showing ample fuel to return to base was now pointing toward empty. Unbeknownst to him, one of the enemy's bullets had pierced his fuel tank, causing damage too small to be noticed by Julien and his fellow pilots but damaging enough to cause fuel loss. In the distance, Julien could see the British shore fast approaching and, with it, the safety of a landing field. But he was losing fuel too rapidly.

Terrified, he did his best to slow the plane as he prepared to bail out. He then checked his flotation device and parachute and rehearsed in his mind the procedure for abandoning the cockpit. His first instinct was to throw his foot over the side of the cockpit, but somehow, he remembered from his training that such an exit would likely throw him into the surrounding airstream and cause him to collide with the tail of the plane. So, as methodically as his mounting terror would allow, he positioned his hands over the side of the cockpit and rolled out of the plane. With thoughts of Kayla intermixed with pangs of fright, Julien counted to ten and then pulled on his parachute chord. As the parachute's huge canopy opened and Julien felt himself suspended by the chute's straps, he watched with macabre fascination as he descended toward the dark waters below.

Chapter 9

Washington, DC: A Legal Memorandum and its Consequences March 1942-August 1942

As Julien Krauss descended helplessly to the terrifying waters of the English Channel, another aspiring young lawyer in Jonathan Sternbloom's orbit was listening to reports describing a different form of terror.

Lester Abelstein had wanted to be a lawyer from the time he was in middle school. As an honors undergraduate at UCLA, he had obtained special permission to take graduate level courses in both government and law. He had done so well in his law courses that, when he started attending UCLA's law school, the dean had agreed to give him advanced standing. Lester had not appreciated the value of being a student with advanced standing until the months following the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor. Then, everywhere he went on the UCLA campus, he had found himself in the midst of war fever and discussions pertaining to when and how to enlist.

Lester should only have been a second-year student, as was true of his classmate and friend, Charlie Brody. But, with his advanced standing, he was informed he would be eligible to graduate at the end of the spring semester following Pearl Harbor. The dilemma he faced was real and palpable—should he wait until he graduated in May or did duty to country demand that he volunteer for military service immediately.

In the Abelstein household, the issue of enlistment had taken on a level of great importance. Jonathan Sternbloom—Lester's brother-in-law to be and his sister's fiancée—had just announced his decision to forego completion of his second year of medical school at UCLA to enlist as a medic. Leslie was beside herself with worry over Jonathan's safety and disappointment over the fact he would not be completing the school year. Lester was well aware that the prospect of his enlistment would only add to Leslie's hysteria, not to speak of that of his parents.

But, he had made up his mind. In late February, after the completion of his classes, he stopped by the office of the campus recruiter. He then sought out Jonathan to tell him of his decision. Finding his future brother-in-law, he could only blurt out, "I'm going to enlist."

Jonathan had been preoccupied with his own enlistment decision. However, Lester's announcement shook him out of his preoccupation. "Leslie's not going to be happy, and how will your parents take it?"

"I don't know. But I think I can soften the blow. A number of the third year students at school have been advised they can remain on campus until graduation before they are called up. Since I will also qualify for graduation in May, I decided to check in with the campus recruiter today and was told the same. So, at least my parents will be able to see me graduate before I have to report for duty."

"Do you want me to come over for moral support when you break the news?"

"No, I think I'll be okay. My father is just as worried about the war as everyone else in the family. But he's also a realist and, as much as anyone I know, he's incensed by the rumors we keep

hearing about the massive killing of Russian Jews in areas the Nazis have overtaken. So, he may be more amenable to my serving than his body language would otherwise suggest.”

“Good luck. I’m merely waiting for my travel orders. So, I’m available if you need me.”

As it turned out, Lester’s assessment of this father’s reaction had been correct.

“At least they’re going to allow you to graduate. And, for my money, the army’s going to get one hell of a smart guy to help the war effort against those Nazi assholes. I know you’ve been busy at school, but I’m sure you’ve heard about the mop up squads Hitler’s been sending into captured areas of Russia.

“I’m afraid so and every time I hear about them it makes my blood boil”

“It should and, maybe when you’re in the service, you’ll be able to do something about it! I’ve heard they’re called the *einsatzgruppen*--mobile killing units that are even beyond the control of the military. Their job is hideous even by Nazi standards. As new areas are taken by the *Wermacht*, the *einsatzgruppen* fan out into the newly occupied areas for the sole purpose of sewing terror and wiping out all forms of resistance. Unfortunately, they don’t limit themselves to enemy operatives. In addition, their savage activities extend to those who are considered undesirable to the German war effort. Translated, we’re talking about hundreds of thousands of Jews the *einsatzgruppen* thugs may already have murdered. They’ve got to be stopped before they murder all of European Jewry.”

“I’m glad you agree for the need to confront the bastards. With Jonathan enlisting, I thought I might have difficulty making my own case for enlistment.”

“Of course, I agree, but to a point. You know your mother is going to be out of her mind with worry. Do you have any idea whether you’ll be able to secure a legal position with the army? Surely, they’ve got to respect your record. You’re a terrific student and they must know you’ll make a great military lawyer.”

“I’m hoping that will be the case. I’ve heard that graduating lawyers at the top of their law school classes have a pretty good chance.”

After graduation in May, Lester did receive his orders to report to Judge Advocate General School, or JAG, as it was more familiarly known, at the University of Michigan. On a hot day late in July, he reported for legal duty to Fort Belvoir outside of Washington, DC. As a recent graduate who had not yet taken the bar exam, he was assigned to reviewing claims against the army by the day while studying for the bar exam at night.

At first the job seemed tedious. There were countless interactions between the military and the civilian community. These ranged from the purchase of military supplies to the procurement of troop vessels from civilian cruise lines. Many of the contract issues were addressed by other branches of government, but those that required the army to stake out a policy were given to the JAG office. One afternoon, as Lester was feeling fatigue from burning both ends of the candle working by day and studying at night, his commanding officer came by with a novel assignment that would have far reaching repercussions for the recent law school graduate.

Since the Great War, United States embassies around the world had received security details both for their protection and to ferret out espionage. Most of the security details came from the marines. However, the army filled in any gaps that arose due to manpower shortages or peculiar circumstances. That had been the case in Estonia, a country of previously limited interest to the United States, but one that was becoming increasingly important due to its proximity to both the North Sea and Russia. During the 1930's, the United States had established a small legation in Tallinn, the country's capital. An equally small army contingent had been assigned to guard the United States legation. However, the legation was not large enough to provide housing for the guard. So, the army had purchased a sizeable piece of land near the legation and built a barracks on it and made monthly installment payments to the Tallinn city council. The arrangement had worked well until Estonia found itself the object of a Soviet land grab.

Prior to Operation Barbarossa, the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, Hitler had preemptively taken steps to shore up his eastern front while, in the west, waging an aerial campaign against the British and carried out the invasion of France and the low countries. His mechanism for immobilizing the Soviets had been a non-aggression pact with the Soviets signed in Moscow during August 1939 and known by the names of its chief negotiators, the Russian diplomat, Vyacheslav Molotov, and his German counterpart, Joachim von Ribbentrop. Under the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, the two powers had agreed to partition the countries that lay between them, with the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania being relegated to the Soviet sphere of influence.

Pursuant to the pact, the Soviet Union had staged sham plebiscites in support of annexation of the three Baltic States in June 1940. Annexation of Estonia occurred soon thereafter. Equally sham elections resulted in Estonian candidates loyal to the Soviet Union being elected. During the events associated with the annexation and the subsequent spurious election, the US army continued to make payments for the barracks property. However, the leaders of the new puppet government in Tallinn claimed they had never received the funds and that the army had forfeited it's interest in the property. At the time, the United States was still not involved in the war on the European continent and had not taken sides and was reluctant to antagonize the Soviets. Yet, as a matter of principal, the army did not want the Soviet Union to be able to confiscate US army property based on what was considered a fabrication. So, the decision had been made to sue. The question was whether the suit should be brought against Estonia in its own capacity or against it as an entity within the Soviet Union.

The question required legal research, although not bar membership. Lester Abelstein was chosen because of his outstanding research record as a member of the UCLA Law Review. In a carefully researched memorandum, Lester concluded that the United States could not countenance the predatory policies of the Soviet Union and its involvement in the domestic affairs of Estonia. As a result, concluded Lester, Estonia, despite its annexation by the Soviet Union, was the proper party to be sued. By contrast, the Soviet Union had no interest in the property and, therefore, no role in the litigation, as its involvement in Estonia's internal affairs violated international law.

Unbeknown to Lester, his well reasoned memorandum had found its way to Under Secretary of State Sumner Welles. Welles views on the illegality of the Soviet annexation of the Baltic States were well known and had been enshrined in a diplomatic statement he was about to release. Since Welles was then acting for the ailing Cordell Hull as Secretary of State, Lester's memorandum had to be cleared with Welles' office. Because of its subject matter, Welles had

asked to see the memorandum and had read through it approvingly. When he finished, he had asked to meet with the memo's author.

Lester was both delighted and unnerved at the prospect of meeting so high an official. But, he had learned *chutzpah*, assertiveness, from the best, his father, and he eagerly awaited Welles' call.

The call did not take long. Wearing freshly ironed army khakis, Lester walked into Welles' ornate office. Wells, tall, slender and consummately dignified in appearance, greeted him warmly. "I want to congratulate you on your memo regarding the Soviet annexation of the Baltic states. In my opinion, you were spot on."

"Thank you, sir."

"I hope you don't mind me snooping, but I've had one of my men look into your background and I find it quite impressive."

Again, Lester expressed his thanks, wondering what was coming next.

"I'm a Harvard man. But I understand that Californians are partial to their state universities and your record at UCLA is as good as that of any Harvard man I have on my staff. I noticed that you majored in Spanish as well as government and economics.

"Yes. My father and I believe that Spanish is going to become an increasingly more important language in southern California. Already, I have had ample occasion to use my Spanish both as an undergraduate and during law school."

"I couldn't agree more about the importance of the language. You may not know, but prior to my landing in my present job, I became fluent in Spanish while posted in Argentina and then headed the State Department's Division of Latin American affairs."

"I didn't. I guess my snooping program isn't as extensive as yours."

"Touché! In the interest of full disclosure, I should also mention I'm aware you are Jewish."

Now, Lester's face showed concern. "I hope you don't find that to be a problem!"

"Just the opposite. I would like to get to the bottom of some very serious issues affecting the Jews of Europe. Unfortunately, there isn't too much interest here in the State Department. But, I am increasingly worried from the reports I have heard. I could use someone on my staff who is willing to focus on the Jewish issue in its own right and not just as an incidental part of the overall war effort. If I can get your superiors to loan you to the State Department, would you be interested in serving on my staff for such purpose. You can continue to study for the bar exam on your own time."

"Of course, sir."

"I thought you'd agree. So, I've already put the wheels in motion. If all goes well, we'll be meeting with Rabbi Stephen Wise shortly. I assume you've heard of him. He's the rabbi who is the

chairman of the World Jewish Congress which, as you may know, often speaks as the diplomatic voice for world Jewry.”

Lester did not want to sound smug but thought it important to emphasize the importance of the work performed by the WJC. “I do know that sir. It’s an organization known and respected by just about all the Jews I’ve encountered.”

“Good to hear. I’ll keep that in mind.”

The meeting with Rabbi Wise came sooner than Lester had expected and the subject matter of the meeting unnerved Lester in a way he could not previously have imagined.

At sixty-eight and in declining health, Rabbi Stephen Wise was a tireless advocate for the Jewish causes of the day. The son of a rabbi, Wise was a leader within the Reform Jewish movement and a strong Zionist. In addition to having been ordained as a rabbi, he, like his father before him, also held a doctorate. He was a compelling orator, had served as an advisor to President Woodrow Wilson, and was one of the founders of both the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the WJC. He also served as honorary president of WJC’s American branch, the American Jewish Congress. He had been a Democratic committeeman and an enthusiastic supporter of President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal, for which the president remained grateful and continued to seek out Wise for his views on Jewish community relations.

As early as 1933, Wise had sounded the alarm against Nazi atrocities perpetrated against Germany’s Jews. In March of that year, the American Jewish Congress, along with the B’nai B’rith had organized a massive rally at Madison Square Garden. Broadcast worldwide, the rally had attracted over 55,000 persons and had even caught the attention of Secretary of State Cordell Hull who had previously shown little interest in the plight of Germany’s Jews.

Since the Madison Square Garden rally, Wise had worked unceasingly to make the world aware of the atrocities being committed against the Jews of Europe. His concern and efforts had intensified as reports of *Einsatzgruppen* killings had filtered through to the outside world. But the reports that began to leak out starting in 1941 shook him to the core. In October 1941, there had been a New York Times report of thousands of Jews being killed in Galicia. In May 1942, as Lester Abelstein was graduating from law school, there had been a considerably more harrowing report from the Polish underground indicating that seven hundred thousand Polish Jews had been slaughtered.

The report had been confirmed the following month by Szmul Zygielbojm, a leader of the Polish Jewish underground, who had publicly reported what he knew on BBC Radio. Weeks later, there had been rumblings in the British press of Nazi gas chambers. In consequence, Wise had helped organize another massive rally in Madison Square Garden during the latter part of July 1942 for the purpose of exposing the Nazi crimes against European Jewry. However, the document he now held in his hands had, in the horror it reported, eclipsed everything he had previously known or heard.

Quickly, Wise had requested a meeting with Sumner Welles, who was then acting for the ailing Cordell Hull, for the purpose of bringing the document to the attention of the State Department. He could not have known at the time that Welles subalterns at the State Department had already seen the report and had dismissed its contents as far-fetched.

Welles had agreed to the meeting and had asked Lester, his new acolyte, to sit in. As the time had arrived for the meeting, Welles sat with Lester and briefed him on Welles' prior dealings with Wise. A secretary then reported that Wise had arrived. Soon, the door to the meeting room opened and an obviously agitated Stephen Wise walked in. As Welles introduced Lester, Wise curtly acknowledged the introduction and noted to himself Lester's Jewish surname. He then hurriedly opened his briefcase to pull out the document that had been the cause for the meeting.

The document was a copy of a telegram from Gerhart Riegner, secretary of the World Jewish Congress in Geneva, who had obtained his information from German industrialist, Eduard Schulte. The telegram had originally been sent by way of the British Consul General in Geneva, to S. S. Silverman, Member of Parliament and Chairman of the British Section of the World Jewish Congress. Wise looked at Welles concernedly and asked if he might read pertinent portions of the telegram out loud. Welles nodded affirmatively and Welles began reading, agitation and worry punctuating each one of his words:

Received alarming report stating that, in the Fuhrer's Headquarters, a plan has been discussed, and is under consideration, according to which all Jews in countries occupied or controlled by Germany numbering 3 1/2 to 4 millions should, after deportation and concentration in the East, be at one blow exterminated, in order to resolve, once and for all the Jewish question in Europe. Action is reported to be planned for the autumn. Ways of execution are still being discussed including the use of prussic acid. We transmit this information with all the necessary reservations, as exactitude cannot be confirmed by us. Our informant is reported to have close connections with the highest German authorities, and his reports are generally reliable. Please inform and consult New York.

When Wise finished, he again looked at Welles who sat in utter astonishment, his dumbfounded expression exceeded only by the look of dread written on Lester's face at hearing Wise's words.

After a few seconds of silence, Welles spoke. "Rabbi, it's every bit as bad as you said it would be when we spoke, and something must be done. But I can't do anything until I consult within the Department to get a feel for the reliability of what you have just reported. It may take a little time, so I have to ask for your patience. I know that's a big request, but, as you are aware, there are a number of officials within the Department who would just as soon see this report squelched as have its accuracy investigated. So, I need to be very careful in the way I present the matter. In the meantime, I must ask for your forbearance in not disclosing the contents of the telegram to the public until I complete my investigation.

Wise looked disappointed and began to protest. However, at that moment, Lester asked if he might speak. "I'm sure you've noticed from my last name that I'm Jewish. I have as much to lose as anyone if what your document recites is true. But, from my short time here, I've learned there are strong elements within the Department who don't want to give the appearance that the war in Europe is being fought for the benefit of we Jews. Acting Secretary Welles is not one of them. But, he has to follow procedure if we are to get to the bottom of your telegram. So, as a proud American and concerned Jew, I think it would be a good idea if you agreed to the Secretary's wishes."

As Welles assured Wise that he could reach Lester if any questions arose, a submissive Wise agreed to forbear from any public announcements. Barely two weeks later, on September 4, he would have cause to regret his agreement against speaking out, as he received word that one hundred thousand Jews had been slaughtered in Warsaw.

Chapter 10

Vichy, France: A Foreshadowing of Evil October 1940-November 1942

On the heels of the October 1940 Statue on Jews, the Vichy government passed increasingly oppressive legislation aimed at its Jewish population. By March 1941, Jews in Vichy France were required to obtain authorization to rent or sell a business. In June 1941, a second Statue on Jews was passed that defined a Jew more broadly than had the first. It also more exhaustively prohibited Jews from participating in most elements of industry and business. In July 1941, Jews were excluded from practicing law and those with businesses were required to register them as Jewish businesses. By August 1941, Jews were excluded from the medical arts.

Throughout this period, both Krauss families had settled into an uneasy existence in Nice. While each day brought more and more limitations on the Jews of both the German occupied north and the Vichy south, the Italians who oversaw Nice responded with relative benignity. With the aid of well-placed connections and an occasional bribe, the Krauss's perfume business had managed to continue its operations. For Bernard, the opportunity to make regular trips to Grasse to inspect the family's perfume interests provided a much-needed distraction from worrying about the tide of fascism that was overtaking Europe.

May was the best month to visit Grasse as its most aromatic blossoms were in full bloom. There was the fragrant rose, the pale pink flower that was so identified with the month of its blooming that it was referred to as the May rose. When combined with blends such as bergamot, lemon oil, cedar wood, cloves and bergamot, the result was both classic and sensual. While nominally intending only to check on his family's interests, Bernard often allowed himself to pass the hours with the old hands who harvested the flowers and worked in the blending facilities. Invariably, the conversation turned to the region's most renowned petal—the jasmine. Admired by perfumers around the globe, the jasmine's woody aroma combined with its flowery scent formed the base ingredient for more than seventy percent of the world's legendary perfumes and was the real staple of the community. The locals swore that the scent of the jasmine helped to ease life's stresses. Only a short time in the presence of freshly cut jasmine petals told Bernard they were right.

Bernard was familiar with the various methods for extracting the essential oils from the harvested flowers and had observed each of the five major extraction methods over the years. His favorite by far was the *enfleurage* technique. It was the most labor intensive of the various methods, but it also was the most hands on and offered Bernard the opportunity to observe firsthand the extraction of the precious oils. The technique required workers to place the harvested flowers on glass sheets suspended between wooden frames and greased with animal fat. Once on the sheets, the workers would move the flowers by hand across the glass sheets until the floral essence was absorbed by the animal fat. The resulting material was dissolved in alcohol which was then burned away leaving the essential oils.

It was the next and final step that delighted Bernard the most. Once the essential oils were removed, they would then have to be blended with an established array of ingredients to create the desired scent. The blending followed time-honored formulas and the person responsible for the blending was called the "nose." Bernard had become friends with one of the most heralded noses in the community, a man named Emil. Often Bernard would sit with Emil after work, and they would exchange stories about the most successful blends employed in the past and the

prospects for the future. When they had last met, Emil revealed that he had been experimenting with a new formula that could be the best of his career. He was looking forward to the next harvest so he could employ the formulation on a large scale, including the flower harvest belonging to the Krauss family. The prospect of a greatly successful scent—even during a period fraught with the atrocities taking place throughout Europe—filled Bernard with hope and he, too, found himself looking forward to the following spring's flower harvest.

The new academy for the deaf had finally opened in Nice and, consistent with their highest hopes, Maurice and Jacquelyn had found Dr. Durant to be an open and willing instructor. He had expressed enthusiasm working with Leon and was even more encouraged when he heard about the manner in which Leon had learned to communicate with Gabrielle.

Leon's visits with Dr. Durant had started slowly, but before long he was making progress both in understanding oral communication through lip reading and in the quality of his own verbal communication. Durant's mother had been Swiss and spoke German while Durant was growing up. Durant had been curious whether his new student might perform proficiently in two different languages—something he had never seen in the literature. So, with the help of Gabrielle who was studying German at the gymnasium, Durant began devoting part of the sessions with Leon to teaching him German. Leon's response had been gratifying. Enough so, that, after only six months, Durant had reported his belief that Leon would be able to pursue a university education if he stayed with Durant's program until he was ready for his exams. The family had been elated.

Every week, Gabrielle would come home with a new story describing Leon's progress in both French and German and the satisfaction Maurice and Jacquelyn derived from these reports helped to support them through the uncertainty that surrounded their small enclave in Italian-occupied Nice.

However, as 1941 progressed into 1942, the warning signs from both the occupied north and the Vichy south kept growing and, with them, the tension of not knowing what would come next. In August 1941, the warnings had begun as the *Gestapo* rounded up more than three thousand foreign Jews in Paris and interned them at a number of the burgeoning detention camps that had sprouted throughout the country. Even worse, as time wore on, the naked acts of hostility against the Jews began to intensify. During the summer of 1942, more than sixty-five hundred Jews were rounded up from the recently-annexed Alsace-Lorraine region and, without explanation, taken to one of the increasingly harsh internment camps. In July of that summer, the French police, under orders from the *Gestapo*, rounded up over twelve thousand Jews, with most sent to the internment camp at Darcy. This July roundup was followed by another raid the next month, resulting in an additional seven thousand Parisian Jews being apprehended and sent to Darcy. By then, Darcy had become a transit point for deportation to the east and the death camp at Auschwitz.

In the Vichy south, the news was no less foreboding. Foreign Jews who had been held in refugee camps were taken without warning, beaten with hoses and batons and placed on transports headed for the east, their destination, too, being Auschwitz. In all, nearly forty-two thousand Jews would be deported to the Nazi death camps by the end of 1942.

As the unsettling events in the rest of the country were unfolding, Donati had no intention of watching as a hapless bystander. For months, as the ominous signs began to grow, he had been busy with a plan to rescue the Jews of the Italian occupied sector of France and to transport them to the safety of North Africa. Working with local rescue committees, Donati had made arrangements with the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, the “Joint,” to procure four transport ships for such purpose. The Joint was the primary source of funding for many of the rescue efforts aimed at assisting European Jews who were under Nazi control, and their involvement in the ship procurement effort was making Donati feel optimistic.

Donati had shared his plans with Bernard whose knowledge as an exporter and shipper had proved valuable. Bernard had been enthusiastic but had pointed out the difficulties of relying upon the fascist Mussolini government to allow such a plan to go into motion. As they once again sat on Bernard’s balcony, Donati was trying to be upbeat, though his plan had stalled, and the ships had not yet been procured. Bernard turned to him with a look of appreciative consolation.

“You are doing all you possibly can, but the political situation is so delicate, particularly if you want to involve the North African countries. Further, we don’t know how long the local authorities are going to forbear before they start imposing the same type of registration requirements as have the German lackeys in Vichy.”

“I’m sure you’re right. But, already, I have made contact with the American and British embassies in Rome and I have the support of influential elements within the *Capuchin* Friars, who have the ear of the Vatican. And, as I’ve mentioned, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee has committed to purchase the ships.”

Bernard did not want to discourage his friend and associate. This was particularly the case since he knew how hard Donati had been working. It was a cause that might benefit not only the tens of thousands of Jews who were now living in the Italian occupied sector of France, but, in addition, might also help the almost three hundred thousand Jews who were living in other parts of the country. Bernard looked at Donati appraisingly before speaking.

“The last thing I want is to discourage you from any pursuit that will assist the Jews of France escape the Nazi scourge. However, I think it unwise to place so much of your hope in one rescue plan. I recognize it has great potential. But, it also has significant problems that, to my way of thinking, require a backup.”

Donati was not happy with the possibility his labors might not bear fruit. But he was a practical man and he knew the same to be true of Bernard. So, he suppressed his disappointment and encouraged his friend to continue. “So, what do you think I should do?”

“What you’ve been doing all along—helping the Jewish refugees in France find places that make it difficult for the Nazis to reach them. I’ve been observing with fascination and awe how you’ve managed to find places for so many Jews in the mountainous communities of Italian occupied France—places such as St. Martin Vesubie. There must be an extraordinary number of Jews in that one small community alone.”

“There are. My colleagues and I estimate we have found a home for as many as twenty-five hundred Jews in St. Martin.”

“There you have it. Such communities are under the relatively benign control of the Italians, but if the political tides were to change, the relative inaccessibility of St. Martin will make it a desirable place to hide or, at the very least, give its Jewish occupants a head start if they have to leave in the face of a German takeover. In addition, why not also capitalize on your many connections both here in the Italian occupied sector as well as in Italy itself. Your family has been associated with Italy’s prosperity since well before the unification of the Italian mainland. Perhaps, you could draw on those connections and arrange for as many Jews who are now living in Nice to relocate to the safety of Italy. Admittedly, Mussolini’s government is unpredictable. But, once in Italy, it will be much more difficult for the Germans to do anything. In addition, it will be easier to arrange for a rescue transport to North Africa from the Italian mainland.”

Wariness was showing on Donati as he considered Bernard’s words. After a moment, his manner seemed more upbeat. “You are absolutely correct and I will redouble my efforts to relocate France’s Jewish refugees. However, unless things change dramatically, I believe the transport ship approach might still have merit and, in addition, it provides a means by which a large number of Jews can escape at one time.”

As events would unfold, a dramatic change was about to take place. On November 8, 1942, Allied war ships and aircraft under the command of Dwight D. Eisenhower initiated a three-pronged attack on the French colonies of Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia in North Africa. Rapidly, the targeted ports of Casablanca, Oran and Tunis fell to the Allied assault. During the attack, Admiral François Darlan, commander of the Vichy French forces in North Africa, was captured while visiting his son who had been hospitalized in Algiers. In captivity, Darlan struck a controversial deal with the Allies. In return for Allied recognition of Darlan as High Commissioner of France for North and West Africa, the Admiral agreed to put “North Africa to the disposition of the Americans.” Eisenhower agreed and, on November 10, Darlan ordered all French forces under his command in North Africa to cooperate with the Allies.

The Allied invasion of North Africa changed Hitler’s calculus toward Vichy France. The Fuhrer had undertaken extraordinary efforts to prevent French North Africa from falling into Allied hands. While the Vichy government was in control of its colonies in North Africa, he had benefitted from French administration of the strategic North African coast. However, now that the Allies had established a beachhead in North Africa with Darlan having capitulated, the benefit of the Vichy administration had diminished while the need for Germany to shore up its exposure in southern Europe had increased. Immediately, the order for Case Anton, the occupation of southern France, had gone out. By end of the day on November 10, the German 1st and 7 Armies had occupied all of Vichy France except for the crucial Mediterranean coast the responsibility for which had been given to the Italian 4 Army.

For Donati, the events of November 1942 had spelled disaster as a new reality had settled into southern France. He could not know whether the Italian army would stand up to Hitler, although his sources advised that the Italians would not easily capitulate to any demands made by their Nazi Allies with regard to the Jews of the occupied Mediterranean. However, he also knew that Italy’s new military responsibilities for defending the southeastern French coastline would consume much of its resources. That alone would divert any incentive the Italians may have had to support a convoy of ships bound for Allied controlled waters. Reluctantly, Donati picked up the phone and called Bernard. “My friend, I’m afraid you were right. The transport to North Africa is looking increasingly doubtful. I won’t yet abandon it, but we now have to marshal as many of

resources as possible to find another way for the Jews of France to find refuge beyond the reach of the Nazis.”

Chapter 11

Malta: The Siege is Lifted August 1942-November 1942

Julien had often wondered what thoughts entered the minds of pilots who were catapulted out of their aircraft and forced to hope for a miracle as they floated through the air to an uncertain landing. Now, he was in that position and the thoughts careened through his mind like a hail of bullets. As he watched with increasing alarm the fast-approaching English Channel, his mind unavoidably focused on survival and Kayla.

Julien knew that a parachute landing in the Channel during the summer offered a ray of hope. During training, he had been advised that the waters of the Channel often reached a temperature of seventeen degrees Centigrade during the summer months. In waters of that temperature, a man could easily survive for two hours and some had been rescued alive after as many as twenty hours in the Channel's unpredictable waters. He also knew that shore crews were on the lookout for downed planes. Even so, he was aware his chances depended on any number of unpredictable factors and his mind kept returning to the worst.

"What if I don't make it," he thought. "What would become of Kayla." Maybe, it would have been better for her if she had stayed with her suitor from Cornell. Hadn't he been a pre-med student? Perhaps, even now, he was completing his medical education, alive and secure, before being deployed as an army doctor. For sure, he was not floating through the air, with Kayla's and his lives left to the uncertainties of the Channel's fearsome waters."

Julien was so preoccupied with his thoughts that he almost lost track of his descent. However, he managed to regain his composure, and, as he approached the Channel's dark waves, he loosened the chest strap on his parachute to enhance his escape from the chute once he entered the water.

The splashdown was more of a shock than he could have imagined. The waves seemed unimaginably large and the water was cold—much colder than he had expected. But the contact with the water had had the advantage of putting all of his senses on high alert. Once in the water, he was able to release the parachute's leg straps and swim away from the huge swath of parachute material which, if left attached, would have impeded his ability to swim, if not drag him down.

Julien could not have known, but he was in luck. The sun was beginning to set, but it was still daylight and, as he had hoped, shore patrols were on the alert for downed aircraft. One such shore patrol had been tracking his plane as it went down and a spotter had observed him eject from the cockpit. Quickly, a rescue launch had been dispatched. Now, as the afternoon began to turn to dusk, the rescue craft, briefed on the most recent wind readings, was heading in what it hoped would be Julien's landing area.

The first thing the rescue boat spotted was Julien's parachute. From there, it was easy to find the downed pilot. By then, Julien had been in the water for over two hours. While hypothermia had not yet run its course, he was beyond cold. As welcoming hands pulled him on board the rescue craft, he could hardly form words to express his appreciation. Before he passed out, the last thing he remembered was his rescuers covering him with blankets and massaging his hands and feet.

Once back on land, he was taken to a hospital unit that specialized in hypothermia. For three days, he alternated between hazy awareness and sleep. Finally, to the relief of his attending nurses, he sat up and declared that, if nothing else, his hunger was going to kill him.

As every Englishman had learned from the Blitz, war does not take time out for the wounded, the dispossessed or the downed. As soon as Julien began showing signs of full health and recovery, he was subjected to a battery of tests to determine his frame of mind. By then, his near escape from his doomed aircraft and his downing in the merciless waters of the Channel had become repressed, if not, distant memories. Slowly, but imperturbably, the commitment and bravado that had brought him to England began to return.

When he was declared fit to fly again, Julien had expressed elation, rather than any other emotion. Immediately, he sat down to write Kayla and await his next assignment. It did not take long.

Located between Sicily and the North African coast, the British Crown Colony of Malta, with a population of about 270,000 inhabitants, was an island stronghold in the middle of the Mediterranean. Ever since the beginning of the North African campaign in 1940, both the Allied and Axis powers had eyed the island's strategic position. Because of its location, it had served as a British aerial and maritime base. From its small airport, British Harriers and Spitfires took off daily. Their mission was the interdiction of Axis transport ships bound for the Mediterranean coast of North Africa.

In response, the Germans and Italians had positioned 600 aircraft in Sicily for the purpose of mounting fighter and bomber attacks designed to isolate the island and neutralize its fighting ability. From the middle of 1941 on, German and Italian bombers waged a punishing bombing campaign against Malta's principal ports, their goal being to stifle the British air defenses and, in the process, lay siege to the island. Day after day, the *Luftwaffe* unloaded more bombs on Malta than on almost any other wartime target.

As the island shuddered under the relentless rain of German bombs, the RAF planners in London decided that a concerted air offensive was needed in Malta, lest the chance of defending the island against the Axis forces vanish in a mass of bombed out rubble.

Fighter planes were needed in Malta, but none had the flying range from England. In addition, transporting such craft aboard ship was out of the question due to the heavily patrolled waters of the Mediterranean. As a result, the approach chosen was to launch the needed fighter planes from aircraft carriers located off the coast of Gibraltar. The first squadron of Hurricane fighters had taken off, in what were referred to as "cub runs" from the HMS Ark Royal in May 1941. Later, in March 1942, the Hurricanes were replaced by more versatile Spitfire MK VC's, tropical fighters, known as "trops," designed with special air filters to deal with the hot and dusty Malta environment.

Now, as Julien was reaching full recovery, a new squadron of planes was being positioned to fly to Malta for what was hoped to be a final counterattack against the German and Italian air forces. Twenty-eight pilots were assigned to the mission, among them Julien and eight other Canadian pilots. Soon, the new pilots disembarked from their transport ship, the Empire Conrad,

and motored toward the huge Audacious-class aircraft carrier that was heaving in the nearby waters.

Once onboard, Julien and his fellow RAF pilots were greeted by three guide pilots who had flown in from Malta as escorts. The new pilots were given a few hours to freshen up. They were then briefed on the forthcoming flight that might well expose them to German Focke Wulf FW-190 and Italian Macchi 202 fighter planes as they approached Malta.

The new pilots were then given a tour of the hulking aircraft carrier as well as a briefing on the modifications made to the Spitfires for aircraft carrier operations. Julien was fully familiar with the Spitfire's design and couldn't understand how the planes could take off from the carrier's deck without takeoff flaps. His question had also entered the minds of his fellow pilots who were relieved to hear Julien ask the briefing officer about the takeoff protocol for the Spitfires. "Sir, I'm well familiar with this plane and don't understand how we are to get it airborne without flaps."

Smiling, the officer replied slyly: "I guess that is an important detail. Let me show you." As Julien and his fellow pilots watched nervously, the officer casually placed two wooden blocks between the wing and the standard wing flaps on each side of the plane. "Gentlemen, the wooden blocks will give you the angle you need for takeoff. When you are in the air, you'll release your flaps and the blocks will fall away. Couldn't be simpler."

Hearing moans from his fliers, the officer changed his tone from sarcasm to reassurance. "It really does work as your predecessors can attest. Now, get some sleep. You take off in the morning."

As he climbed into the air and released the wooden blocks, Julien was relieved to discover the technique did work. He was even more relieved to arrive at Malta on a clear afternoon without having encountered any enemy aircraft in his path. However, as he emerged from his plane, his relief turned to wariness. The hot Maltese sun bore down on him. Even worse was the layer of dust from the landing field that entered his nostrils as he walked to the lonely looking crew quarters at the airfield in Luqa, one of three that hosted British fighter craft. He knew that the island's RAF pilots had had impressive results in warding off their Axis foes and that much of the Axis sea traffic bound for Tunis and Tripoli had been obstructed. As a result, most were predicting that the German and Italian effort to lay siege to the island would end soon. But, as he looked around at the hot and spartan surroundings that he would be calling home, he wondered whether that ending would come soon enough.

Julien was given only a short time to shake any of the hesitation he was experiencing. The next afternoon, Julien and twenty of his fellow pilots scrambled. Fifteen Italian Savoia-Marchetti SM medium bombers had been sighted accompanied by an unspecified number of Macchi C.202 fighters. As Julien and his fellow pilots reached altitude, they immediately encountered the Italian fighter planes. Luckily, fate was on their side as the Italians were forced to look into the sun as the battle raged.

As Julien was positioning his aircraft behind two of the Italian fighters in what would prove to be his first kill of the campaign, he looked with horror as he observed two of the Italian Machi's circle behind one of his fellow Canadian pilots. As cannon fire shot past the fellow Canadian, Julien thought the man was a goner. Then to his amazement, he watched as the Canadian pilot changed course and streaked directly into the sun. The two Italians gave chase and, for a few terrifying seconds, Julien could not make out the results of the chase. However, as the angle of his

own plane changed, Julien observed that the Canadian had outsmarted the Italians by suddenly slowing down in the glare of the sun, causing the Italians to overshoot his craft. Now, the Canadian was behind the Italians and had a clear shot. As an amazed Julien looked on, he watched as both of the pursuing Macchi's fell from the sky.

The day's battle had been a success with seven of the Italian bombers having been downed along with as many Macchi's. There had, however, been casualties. As Julien and the others sat around the mess table that night, they observed a moment of silence for their fallen comrades. After dinner, Julien approached the Canadian whose flying heroics he had observed that afternoon. The man's name was Henri. He was a tall redhead whose eyes sparkled with friendliness and intelligence. Like Julien, he was from the French-speaking part of Canada and was pleased to have a fellow Quebecer in the squadron.

"Where did you learn that maneuver?" Julien asked.

"Like most of what we know, I learned it from watching a fellow pilot over France and then, by asking him questions just the way you are now."

That evening's simple conversation had led to a staunch friendship between the two pilots who enjoyed speaking in French and trading stories about life back home. Henri was from Quebec City and had studied meteorology for two years at Université Laval, Canada's oldest public university and Quebec City's finest. It was his love of the atmosphere that had led him to flying and he was eager to hear about weather conditions in the northern regions where Julien had done his private flying.

In addition to being an engaging companion, Henri also proved to be a valued fellow warrior in the sky. Henri had volunteered to fly the "tail end" position in almost every air engagement. The position was particularly dangerous because attacks often came from the rear, rendering the tail end position particularly vulnerable. For, Julien, however, it was comforting to know that Henri was protecting his own tail when they were flying in formation.

One day, Julien was flying in the squadron's lead position. From this position, he was the first to detect as many as two dozen German Focke Wulf FW-190 fighters flying out of the glare of the afternoon sun. Quickly, he alerted his fellow pilots. But, for some, it was too late. Fortunately, Julien had been able to take evasive action and was winning a dog fight with a fleeing German Focke. But, as Henri observed the scene from his tail position, he saw two more Focke's heading for Julien at high speed. Radio communication was dangerous at this stage of the battle, but Julien had to be warned. Quickly, Henri reached down for one of the two colored paddles that, by prearrangement, Julien and he carried in their cockpits. Frantically, he waved the red paddle, the one indicating Julien should drop his landing gear and wing flaps to suddenly slow down his speed, hoping that Julien would be able to see his frenzied waving.

Luckily, Julien did see the signal. As the enemy pilots came streaking after him, Julien did as instructed. The sudden lowering of the landing gear and wing flaps caused his plane to shudder alarmingly. However, it had the desired effect as the enemy pilots overshot their mark and streaked by their intended prey. Julien's ribs hurt from the bruising his body had taken from the suddenly slowed-down plane, but he was alive.

At dinner, Julien thanked his fellow pilot as the two drank to one another's good health. Waiting on their table was a Maltese waitress name Pila from a nearby village.

As with her fellow islanders, she had endured unyielding tension for the two years of the Axis bombing campaign. Now, the company of young men in the mess hall offered an opportunity for something more than the terror of overhead planes and the countless casualties she had witnessed. She had a rich Sicilian complexion, lively dark eyes and a buxom body. She was the fantasy object of every single pilot in the squadron whose ardor was fueled by her flirtatious manner.

Like many Maltese from her region, she spoke Italian and Maltese, a Semitic tongue, but not English. Many of the English speaking pilots had tried to overcome the language barrier but to no avail. Henri and one other pilot named Claude who also spoke French had the clear advantage with Pila as their mother tongue was close enough to her Italian to enable them to communicate in a way that put Pila at ease. Soon, Julien noticed that Pila was disappearing from the mess hall each night for about a half hour, sometimes with Henri and sometimes with Claude. The routine became so well established that, after a week or so, it no longer even engendered jeering from the other men.

Despite her regular assignations with Henri and Claude, the real object of Pila's interest was Julien, an aim that hadn't escaped Julien's notice. However, Julien did not want to do anything that would be inappropriate for a married man, let alone impair Henri and Claude's good times. So, cheerfully, he played along, not wanting to tease but also not wanting to sour the friskiness that always accompanied Pila's arrival.

Despite Pila's good-natured manner and the playful banter of the pilots as they drank and told stories of the day's battles, everyone was beginning to feel the pressure of unrelenting battles, lost friends, and limited outlets for tension. After a month of unremitting battle, every ear was peaked as the evening military news described the Allied advances in North Africa. Every pilot knew that each Allied success brought with it the possibility that the Axis powers would have to retreat from North Africa and end their efforts to lay siege to Malta. But, until that time, there would be more battles to be fought over Malta's hot skies.

The battle that would prove to be Henri's last occurred on a bright midweek afternoon as the squadron was taking on a large contingent of German Junkers Ju-88 bombers, with Henri as usual in the tail end position. As he exchanged fire with an opposing Messerschmitt looking for his fourth kill of the day, canon fire from a following plane suddenly ripped through one of the wings of Henri's plane. In an effort to evade his pursuer, Henri went into a deep dive hoping that the German pilot would never follow him toward the water at such speed. Henri had been correct and, at the last minute, the pursuing German pilot had pulled up. Breathing a sigh of relief, Henri, too, tried to pull out of his dive. But it was too late. The shredded wing and speed of the plane had made it impossible for him to stop the plane's descent or to evacuate the cockpit. He would be awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for his day's work, but it would be awarded posthumously.

Back in the barracks, Julien was beside himself with grief. Rarely did he drink to excess because of the need to be fresh for an encounter with the enemy. That night however, he hardly let go of the bottle as he sat at a corner table and drank alone. Morbid thoughts made worse by inebriation raced through his mind, enough so that he hardly noticed Pila bring another bottle and sit down beside him. As she breathily suggested an antidote to Julien's distress, she took his unresisting hand and began leading him to the back room of the mess hall.

Chapter 12

Washington, DC: The Run up to the Bermuda Conference September 1942-April 1943

After the August meeting between Welles and Wise, Lester Abelstein's life had settled into an arduous, but familiar, pattern. He would arrive at work at eight o'clock each morning and sort out the communications from the previous night as well as the newly received wires and mail that had begun flowing in since his arrival.

At ten o'clock, after Welles had met with the various State Department heads to discuss planning and any urgent matters that had arisen, Lester would bring the now burgeoning stack of communications into Welles' office. Welles would survey the documents, withholding those that required his personal attention and return the others to Lester for the purpose of preparing draft replies. At two in the afternoon, before Welles customary afternoon meeting at the White House, Lester would present the draft responses to Welles for his approval and would then begin the process anew for those communications received during the day. Lester would then meet with Welles at seven after dinner and would again commence to draft responses in time for their final meeting at ten in the evening.

It did not take long for Welles to discover Lester's facility with words and the replies he was willing to entrust to Lester began to mount. For Lester, the increased responsibility was both heady and exhausting. But, he knew he would never again have an opportunity like the one he was experiencing. In addition, he hoped his work would in some small way benefit the besieged European Jews. So, he trudged on.

Welles was known to enjoy his alcohol and, in his office, stocked a fine variety of American and Scotch whiskeys. As the courtly statesman began to rely more heavily on Lester's judgment without the need for exhaustive oversight, their ten o'clock meetings took on a more social quality, with less review and, increasingly, more drinking. Welles was a great raconteur and loved to talk about his experiences in Latin America as one of America's preeminent representatives of what had become known as the "good neighbor" policy. In addition, to helping deescalate the Cuban revolution in 1933, Welles had also attended conferences in Buenos Aires in 1933 and in 1936, in Lima during 1938, in Havana during 1940, and in Rio de Janeiro earlier in 1942. That he could describe some of his experiences to Lester in Spanish made the story telling all the more appealing for Welles.

One evening, while Welles and Lester were talking about the day's goings on, Lester asked offhandedly whether Welles had heard anything from his State Department colleagues about the reliability of the telegram Wise had brought to his attention.

"I'm afraid I have," replied Welles, "and what I have heard doesn't fill me with pride or confidence in my colleagues here."

"What do you mean?" responded a surprised Lester.

"Well, it seems that our guys had knowledge of the Riegner report and may have even made an effort to keep it from Rabbi Wise who all along was its intended recipient."

"That's fairly shocking."

“Not if you’re familiar with the culture here at State. Few of the people here, appointees or staff, are Jewish and most are guided by the view that the war can best be won if it treated as a global conflict with the Allies being on the side of the good.”

“But can’t such a straightforward view be reconciled with support for Europe’s embattled Jews.”

“In the abstract, yes. But this is a diplomatic mission. In the view of many of the people here, any suggestion that the war was being fought to liberate the Jews of Europe might sour support at home and infuriate the Arabs who worry that a rescue effort might result in hordes of European Jews being sent to Palestine. In addition, our guys want to drive a wedge between ordinary Germans and the Nazi government that has taken them down such a bloody path. However, the concern is that we won’t be able to galvanize the German public if they see American involvement as taking place on behalf of the Jews.”

“Your last point leaves me flabbergasted. Even so, from what I’ve heard, American public opinion is increasingly supportive of rescuing Europe’s Jews.”

“You may be right. But my colleagues are not just ordinary Americans. They are grandees, and like many of their fellow patricians, have never been receptive toward the Jews of this country. Just look at the unconscionable limitations on Jewish immigration under the Immigration Act of 1924.”

“Yes, we’ve had many conversations about that piece of legislation around my family’s Friday night sabbath dinner table. I have to say my family appreciates without reservation the opportunities that America has given us. But the limitations on Jewish immigration at this time in history just seems indefensible. In any event, you were about to tell me more about the Riegner communication.”

“Yes. The whole episode goes back to earlier in August when Riegner paid a visit to our vice-consul in Geneva, a man named Howard Elting, Jr. Once there, Riegner apparently dictated a telegram intended for the ultimate consumption of Rabbi Wise, in his capacity as president of the WJC. In the Telegram, Riegner described the plan to exterminate Europe’s Jews”

“That must have opened Elting’s eyes!”

“It did. Believing there was an element of truth to Riegner’s information, Elting forwarded the telegram to Leland Harrison, the highest ranking official in our legation in Berne.”

“So far, that sounds like the telegram was on the right trajectory to reach the States.”

“Correct again, but only to a point. Harrison was skeptical but did send the message to our guys here at State where, I’m afraid, it was allowed to languish without ever being forwarded to Wise. The view here, cynical as it may sound, was that any Jews being deported to the east were being sent for the purpose of performing the Nazis’ dirty work and not for the purpose of extermination.”

“I don’t like the sound of that.”

“I don’t either and I will report my reaction to Wise when we see him.

For many months, a Polish resistance fighter and diplomatic courier named Jan Karski had been sending warnings about the plight of the Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto and of the Nazi death camps in Poland. But now he had evidence in the form of a microfilm from the Polish underground. The evidence described the employment of a Nazi death camp at Belzec, Poland, intended for the purpose of exterminating Poland’s Jews.

Shortly after Welles’ meeting with Lester, Karski had presented his evidence to Count Edward Raczynski, the Polish Foreign Minister in exile in London. Raczynski had been so moved that he had prepared a report entitled “The mass extermination of Jews in German occupied Poland,” which he later forwarded to the United Nations.

Karski had also contacted the British section of the World Jewish Congress, which had determined that Karski’s evidence was consistent with other reports coming out of the Polish government in exile in London. Welles, too, had learned of Karski’s findings. So, when Wise walked into Welles’ office for a second meeting, both parties were aware of the mounting evidence of the unspeakable crimes that were taking place at the hands of the Nazis. Impatiently, Wise got right to the point.

“Mr. Secretary, there can no longer be any doubt of what is happening in Poland. Can’t you do something?”

Crestfallen, Welles looked down as he replied. “If it was in my power, I would do something immediately. But, as Lester knows, I am up against some very entrenched elements here at State who do not want any suggestion that United States policy in the war is being driven by Jewish considerations. Even more importantly, I’m afraid Roosevelt is being influenced by the same considerations and by the hope that our recent landing in North Africa will spell the beginning of the end of the war. Otherwise, I’m skeptical there is much we can do. We certainly don’t have any influence over German policy, and we don’t have any soldiers or weapons in Poland.”

It was now a disheartened Wise’s turn to show his disappointment. “Surely, there is something that can be done. We are talking about millions of people being led to their deaths for no reason other than the accident of their birth. At least, there must be some way of getting some of the remaining Jews out of Europe before Hitler’s thugs get their hands on them.”

“That is certainly a hope. But I’m afraid your best bet right now is whatever means you have available to call attention to the situation on your own. In the meantime, I’ll be working with whatever sympathetic elements I can muster to address the refugee situation.

Rabbi Wise did act on Welles’s advice and, at a press conference, announced to the world that the Nazis were planning on killing Jews by the millions. Though the press took little note of his entreaties, Wise, nevertheless, hoped the White House would. He was rewarded by a call from Welles advising that Roosevelt would meet with Wise and other leaders of the Jewish community to address the plight of the Jews of Europe. Welles would be in attendance.

The night after the meeting, Welles and Lester met at their customary evening wrap-up time of ten o'clock. Lester was beside himself with impatience. "What did the president say?"

"I'm afraid you won't find it very satisfying. He acknowledged the magnitude of Hitler's atrocities, expressed sympathy and was interested throughout. But his position remains that the best way to help European Jewry is to win the war."

"What about assisting the refugees?"

"The president has authorized the establishment of an Advisory Committee on Political Refugees. But I believe the impetus is going to have to come from Rabbi Wise and the other Jewish leaders. If Wise can build up a large enough head of steam, perhaps Roosevelt will find the means to take more effective action."

Wise and the American Jewish Congress did organize another huge rally at Madison Square Garden the following March, one of the major outgrowths of which was a proposal to offer reimbursement to induce neutral countries to take in Jewish war refugees. In the aftermath of the rally, many Jewish organizations also came together to form a Joint Committee on European Jewish Affairs for the purpose of submitting additional demands on the treatment of refugees. Welles, as Roosevelt's confidant on such matters, was the recipient of the demands.

As Welles considered the proposals, Roosevelt's Advisory Committee on Political Refugees presented its own slate of ideas and recommendations, especially proposals to enhance Spanish and Turkish involvement in the rescue of Jewish refugees. The Committee recommendation that drew the most attention came from its chairman, James G. McDonald, who offered the view that Palestine should be looked to as a safe haven for those Jews who reached neutral territory.

Unfortunately, the attention came largely from the British. For them, employment of Palestine as a haven ran against the grain of British efforts to avoid antagonizing the Arabs. The British reaction made it clear that a conference with the United States was needed to discuss British concerns regarding the eventual relocation of Jewish refugees who were able to reach neutral territory. Bermuda was the agreed upon destination for the conference both because of its location and the ability of conference participants to carry on discussions in privacy.

Before the conference, Lester discussed with Welles the prospects for a favorable outcome. Welles response had not been inspiring as he described in detail Britain's insistence on limiting the number of Jews reaching Palestine.

Lester was saddened by Welles response, but not surprised. So, he thought he would try a different tack. "British intransigence, when it comes to Palestine is disappointing, if not a shock. But, what about discrete cases like the Jewish refugees from Bulgaria? From what I've heard, there may be as many as sixty thousand Jews trapped in Bulgaria who might be able to escape with a concerted Allied effort. If, as seems to be the case, Turkey is willing to provide a haven for the Bulgarians, then surely Britain would not object to making Palestine as a final place of refuge. There's also been talk about a possible Romanian willingness to accept payment for the country's Jews, particularly after the losses the Romanians have experienced fighting the Russians."

“You’re correct about the Bulgarians and I have every hope we can address their situation in Bermuda. But don’t hold your breath. The Romanians are another story. I don’t see us negotiating with an enemy country. But, at bottom, the British are hard asses to the point of ruthlessness when it comes to Palestine. As a result, they don’t want to have to deal with a stream of Jewish refugees, no matter the country that harbors them. Unfortunately, their intransigence is no less appalling than our own unwillingness to upend our restrictive immigration laws.”

In the end, Welles had been correct. The results of the Bermuda Conference, as it was called, were less than noteworthy, if not totally repugnant. Led by Harold Willis Dodds, president of Princeton, and Richard Law, British parliamentary undersecretary of state for foreign affairs, the conference had focused more on Britain’s callous preoccupation with Jewish refugees heading for Palestine than on any humanitarian concern for rescuing those European Jews who were still alive. No solution was offered for saving the Jews of Bulgaria or Romania, nor for any other refugee matter. Instead, the conference ended with Britain’s reaffirmation of its infamous White Paper of 1939 which limited the number of Jews entering the Palestine mandate to 75,000 of which 46,000 entry documents had already been assigned.

Lester had begun to personally take the diplomatic setbacks applicable to his Jewish brethren in Europe. However, despite his discouragement, he resolved to keep his concerns close to his chest, knowing how porous the State Department was when it came to preserving confidences. Welles had been quick to notice the signs of discouragement in Lester’s manner following the Bermuda Conference. He sympathized with his young aide. But, more importantly, he needed Lester to be at his best for the ongoing demands of his job. So, one evening shortly after the conference, Welles walked around to where Lester was sitting and put his hand on Lester’s shoulder. “Son, you’ve been working awfully hard of late. Why don’t you take the weekend off? In fact, why don’t you make it a three-day weekend. Since the conference, things have been a little slow here and I can manage while you’re recharging your batteries.”

Lester began to object, but then thought better of it. Since arriving in Washington, he had had little opportunity to see the sights of the city, let alone socialize. Now, a three-day weekend sounded very appealing.

With the city’s oppressive mugginess still several months away, spring was a magical time in the District of Columbia, even more so since the arrival in March 1912 of more than 3,000 cherry trees—a gift from Mayor Yukio Ozaki of Tokyo to promote Japan’s then growing friendship with the United States. The trees had been planted on the northern edge of the Potomac River along what had become known as the Tidal Basin. A two-mile trail around the basin enabled District residents and tourists alike to relax as they walked amid the cherry trees and glanced across the basin’s sparkling waters. Along the way, they could admire the just completed Jefferson Memorial that now jutted out into the basin, looking like the splendid neoclassical temple.

The cherry blossom season had been unusually late that year. So, after spending his first day off doing laundry and taking care of personal matters, Lester decided to take in the sights and walk around the Tidal Basin. The day was warm and the countless pale pink Japanese cherry blossoms were everywhere, giving the walk an ethereal sense of beauty and lightness. Halfway around the Tidal Basin, the stroll had already lifted Lester’s spirits as he stopped at the steps of the Jefferson Memorial to admire the domed structure with its splendid portico surrounded by ionic columns.

As a political science major in college, he had devoted many a class to studying the founding fathers and Jefferson's presidency had always been his favorite. He was so engrossed in thinking about Jefferson and his almost endless talents as a statesman, architect, inventor and scholar that he almost hadn't noticed the young woman who was standing next to him. But, once having observed her, it didn't take a second glance to note she was attractive with a fresh-looking face that bordered on adorable and an agreeable figure that stood out under the gayly printed sun dress she was wearing. Without even thinking, Lester walked over to where she was standing and introduced himself.

At first, the young woman hesitated. She was not accustomed to being greeted by strangers particularly since most were gentile. But she found Lester's well dressed and pleasant appearance to be reassuring. Even so, she at first stammered by commenting on the loveliness of the day and the majesty of the Jefferson Memorial. Then, as Lester gave her his most welcoming smile, she opened up and introduced herself. "I'm Marcia Goldfarb. My friends call me Marcy."

For the next half hour, Lester did all he could to learn about this remarkable young woman whose name bore the unmistakable and welcome quality of being Jewish. Marcy had lived in Atlanta. However, after her second year at Agnes Scott College, her father, an attorney, had accepted a high-ranking position with the Roosevelt administration as counsel and senior advisor to Leo Crowley, then chief of the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation. The family of course had followed, and, after a quick but favorable taste of Washington life, Marcy had decided to transfer from Agnes Scott and complete her studies at George Washington University not far from where they stood. Because her family lived in the suburbs, she decided to find living quarters closer to school and had moved in with a nearby family.

Crowley had recently been asked to take the helm of the newly created Foreign Economic Administration—the agency tasked with coordinating the sometimes overlapping and often competing foreign activities of the Office of Economic Warfare, the Lend-Lease office, and the Office of Foreign Relief and Rehabilitation Operations, not to speak of the various agencies serving the army in North Africa. Proudly, Marcy reported that Crowley had insisted that her father follow him, with increased responsibilities.

As with most of her fellow women students, Marcy said she had planned on being a teacher, in her case, a high school social studies teacher. However, after completing her studies the previous spring, she had decided to follow in her father's footsteps and sought out work in the government hoping to contribute to the wartime effort. She lived nearby with the family of one of her former sorority sisters and loved walking around Washington before the weather got too hot.

Enchanted by Marcy's manner and excited by the likely prospect she was Jewish, Jonathan hung on to every one of Marcy's words, if not every one of her syllables. He had barely had a chance to tell her much about himself other than that he worked nearby when Marcy looked at her watch and worriedly announced she had to go. She had agreed to have dinner with her parents for their anniversary and she had to get them a present and still get to Bethesda before dinnertime. Gratefully, she told Lester how glad she was to have met him and then scampered off. It was only after Marcy was no longer in sight that Lester realized he hadn't obtained her telephone number or address, both of which would be difficult to come by since she was living with another family. He vowed he would find a way of seeing her again and then decided to have dinner in one the restaurants that offered outdoor dining during the spring months.

As he finished the last of his fine dinner of Chesapeake sea bass, baked potato and local vegetables, Lester thought about his missed opportunity with Marcy. Happily, after a few moments, his thoughts turned to the beauty of the cherry blossoms. Lester had not yet heard of the uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto. Had he known how the Nazis were squeezing the life out of Warsaw's last remaining Jews, he might not have been so comfortable thinking about how the District's cherry trees were showering the city with warmth and giving its war weary residents a new lease on life. However, he would soon hear of the tragedy in Poland among many others. and would have ample opportunity to think about less happy things.

Chapter 13

Malta: Onward to a New Assignment October 1942-March 1943

More than anything else, it was her smell. As Julien allowed himself to be led by Pila, he found her scent overwhelming. Sure, he had been around her for a number of weeks. But now that he faced the prospect of being alone with her, he found her scent to be irresistible. The combination of his own intoxicated state and the woman's sensual smell, not to speak of the enticement Julien read into every motion of her body, contributed to his imagination of going on a wild, uncontrollable joy ride. His body trembled and his loins stiffened imploringly as he anticipated what awaited him. A small voice of caution whispered to him, but it barely registered as his need and desire overtook everything else.

Julien and Pila walked through a dark hallway that led to the back of the mess hall and the room that would serve as their place of assignation. Pila reached into her brassiere for the key to the room. But, as she did so, the key dropped to the floor. In the dark, it was hard to find. As she got on her knees and fumbled for the key, a newly arrived squadron of pilots entered the mess hall.

Just about all the pilots Julien had met in Malta had come from England or Canada. Other Commonwealth countries had contributed to the defense of the island, however, on a lesser scale. On this day, the squadron of new pilots who entered the mess hall had come from South Africa. As with any group of fighter pilots arriving on the island, they were relieved to have completed a long and dangerous journey. They were also interested in establishing themselves as a carefree cadre of imperturbable adventurers from down under. The result was quite stunning as the entire squadron of newcomers entered the room singing, at the top of their lungs, a rousing version of the "Call of South Africa," one of the popular South African anthems of the day.

The effect of so loud and unexpected a sound had a jarring effect on everyone in the room, whatever the relative state of their sobriety. But for Julien, it was electric. For the first time since leaving Kayla, he was listening to authentic South African accents. The sound jolted him as it reinforced the small voice of caution that had been trying to find purchase in the dazed recesses of his mind. All of sudden, he realized where he was and what he was about to do. But all he could think of was the sweet sound of Kayla's South African accent as she tearfully sent him off to war.

As he looked down at the floor where Pila who was still trying to find the errant key, Julien was filled with an overwhelming sense of shame and regret. Gently, he reached down to help Pila rise up. Even in the dark, the waitress could tell something momentous had taken hold of Julien. Awkwardly, Julien half leaned on and half hugged Pila. The hug was affectionate and appreciative, but it also signaled that their intended back room rendezvous would not take place. Pila smiled as best as the awkward circumstances would allow. Then she pulled free of Julien just as he bent over and retched in the hallway.

For the next two days, Julien was distressed. His wing commander recognized his symptoms and assumed he was depressed due to the loss of Julien's flying mate. Depression was a familiar companion to many pilots. The stress of daily aerial combat could eat away at even the most hardened combat pilot.

Wing commanders had been trained to recognize combat depression. In most cases, a few days of ground duty was sufficient to overcome combat fatigue and position the affected flyer to return to his duties. That is what Julien's wing commander prescribed for him. For the next two days, Julien remained on base while his fellow pilots scrambled in response to the sighting of enemy aircraft. However, it didn't seem to be working. All Julien could think of was how lonely he was. He had not received a letter from Kayla since arriving in Malta and he missed his family in France. The last communication he had received was not even from his parents, but rather from Angelo Donati who had used his connections to smuggle a wire to RAF headquarters in England, which then forwarded the contents of the wire to Julien. Donati's short communication had attempted to be reassuring but had left Julien with more questions than answers. It had merely advised that Julien's family might have to leave Nice.

It was now the third day of ground duty and Julien knew he would soon be expected to return to his combat responsibilities or risk being permanently grounded and having his indisposition reflected on his record. He truly did not know if he could snap out of his depressed mental state enough to persuade his wing commander he was ready to return to combat duty.

As Julien reflected on his dilemma, he heard the camp postmaster call out mail call. From around the camp, those pilots not in the air congregated around the postmaster hoping their turn for news had arrived. Julien had been through the exercise many times and had been disappointed just as often. He had no reason to believe today would be any different. But, he had nothing else to do, so he positioned himself a few feet away from the mail carrier who was now barking out names.

As he stood by absent mindedly, he watched as his fellow pilots came forward as they happily heard their names being called. The mail carrier was now near the end of his stack of letters and Julien had no reason to believe that the day's mail call would be any different for him than those that had occurred in the past. All of a sudden, his ears peaked and his whole affect changed as he heard his name being called. Quickly, he came forward to receive his letter. As soon as the mailer carrier handed it to him, Julien knew it was from Kayla.

His first thought was to give thanks for the arrival of the South Africans and for their role in helping Julien avoiding betraying his wife and shaming himself. As unceremoniously as he could muster, he walked to a corner of the room where he could read the letter in private. He hesitated for a few moments savoring the envelope in the same way that one might contemplate a feast once it has arrived at the table. Finally, he opened the envelope. After only a few lines, he knew it was just the tonic he needed:

Dearest Julien,

It has been so long since I last heard from you. I know that trans-Atlantic mail is slow and fraught with all kinds of difficulties due to the Nazi U-Boats that patrol the seas as they look for unsuspecting convoys. In addition, I have read that the Mediterranean poses just as many dangers, making the whole process doubly difficult. So, I am determined not to draw any conclusions from the fact that I have not received any recent mail from you and I coax myself to sleep imagining what you have said in letters that never reached me.

My brother, Edgar, sends his regards. It turns out the mines father invested in have been paying off handsomely because of the price of all raw materials going up in

value since the war began. Edgar has been busy overseeing the mining activities. He is an honorable person, as I've always known. He knows the business must show a profit but is loath to generate windfall profits. As a result, our ore prices have been less than our competitors in the interest of serving the country. However, your family will still make a handsome profit that should place all of us on secure footing once the war ends and you return from your overseas duties.

Since you left England for Malta, I have been trying to do my share. I'm not exactly cut out to sew parachutes or knit sweaters for our fighting men. However, I have tried to put my economics degree and knowledge of finance to work by volunteering in the war office's accounting department. They can use as much help as they can get. I don't find the work challenging, but I am very good at it and my efforts are uniformly appreciated.

There is something about being on the home front while a loved one is overseas that often evokes feelings ranging from emptiness to guilt. Many of my friends have experienced both emotions and we have talked about it a lot over bridge games or while working on food drives for the less fortunate in our country. However, I am happy to say I have managed to avoid both such emotions. I am enormously proud of you and that, by itself, enables me to go from day to day without self-pity or more than my share of anxiety.

Don't get me wrong. I worry about you every day, particularly given your decision to become a combat pilot. However, I know you must summon extraordinary courage to do battle in the skies day after day. That knowledge is what keeps me going. For, if you can find the uncommon strength to fulfill your duties, as perilous as they are, then I, too, can find the strength to cheer you along, even from afar.

Everyone says the scales are tipping against that monster Hitler. But I'm so worried about your family in France, not to speak of so many of Europe's Jews. I fear we are only beginning to hear about the unspeakable crimes our fellow Jews have endured at the hands of that madman.

Until Hitler abandons his lunatic ambitions, I can only dream of the day when you return home so we can embrace endlessly and begin to think about a family.

I miss you so much. Your Kayla.

Julien spent much of the rest of the day rereading Kayla's letter. Each time, the theme that went through his mind was a play on Kayla's own words. If her pride in him could sustain her against the uncertainty of his being in combat, then, in turn, he had no choice but to act in a way that justified such pride. By the end of the day, he had rediscovered the resolve that had powered him through so many aerial encounters with the enemy. The day's duty list was about to be posted. Before it went up, Julien singled out the flight commander and asked to be put on the next day's flying roster.

As November neared, it was becoming clear that the German command in Sicily had begun to give up on the Malta campaign. The number of air raids against the island had decreased dramatically and the RAF and Canadian flyers on the ground, as well as their South African counterparts, were beginning to relax and enjoy one another's comradery. One evening as Julien

and several of his fellow Canadians were enjoying a beer after dinner, Julien heard one of the South Africans make reference to Cape Town where Kayla had lived before attending McGill.

Julien excused himself and curiously headed over to the table occupied by the South African and introduced himself. “My name is Julien Krauss. I heard you refer to Cape Town. My wife, whose maiden name was Kayla Lewis, and I live in Montreal where we both went to McGill. But, before university, Kayla and her family lived in Cape Town. So, I thought I’d come by and say hello.”

“Geoffrey Allistaire, at your service. Pleased to meet you. I’m also a university man. University of Wittersrand, I’m proud to say. Finest university in South Africa. Lewis is a fairly common name in Cape Town, common enough that I did have a classmate named Lewis. Edgar was his first name. Jewish fellah. Pretty much kept to himself, but we did travel together on the debate team and got to know one another fairly well.”

Julien could have been blown over by a proverbial feather. “Edgar is Kayla’s brother,” he blurted out, amazed at the unexpected coincidence.

“No kidding! Edgar told me a little about his sister who he said was quite smart and nice looking, but he never mentioned her first name. There was really no point in doing so as he would never have introduced her to a gentile such as myself. However, he did tell me he was proud of her adventurousness, particularly when she headed off to Palestine to work on some kind of farming community. She returned just as Edgar and I were heading off to university. If I recall, he was quite amused at how besotted his young sister had become with some guy she had met while working on the farm. Are you that fellah?”

“No. I’m afraid he beat me to it. His name was Jonathan. He does have an interesting way of popping up in conversation from time to time. But I’m the lucky guy who took her to the alter.”

“Good for you. You seem very proud of her, I’m happy to say. She must be quite a gal.”

Julien thought about his companion’s simple statement and acknowledged to himself how lucky he was that Kayla had wound up with him and not Jonathan. However, the remark had also made Julien think about how close he had come to breaking the bond between Kayla and himself. After a long few seconds, Julien stirred himself from his preoccupation. Smiling, he looked at Geoffrey. “You have no idea.”

Later that month, the day arrived when Julien and his fellow pilots would be flown back to their home bases. Julien sought out Geoffrey with whom he had become good friends. The two congratulated one another on the various flying medals they had accumulated and gave one another a goodbye hug. After a shuttle flight to Gibraltar and a short voyage on a troop convoy to the British coast, Julien soon found himself in London with a one week leave.

Through thick and thin, London’s pubs had managed to stay open during the war. Now that the blitz had long passed and with American servicemen arriving in the city by the hour, the pubs were doing an even more thriving business, often staying open to the late hours of the morning. Wartime rationing was in effect, but somehow the beer and ale had kept flowing. At any one of the city’s watering holes, the noise and merriment was almost nonstop. Most of the city’s male bartenders were now in the military. As a result, the bars were staffed by barmaids. With countless

young soldiers on leave and desperate for amorous adventure, the jockeying for attention was everywhere as were the raunchy and exaggerated stories about sexual conquests.

For Julien, the competition for female companionship was merely a backdrop. He was too consumed with worry about his family in Nice and longing for Kayla back home. He had found a pub frequented by Canadian flyers who were with one of the 14 squadrons comprising Group 6, an all-Canadian fighter group of the Royal Air Command, stationed at Base 61 in Yorkshire. The talk was about a special all Canadian bomber command that was scheduled to commence operations the beginning of the year.

The idea of flying with an all-Canadian command sounded interesting, although Julien didn't know what role he could serve in a bomber command, given his experience was as a fighter pilot. His quandary was soon answered in an unexpected manner as he was requested to meet the following morning with a Commodore James Pittson.

Pittson commanded a base in County Durham. However, he was in London with a special mission pertaining to a planned all-out aerial assault on the German industrial heartland—the coal mines, coke plants, steel works and synthetic oil plants of the Ruhr Valley. The planned assault would likely last for half a year, with bombing campaigns planned against crucial targets such as the Krupp armament works in Essen and the Nordstern synthetic oil plant in Gelsenkirchen. Only the best pilots would serve in what was expected to be over two dozen raids. There were already many suitable bomber pilots, but not enough. Pittson's mission was to recruit highly decorated fighter pilots who could be trained to fly bombers for the forthcoming campaign in the Ruhr. He had been given a list of names and Julien's had been at the top.

The next morning, Julien met with Pittson for breakfast at a nearby London hotel. Julien arrived at the hotel early and headed for the hotel restaurant. The restaurant was more elegant than anything Julien had recently experienced and the ambience made him feel good about his upcoming meeting, although he was not sure of the subject matter. Soon, Pittson arrived. Over coffee, eggs and scones, Julien told Pittson about his interest in joining an all-Canadian fighter group, perhaps in the role of a fighter escort.

Pittson listened carefully and then laid out his proposed plan for Julien to become a bomber pilot in the campaign against the Ruhr. The training, he told Julien, would start immediately and be intense. In three months, Julien would be expected to achieve what less experienced flyers might hope to accomplish in six, and he would have to be ready to assume his duties as a bomber pilot early in March. The preparation, admitted Pittson, would be onerous, but the rewards would be immense. If the RAF could deliver a knockout punch against Germany's industrial capacity, he opined, the war could be shortened by months.

At the end of the meeting, Pittson presented his bomber pilot plan to Julien as a proposal, not an order. "Julien, you've proven yourself as an outstanding fighter pilot and there's still lots for you to do in this bloody war and I'm sure there would be a place for you as a fighter pilot with the new Canadian group. But I think you'd be making a much larger contribution if you'd consider flying a bomber with my group. It won't be all-Canadian, but there will be a lot of your fellow countrymen flying and crewing the bombers in my base. The choice is yours. What do you think?"

Julien hadn't given himself time to think. He couldn't articulate why, but he loved the idea of piloting a bomber. So, he merely shaped his face into a wide grin and enthusiastically said yes.

“Good. You’ll be reporting to me in County Durham first thing next week. In the meantime, enjoy the rest of your leave.”

Chapter 14

Italian-Occupied France: A Discouraging Awareness Emerges January 1943-September 1943

Now that the Germans were occupying both the northern part of France and what had been Vichy France, they began to exert pressure on the Italians to follow German directives in Italian-occupied southeast France. Tens of thousands of those Jews who had found temporary refuge in Vichy France now headed for Italian-occupied France. In return, the Germans demanded that the Italian military occupiers collect and hand over the newly arrived Jewish residents under their control. However, lacking the stomach to consign the newly arrived Jews to a certain death sentence, the Italians resisted.

The Italians resisted in other ways as well, by refusing to allow the now infamous internment camps to be located in their zone of occupation and by scoffing at the demand that the word “Jew” be stamped on Jewish ration cards and other identification papers. However, the Germans were not to be deterred. In February, German Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop met with Mussolini to demand Italian cooperation in fulfilling Nazi demands pertaining to Jews quartered in Italian-occupied France and Croatia. Mussolini appeared to give the Nazis what they demanded. He established a Commissariat for Jewish Affairs in Nice under the direction of Guido Lospinosa, a police official, whom the Nazis believed would bypass the army and hand over the region’s Jews.

Lospinosa, as it turned out, had ideas of his own and managed to avoid the Nazi officials who were eager to meet with him to formulate a plan for dealing with the Jews. Not wanting to stir up unnecessary trouble, he had sought the advice of local leaders, among them Donati. The two had established a cordial relationship, even as Lospinosa was being subjected to increased Nazi pressure.

Acting on Donati’s advice, Lospinosa tried to appease the Germans by sending many of the new Jewish arrivals to enforced residence in the mountainous regions of Italian-occupied France. Jews who had been city dwellers now found themselves in mountain communities such as Megeve, Saint Gervais, Chambéry, Saint Martin Vesubie and Barcelonnette. There, they were required to sign in twice a day, but life went on, as the plight of those Jews who had remained in Vichy France deteriorated, with Jewish communities in places such as Lyon being subjected to the insatiable malevolence of Nazi officials such as Klaus Barbie, the infamous “Butcher of Lyon”.

Donati sat in his office thankful for the opportunity to befriend Lospinosa. However, even as he was acknowledging his good fortune, he also had to acknowledge that the Germans were losing their patience and that, for the Jews of southeast France, the noose was tightening, even more so now that the Allies were in control of North Africa and only a stone’s throw away from Sicily. “If Sicily falls, how long can Italy last,” he thought. He had helped save so many of his fellow Jews, but now he recognized his options were narrowing and there had been no progress on the North African rescue ships. “If the options for helping Jews on a large scale were fading,” he thought, “he could at least try to help his friends.” As he had done so many times in the past, he decided to confer with Bernard.

Bernard welcomed his visitor the next morning. However, as soon as Donati set foot in his living room, Bernard could see the worry written on his face. “What is it, my friend?”

Donati took off his coat and sat down in Bernard’s drawing room, his look of concern still apparent, his speech troubled and his words spit out in hasty bursts. “I’m afraid its everything. Most importantly, if Italy falls, I worry that the Nazis will take over our small slice of France and all of us will be vulnerable.”

Bernard, too, had been thinking along those lines and was grateful that Donati had finally broached the issue. But he knew it would be a difficult conversation and he first offered his guest a cup of coffee.

The gesture seemed to relax Donati whose words were now more measured and less frenzied. “I think we have to take stock and be honest with ourselves. We can’t hold out forever in Nice.”

“You may well be right. What do you have in mind?”

“I think we have to plan for our families. You are aware of the forced residence communities to which Lospinosa has sent a number of the area’s Jews in an effort to appease the Germans?”

“Yes, of course.”

“Well, some of them are not half bad. Indeed, some of the quarters were resort hotels in their day. In any event, the Germans have not been placated in the least. They do not like the comfortable surroundings in which the Jews of these communities now find themselves. Nor do they like the fact that these enforced communities are in mountainous areas that are hard to reach, with most being near the border of Italy and Switzerland—locations that might afford a means of quick escape should the need arise.”

“Agreed. But there can’t be very much additional capacity, even for those Jews who would prefer such forced residency.”

“There isn’t. But there is enough room for your brother’s and your families. I believe I could get Lospinosa to arrange it.”

Bernard had been caught off guard at Donati’s abruptness but not at what he had to say. For a moment, he sat speechless as he contemplated the full import of what Donati was suggesting. Finally, he responded. “I’m truly grateful for what you are proposing and know that something must be done. But it’s going to be a hard sell. Maurice and I grew up around here and we’ve been exploring the mountains in this region all of our lives. However, we’re now city dwellers and, more importantly, our wives and families have no experience in the mountains. I don’t know how I can expect them to pick up stakes for an uncertain future in an unfamiliar place!

Donati looked at his friend with sympathy and understanding. “From what I hear, there is widespread dissatisfaction with Petain and his German-sympathizing government. More importantly, many of our countrymen have little appetite for what is happening to France’s Jews. There are underground cells everywhere. They may come in handy should there ever be a need to escape. But it will be easier for those who have made their way to the mountains than for those of

us who remain exposed in the cities. I know the enormity of what I am suggesting. But I can assure you, I wouldn't be making such a proposal if I thought there was a better way."

The conversation managed to consume most of the morning and into the lunch hour as the two men discussed logistics. At length, they concluded that the best destination for the two Krauss families was Saint Martin Vesubie. It was far enough away and hard enough to get to that it would serve as the desired haven. Yet, it was close enough so that, if an emergency arose in Nice or Grasse, Bernard would be able to render assistance. Now that the two had arrived at an agreement, Bernard reached into the back of his wine cabinet for a vintage he had been saving. As he poured the rich liquid into Donati's and his glasses, he smiled wanly as he proposed a toast, "to springtime in Saint Martin Vesubie."

Bernard had been right that persuading his brother's and his family to pick up stakes and move to the mountains with little more than they could carry was a difficult piece of salesmanship. He was aware of the progress Leon was making and of Dr. Durant's assurances that, if Leon could remain with him through the end of the summer, he would have Leon ready to study at the university level. Though studying anywhere was problematic during the war, Gabrielle and Leon had spent countless hours talking about where they would go to school and what they would study. Bernard knew they would both be disappointed if the families were required to pick up stakes before Leon completed his work with Dr. Durant.

However, it was Jacquelyn who had expressed the greatest resistance at having to disrupt the therapeutic work being performed by Dr. Durant. "Since Leon started working with Dr. Durant, my son's been a changed person. Now that they are so close to completing Leon's therapy, I can't bear the thought of terminating it, particularly since we only need until the end of the summer. I know we're at risk, but if we leave this place and even manage to survive, I could never forgive myself for having deprived Leon of what has been a life altering experience."

Collette had added to the difficulty of the moment. "Hasn't anyone noticed how Gabrielle and Leon are practically bound at the hip. If Leon were to remain here, I just couldn't imagine taking Gabrielle away from her cousin and best friend. Not only that, Gabrielle, too, is only a few months away from completing her schoolwork at the gymnasium and qualifying for university study. I'd feel awful if I took her away from her classes with just a few months to go."

The conversation might have gone on endlessly were it not for a compromise solution worked out by the brothers. "Maurice and I have an idea that might make everyone feel a little more comfortable with Donati's proposal." Looking at the two women, he asked: "Would you mind if I spelled it out?"

Resignedly, both Jacquelyn and Collette nodded their assent.

"Both Maurice and I understand your concerns regarding the children, concerns that we both share. But we also believe it's important to begin implementing the move to the mountains. We're both familiar with the region around Saint Martin Vesubie and either one of us would be able to serve as the family coordinator were we to go there. But, for me, it would be a bit of a problem as the flower crop in Grasse is expected soon and will require my attention. This year it's particularly important that I be available as our nose believes he has come up with a revolutionary new perfume formula for the harvested petals."

Jacquelyn was the first to speak. "What are you getting at?"

"Simply this. Maurice and I propose that he accompany the two of you and Natalie to Saint Martin Vesubie. Natalie is young enough so the move shouldn't be too disruptive for her. But we recognize that a move at this time would be very disruptive for Leon and Gabrielle. So, I'll stay with them until the conclusion of the school year and the completion of Leon's sessions with Dr. Durant. Remaining here will allow me to do what's required in Grasse when the May harvest begins. However, as soon as everything is completed here, Leon, Gabrielle and I will join the rest of you in the mountains."

No one was happy with the proposal, not the least of whom was Collette who might not be seeing her husband for months. However, after an emotional discussion filled with tears and sadness, the two women agreed that Bernard and Maurice's proposal had merit. All that would now be needed was Donati's assurance that the matter had been cleared with Lospinosa and that housing in Saint Martin Vesubie would be available for the four family members.

The go ahead came sooner than any of them had expected. One day early in April as the sun sparkled off the newly arrived leaves of the deciduous larch, the two families, along with a guide and a porter, made their way up the foothills leading to the mountains and Saint Martin Vesubie.

Life at Saint Martin proved comfortable enough. The accommodations provided to Maurice, Jacquelyn and Gabrielle were simple but afforded shelter from the still cold mountain air and a place to cook and eat. Collette was housed with another family and found them to be quite engaging. The routine of reporting to the local authorities twice a day was no more than a mild inconvenience and anything but threatening. French police stood by idly as the gentle children of Saint Martin mixed with their forced-residence Jewish neighbors. Soccer games, always a pastime for the children of the community, now took on greater importance as the town's population increased with its more than 225 Jewish residents.

As the days turned into weeks, Collette found it easy to make friends among the Jews of Saint Martin Vesubie—Jews who came from a variety of backgrounds and even spoke a number of different languages, but who now shared a common fate and a singular desire to help one another. Many of the adults held classes for their fellow Jews and Maurice and Jacquelyn were delighted to discover a teacher who had volunteered to tutor Natalie and two other girls her age. Still, each of the four members of the Krauss clan felt an unsparing emptiness as the length of separation from Bernard, Leon and Gabrielle grew longer.

In Nice, Bernard and his two charges experienced a similar sense of tranquility punctuated by an unremitting feeling of hollowness. For Bernard, remaining in Nice had provided him with a small consolation prize--the opportunity to visit Grasse. As he toured the family's flower fields, he could not have been happier with the quality of the year's harvest and was excited beyond measure by the thought of the perfume formula being developed for the new crop. Meanwhile, in Nice, Leon was doing well with Dr. Durant who advised Bernard that, by the end of the summer, Leon would have learned all that Dr. Durant had to offer. School, too, was going well for both Leon and Gabrielle with each working to close out their gymnasium studies with a flourish. Hoping against hope, each was also preparing for university admission exams in anticipation of the day when such things would once again matter.

Surprisingly, Donati was beginning to make progress with his plan to evacuate thousands of the region's Jews to North Africa. Working with Italian officials, American and British representatives at the Vatican and the American Joint Distribution Committee, the outline of a relief effort for as many as thirty-thousand Jews to be evacuated to North Africa was beginning to take shape. As word of the negotiations leaked out, thousands of Jews began to descend on Nice swelling its ranks of refugees.

All might have continued peacefully if not uncertainly but for events that were beginning to unfold across the Mediterranean to the south. As the Allies solidified their hold on North Africa, they began to implement what would become known as Operation Husky, the conquest of Sicily and the eventual invasion of the Italian mainland. On July 10, 1943, Husky began with a resounding wallop as British forces under Bernard Montgomery and American forces under George S. Patton launched an airborne and amphibious assault on the island. Under air cover from nearby Malta, three thousand ships landed over one hundred and fifty thousand soldiers as four thousand aircraft overhead warded off the enemy from the air.

Relentlessly, Patton's invigorated troops moved northwest and then east toward Messina as Montgomery's forces moved up the east coast. By the end of the first week of fighting, the success of Husky was becoming increasingly evident as was Italian dissatisfaction with Mussolini. On July 24, the *Duce* was deposed and placed under arrest. In his place, the fascist, Pietro Badoglio, assumed power. A favorite of King Victor Emmanuel III, who hoped for a continuation of the country's fascist regime, Badoglio had opposed the alliance with Germany. Now, as he struggled to maintain authority, he concluded quickly that an armistice with the Allies was the only route that would enable Italy to escape the grip of its Nazi partners.

In Nice, Donati received the news of Badoglio's ascension to power with delight as it offered the opportunity for bringing his evacuation plan to fruition. For weeks, he frantically negotiated with members of the Badoglio regime and, by the beginning of September, his plan was beginning to fall into place. Donati knew that an armistice was being negotiated but assumed it would not occur until later in the month. Sadly, he was wrong. The armistice was signed on September 3. Badoglio never informed his commanders of the actual signing, but, inexplicably, only advised them that negotiations were ongoing. On September 7, an Allied delegation arrived in Rome to advise Badoglio that the treaty would be announced the next day and that the US 82 Airborne Division would be arriving in Rome at the same time.

Badoglio discouraged the arrival of the 82, insisting that his troops were not prepared and that the Germans were in control of all of the surrounding airports. He requested that the announcement of the armistice be deferred until his military commanders were better positioned to fight. However, because additional US troops were already headed for a landing in southern Italy, Eisenhower rejected the request to defer the treaty announcement.

The next morning, word of the armistice was officially made public. The Italian military, caught unawares, was in disarray. As Badoglio and a cadre of senior advisors made haste to escape from Rome, Donati knew that his rescue plan was a thing of the past. Even worse, Donati knew that every Jew in Nice was now under mortal threat as it would not be long before the Nazis moved in to fill the vacuum created by the dispirited Italian army.

Donati's fears did not take long to materialize. The very next day, Nazi troopers and members of the feared SS swarmed into Nice, intent on finding and deporting the Jews who, under

Italian military authority, had evaded their grasp for so long. Donati did not hesitate. Quickly, he contacted Bernard and a few other cherished friends, and provided them with instructions on reaching a farmhouse that would afford shelter while the Nazis were conducting house to house searches of the city. With little more than a day's change of clothing, Bernard gathered Leon and Gabrielle and the three headed for the farmhouse.

For four harrowing days, reports arrived at the farmhouse of Nazi atrocities against the city's Jews. Already, more than thirteen hundred Jewish refugees and almost five hundred of the city's Jewish residents had been rounded up and placed on transports bound for Darcy and then Auschwitz. As Bernard and the others huddled in the farmhouse wondering when the Nazis would be finished with the city and start fanning out to the countryside, a man named Pascal Ferraro arrived at the farmhouse. At the sight of the man, Donati broke down. He knew the man to be a trusted Jew and also knew he was bringing the ingredients required for freedom—an escape route, French and Italian currency and passports for everyone in the farmhouse. The documents might not hold up to close scrutiny, but they were plausible and, for the time being, they would have to do.

Bernard looked at the passports with a crushing sense of foreboding. He recognized that the documents provided his two charges and him with the hope for escape. But he could not overcome his despondency knowing that Leon's parents and his own beloved Collette and Gabrielle would not be coming with them. "Would their haven in the mountains provide them with the gateway to safety they had planned?" he wondered. He couldn't help himself as he approached Donati to ask whether there was any way they could reconnoiter with the rest of his family and escape together. Donati's response was tender and not unexpected.

"At this point, there is little we can do. The messenger who brought our passports will be joining us and has already mapped out a plan. But, we have to act immediately. If it's any consolation, all around us, the Italian army is now being forced to fend for itself and the messenger advises that a number of Italian soldiers have aided many of the city's Jews in their effort to escape."

Bernard began to respond as tears began rushing down his face, but he was held off by Donati.

"Please, let me continue. Before I recommended Saint Martin for your family, I inquired into the temperament of the Italian soldiers in the region. What I learned then was that the members of the military based there had shown a great deal of empathy toward the enforced Jewish residents of the community. I also learned that this empathetic attitude was shared by many of the surrounding farmers and even the clergy. I can't provide you with certainty, but I can offer hope. I'm hoping that what has been reported to us with regard to the Italian soldiers here in town will also be true of those in the mountains and that your family will find help in making its escape from the region."

Donati did not know it, but his words of consolation were being acted out in Saint Martin Vesube, even as he was speaking them to Bernard.

Chapter 15

Germany: The Bombing of the Ruhr River Valley March-May 1943

Soon, Julien received instructions to prepare for his first bombing mission, a March 12 attack against the Ruhr Valley city of Essen, home to the giant Krupp manufacturing company. An attack conducted against Essen had taken place the previous week on March 5. During the attack, four bombers had been lost and 56 out of the 442 planes starting the mission had been forced to return to base without reaching their targets. However, aerial reconnaissance had shown that the attack destroyed 160 acres of the city including part of the Krupp facility.

Julien's time as a fighter pilot had inured him to the dangers of aerial combat, to the extent one could really become accustomed to such perils. On his multiple combat missions, his fellow pilots and he knew their collective success required that each pilot maintain his assigned place in the attack formation and be as much focused on his fellow pilots as on himself. The effect was a shared duty duplicated by few other wartime challenges.

However, Julien had never been responsible for a bomber crew. The reality that any miscalculation on his part might jeopardize his crew of six had almost paralyzed him. But, he had chosen to accept the challenge and before him now stood the men for whom he would be responsible. As he watched each of his crew members suit up and prepare for the cold, discomfort and danger of a five-hour sortie, his flyer's instincts took over and he felt a reassuring sense of daring.

The heavy-duty Lancaster, with its four Merlin engines, was an awe inspiring piece of aerial machinery. Weighing in at almost 40,000 pounds when empty, it had a wingspan of more than one hundred feet. Its enhanced carrying capacity and huge bomb bay enabled it to carry a number of bombs along with multiple smaller incendiary bombs. The plane that awaited Julien and his crew would carry one 4,000 pounder as well as sixteen incendiary devices.

To provide for maximum lethality, the plane's designers had made certain weight-related compromises in the thickness of its fuselage. Julien knew the result was a thinner and more penetrable outer skin that rendered the crew and him highly vulnerable to enemy fire.

Julien's plane had been given the nickname Fairy Lady by its crew. Due to the plane's height of more than twenty feet, a small ladder was required for the crew to gain access to the interior of the Lady. At the foot of the ladder, Julien conducted a last-minute briefing for his crew members. Everyone knew that Julien was a decorated fighter pilot. However, each also knew this would be his first flight as the pilot of a bomber. If they were experiencing nervousness, as some no doubt were, they didn't show it. Julien picked up on his crew's determination and it fed into his own resolve. Guardedly, he began to relax.

As each flyer passed by, Julien checked him for instrumentation and for the condition of his oxygen mask. Equally importantly, he also assured himself that each was properly dressed. Though the cockpit received some recirculated heat from the engines, temperatures at the designated flying elevation of 19,000 feet might easily drop to near freezing. Even more concerning were the temperatures that would be experienced by the plane's primary observers, its dorsal gunner, and its ventral gunner. The dorsal gunner sat in a rotating observatory turret

high on the fuselage and the ventral gunner occupied a gunnery tube on the underside of the fuselage near the rear of the plane. Neither of the spaces occupied by these two crew members were as well heated as the cockpit and, at flying elevation, the temperatures could descend to well below zero. If either of the gunners was not adequately clothed, hypothermia could set in with disastrous consequences, a concern that was particularly acute for the dorsal gunner who often served as the aircraft's wireless operator

One by one, each crew member ascended the ladder to the craft. First, the two gunners climbed the small ladder and settled into the plane to occupy their assigned positions. Next came the bomb aimer who, for the entire five-hour duration of the flight, would lie on his stomach in a glass-enclosed sighting area below the cockpit. Cold, stiffness and boredom were the enemies of the bomb aimers and it took a person of unusual mettle to be able to tolerate such conditions for long periods of time. After the bomb aimer came the navigator, in this case, a Canadian named Sterling who hailed from one of the western provinces. The navigator sat behind the pilot and the flight engineer separated by a dark curtain so he could have light while he worked. Even with reports from advance weather-gauging planes that had flown over the flight path, flying conditions were enormously unpredictable requiring the constant vigilance of the navigator. Industrial fog was also a problem. Fortunately, the RAF had developed radio navigation systems that permitted reasonable accuracy even during cloud-covered or fog-shrouded bombing runs. Finally, Julien eyed his all-important flight engineer, another fellow Canadian named Colin, as he climbed the ladder. Once in the plane, Colin would assume his place on the folding chair to the right of Julien's pilot's seat, the "dickey chair." Satisfied with all he had observed, Julien then climbed the ladder and headed for the cockpit.

As Julien sat in the pilot's seat, he hesitated for a moment before turning on the plane's four mighty engines. He was in a war zone with all that implied, but he had much to look forward to upon his return to Canada. Suddenly, his face settled into a frown as he thought how he might have jeopardized everything had he not found the strength to resist Pila's wiles. Admittedly, he had needed help. Nevertheless, he was grateful because he knew he could never have overcome the shame had he gone through with it.

Julien's hesitation didn't last for long as he heard Colin urge him to turn on the plane's engines so the engineer could go through his preflight instrument checklist, making sure that the airplane's mechanical, hydraulic, electrical and fuel systems were all operating properly.

Soon Colin gave Julien the go ahead. After checking to make sure that everyone's oxygen mask and microphone was working, Julien prepared to taxi. Calling the day's taxiing protocol intricate didn't do justice to the complexity of coordinating the takeoff of the more than 450 bombers who would be involved in the night's bombing run. There had been larger sorties into the German heartland, most notably, the thousand aircraft that had participated in the bombing of the German industrial city of Cologne further south in the Ruhr-Rhine valley. But the night's mission would be the largest since the beginning of the Battle of the Ruhr, as it was now being called.

Adding to the awesome display of Lancaster's that night were a dozen twin-engine de Havilland DH.98 pathfinder Mosquito combat aircraft. The role of the pathfinders was to lay down flares to assist the Lancaster's as they approached the target area. The pathfinders, themselves, would be guided by a radio transponder technology known as Oboe. The Oboe technology used land-based microwave transmissions from two radio stations on the east coast of England. Following a flying arc set by transmissions from the first station, the pathfinders would be directed to the general vicinity of the targeted area. Once there, transmissions from the second

station would help the Mosquitos find the bombing zone with greater precision. The Pathfinders would then drop flares for the bombers to follow.

Without the Pathfinder's, Julien's mission would have been almost hopeless. The targeted area was familiar to the British Bombing Command as a result of the sorties over Essen the previous week. However, in the dark of night while avoiding enemy ground fire, specific targets would be hard to decipher from an elevation of almost 20,000 feet. In addition, the Germans had created giant replicas of the Krupp factory so as to throw any invaders off course.

At length, the Fairy Lady and its nearly 500 hundred companion bombers were on their way. After an hour of flying time, they would reconnoiter in the sky before entering German controlled Holland. Julien had of course been warned of the hazards he would face as he entered enemy airspace. However, as he encountered his first set of enemy search lights, the glare caught him off guard and his body stiffened as if he had been hypnotized. The brightness of the beams was so piercing Julien could hardly determine the direction of the plane. He knew he had to do something. Otherwise, other searchlights would zero in on his aircraft forming a target vector for the deadly anti-aircraft flak pockets that seemed to be everywhere.

Luckily, Julien's dorsal gunner had a vantage point from his turret and was able to call out information to Julien over the plane's communication system. Using the information obtained from his gunner, Julien began evasive maneuvers. For several harrowing minutes, he guided the plane in and out of the beams so as to throw off the aim of the flak pockets. As enemy gunfire exploded all around them, Julien and his crew felt a slight shudder from the plane as it was grazed by a piece of flak. Fortunately, the aircraft retained its stability.

Finally, the glare of the search lights and the sound of enemy guns began to subside, and Julien sighed with relief as he watched the first battery of search lights fade behind him. His relief, however, was tempered with sadness, as he observed several of his companion bombers streaking through the sky in flames.

Julien asked Colin to confirm that all systems were in order and observed his flight engineer with satisfaction as Colin went through his motions. Happily, the flight engineer reported that all systems were operational. He had, however, observed an instrument flicker from one of the three engine gauges where the flak had apparently contacted the plane. Reassuringly, he expressed his belief that the contact had been incidental and advised Julien he would keep a sharp eye on the engine for the duration of the flight.

A little over an hour later, the massive air armada began its approach to Essen, with the Mosquitos being the first to reach the target area. There had been no additional mishaps along the way and Julien and his crew were looking forward to completing their mission and returning home. Julien knew the Mosquitos would drop their flares fifteen miles in advance of the targeted area so as to provide the bombers with adequate time to prepare for the release of their bombs. Soon, Julien saw his intended target area marked by flares. At his airspeed, he would be over the bombing zone in approximately four minutes. Quickly, he directed his bomb aimer to open the bomb doors and prepare to release his payload.

After two minutes, the flares dropped by the Mosquitos turned from red to green indicating that the targeted area was just ahead. As Julien looked at the change of color on the ground, his own color turned ashen, as his ventral gunner shouted over the intercom that a German Messerschmitt fighter had the Lady in its sights. As the ventral gunner released a hail of defensive

fire against the German fighter plane, Julien had no place to go but forward toward his target. With seconds to go, he tried to provide his bomb aimer with whatever reassurance he could muster, knowing that the faster Messerschmitt might be the Lady's undoing.

But the goddess of fate was on his side. The gunner's defensive fire had been enough to distract the enemy plane and prevent it, if only momentarily, from closing the gap for a deadly burst of fire. As Julien approached the release point, the gunner's voice rang out with relief as he reported that the pursuing German airplane now had a problem of its own. Having released their flares, two of the escort Mosquitos had joined the battle and were now on the Messerschmitt's tail. With the tables reversed, the Messerschmitt, itself, was now engaged in evasive maneuvers.

Nineteen thousand feet below, the massive 4,000-pound bomb exploded. Julien noted with satisfaction that it appeared to be a direct hit on the Krupp factory. Indeed, later reports from the bombing area would indicate that the night's raid had been thirty percent more successful than the monumental bombing run the week before.

The RAF Bomber Command planning group in charge of the Ruhr Valley campaign had long set its sights on the reservoir dams serving the area. If the dams could be destroyed, the resultant flooding would accomplish two key objectives. First, the flooding would destroy many factories and, at the same time, put the hydroelectric power stations served by the dams out of commission. Second, the local authorities would have to divert valuable resources needed for the war effort to pipe drinking water to the stricken areas. The three primary dams of interest were the Möhne, the Sorpe and the Eder.

An earlier investigation of problems associated with damage to the pilings used to construct London's Waterloo Bridge had shown that the top of the pilings were prone to shattering when subjected to the concussion of the massive pile drivers used to drive the pilings into the riverbed. A researcher named Barnes Wallis had concluded that the compression caused by the pile drivers sent shock waves down the pilings which reverberated back up the pilings causing tension and ultimate stress on the pilings. Wallis reasoned that a bomb that imparted similar shock waves could be used to destroy the hardened masonry of the targeted dams.

Wallis' analysis had led him first to propose the use of a ten-ton bomb dropped from 40,000 feet. However, accuracy from so high an elevation was a problem. In addition, the Bombing Command's fleet of upgraded Wellingtons could not carry a bomb of that size. So, Wallis turned his attention to a different kind of bomb, one that was lighter and could be released at a lower elevation.

Low level bombing, while overcoming the problem of accuracy, still presented a number of problems. First, in the case of Eder Dam, the hilly terrain surrounding the dam made a low-level bombing approach problematic. Even so, recent developments in radio-directed guidance systems offered the potential for overcoming this issue. But, if the low level approach problem could be overcome from a navigation perspective, there remained a second significant problem. All the dams were protected by anti-torpedo netting, thus making an underwater delivery system all but ineffective. So, Wallis not only had to come up with a low-level bomb design, but, in addition, had to figure out a way of releasing the bomb on, rather than below, the dam's water line with the force needed to destroy its reinforced concrete masonry.

Wallis' analysis ultimately led him to the idea of a cylindrical bomb released with back spin at very low elevation that would skip or "bounce" over the water as it approached the targeted wall of the dam. The back spin would enable the bomb to roll down the side of the dam upon impact and explode at optimum depth. The resulting concussion would create the type of tension observed in the original piling experiments and cause the dam wall to shatter.

Subsequent testing of a scale model dam at the Bombing Command's research facility in Watford and then at a no longer used dam in Wales indicated that the optimum explosion depth was thirty feet. The tests further showed that a 7,500 pound bomb dropped from a Lancaster approaching the target at 240 miles per hour and dropping its payload at an incredibly low elevation of thirty feet would produce enough of a concussion to shatter the wall of the targeted dam.

The new Avro Wellingtons could carry a payload of that size. However, the Wellingtons would have to be modified to accommodate the new type of weapon. In particular, the bombing bays would have to be left open to accommodate the bomb and hydraulic spin systems needed to release the bomb with the desired spin. Due to the size and configuration of the cylinder, the bomb would have to protrude from the belly of the plane. In addition, the bomb's weight necessitated those additional modifications would have to be made to the weight of the planes with the result that the planes dorsal gunner turrets would have to be eliminated and its interior armor removed.

The exacting new bombing requirements coupled with the fact that the bombing would take place at night guided only by Mosquito flares meant that the Bombing Command would have to set up an entirely new low-level, nighttime bomb training center. This, it did at the RAF's Scampton base just north of the city of Lincoln. In addition, a new squadron would have to be formed for the specialized training that would be required. The new squadron would be made up of twenty-one bombing crews. One week after Julien finished his bombing run over Essen, he was directed to report to Scampton to head up one of the new bombing crews.

For seven weeks of arduous training, Julien and his fellow flyers practiced low- altitude, nighttime flying in the modified Lancaster's. Finally, the day arrived when assignments were posted for the runs that would take place the following evening. As Julien had discovered with satisfaction, almost twenty-five percent of the airmen assigned to the Ruhr Valley campaign were Canadian. Moreover, since crew harmony on so delicate a mission was of utmost importance, the Canadians had been grouped together in bomber crews wherever possible. So it was that every member assigned to Julien's crew was from Canada including Colin, the flight engineer, and Sterling, the navigator, both from Julien's previous foray into the Ruhr Valley.

May 16 appeared to be an auspicious day for the crews sitting in the base briefing room as they were made aware of their flight paths and shown scale models of the three dams that were their targets. Advance reconnaissance had indicated the weather in the Ruhr Valley would be clear and calm and, after seven weeks of intensive preparation, the mood was upbeat.

As Julien smiled, sensing the feeling of auspiciousness that surrounded him in the briefing room, he could not have known that on that same day in Warsaw, the world was anything but auspicious for the city's ghettoized Jews. During four weeks of fighting, the starving remnants of the Warsaw Ghetto had held off the mighty German army, but exhausted and without ammunition, they had finally fallen to their implacable foe. Now, as Julien donned his flight jacket and sized up his crew, the extraordinarily brave Jews of the Warsaw Ghetto, were being stripped

of their meager belonging and transported by airless rail cars to the Treblinka death camp where, remorselessly, they would be gassed to death.

Seventeen aircraft, comprising three bombing groups, would be flying from Scrampton that evening. Nine aircraft arrayed in sets of three would make up the first group, with the mission of bombing the Möhne Dam, and, if possible, the Eder Dam. Five aircraft would comprise the second group, assigned to bombing the Sorpe Dam, and a group of three aircraft would take off two hours after the first two with a view toward finishing the work of the first two groups. Last minute reviews of the hydraulic spinning devices and the way the bombs were secured to their cradles would result in the initial group of planes not taking off until after midnight.

Julien and his crew were assigned to the first group. As it turned out, only seven of the originally assigned planes were able to take off, with Julien in the number six position.

Before climbing aboard, Julien reviewed the flight plan one last time with his navigator. The flight would be extraordinarily challenging once they reached the mainland as it would require flying at no more than 100 feet above ground much of the time to avoid radar. Moreover, they would not only have to avoid the Nazi coastal defenses, but, in addition, would have to avoid two German airbases that were located uncomfortably close to the assigned flight path.

Finally, the moment to prepare for takeoff arrived. Julien waited for his flight engineer go through his instrument review. Once given the go ahead, Julien began taxiing the great plane with its unusual payload. Though the five planes comprising the second group ran into difficulty from the start, Julien's group of seven was able to enter enemy territory with little mishap other than an occasional tree top scare owing to the plane's low flying altitude.

Soon the group-one planes passed the city of Hamm at a healthy distance and headed for the Ruhr River where they would begin their approach to the dams. As they neared the Möhne's reservoir, the sky suddenly filled with enemy flak. Two of the five planes in front of Julien's plane were immediately hit by enemy fire, with one destroyed. However, the remaining three were able to make successful runs with the Möhne's retaining wall showing visible damage and the beginnings of a breach. It only remained for Julien to reach the dropping off point and deliver what hopefully would be the final blow.

Getting on the intercom, Julien advised his crew that the moment they had been waiting for was about to arrive. Julien then confirmed that the hydraulic mechanism required to give the bomb its reverse spin had been set in motion. Satisfied that all was ready, Julien closed his mind to the flak that was bursting around him. Aided by the two guidance beams on the underside of the plane, Julien methodically brought the huge aircraft down to an attack height of thirty feet and began skimming the Möhne's reservoir. At precisely 800 yards from the dam, Julien gave the order to release the bomb and then pulled into a climb to avoid the concussion from the bomb's explosion.

As the plane gained altitude, Julien and his crew watched with fascination as the bomb bounced on the water before making contact with the wall of the dam. Then, they watched the resultant explosion. Even with just the light of the moon, it was clear that the explosion had caused the dam to breach. Jubilantly, the crew released a collective cheer as the dam's wall gave way and a lake's worth of water began pouring through its shattered masonry.

After a few seconds of additional jubilation, Julien carefully rejoined the other bombers. He was followed by the last bomber in the group. Together, the six surviving planes in the first group, one badly damaged, prepared for the trip home. Thirty minutes later, the planes, were flying through the sky without incident. In the Lady, Julien's weary crew was beginning to show its relief with the knowledge that the return Channel Crossing was less than an hour away. All of a sudden, the interior engine on the right side of the plane began to hesitate. Julien's flight engineer had the best view of the stricken engine and was terrified as flames shot out of it. Quickly, he activated the engine's fire extinguisher and, after what seemed like an interminable period of time, was happy to see that the fire had been extinguished.

The plane could fly on three engines if not further stressed. However, the disabled engine propeller was now rotating on its own against the plane's airflow. The resultant drag from the uncontrolled propeller blades posed a serious threat to the ongoing flying capability of the plane. Fortunately, Julien had trained for this moment, as had all of his fellow bomber pilots. Quickly, he began to rotate the blades on the disabled engine, a maneuver referred to as feathering, so that the mid to outer section of the blades would be aligned with the plane's airflow, enabling the propeller blades to remain motionless.

As Julien executed the maneuver, he felt the sweat pouring down his face, despite the cold temperature of the cockpit. His relief was inexpressible as the flight engineer gave him the thumbs up, indicating that the damaged propeller had stopped rotating. However, Julien knew that the disabled engine weakened by fire remained a serious threat to the plane. Quickly, he directed Sterling to reassess their course to determine the shortest route back to base.

Julien was not happy with the navigator's response as it would take the Lady over unpredictable Belgian airspace. Nevertheless, he knew he would not feel comfortable until he had safely landed the aircraft in England and the flight path proposed by Sterling was the quickest way of accomplishing that objective.

Remarkably, all went well during the white knuckled flight over France. However, as they approached the Belgian coastline, Julien's greatest fears were realized as the damaged engine started to make a loud rushing sound. Quickly, the flight engineer consulted the engine's tachometer and reported that the engine was racing. A casual glance affirmed that the engine's propeller blades were now spinning wildly. Immediately, Julien warned his crew of the impending danger and instructed all crew members to prepare to open the plane's hatches in the event a parachute evacuation was needed.

Suddenly, the plane shuddered as the out-of-control propeller broke from its moorings and flew into the outer engine on the starboard side. There was no way the plane could last in the air for any appreciable period of time under such conditions. To buy time, Julien instructed his engineer to empty the fuel tanks serving the damaged engines while he tried to keep the plane aloft long enough for the aft crew members to abandon the plane and parachute to the ground.

When he was satisfied that all of the crew members other than the flight engineer and himself were safely out of the plane, he nodded to the engineer who released the lever for the cockpit and then evacuated the plane. As air rushed into the cockpit, Julien panicked momentarily as his harness jammed. However, he was soon able to free himself and managed to escape from the plane without hitting anything. For the second time in his flying career, Julien was experiencing the disorientation of being suspended in air. Fighting through his fear, Julien reached for the parachute's ripcord.

Luckily, the parachute opened, and Julien began experiencing the eerie sensation of floating to the ground. The dark night had begun to recede as the dawn approached and Julien was able to see with satisfaction that the other crew members had been able to escape and open their parachutes and were now also descending to the ground.

As Julien approached the ground, he could see an open field bordered by a forest. He did everything he could to avoid hitting one of the trees, but he was at the mercy of the winds. He willed himself to land in the field, but his entreaties went unanswered as he hit the branch of one of the trees bordering the field. He groaned loudly as he landed awkwardly on the ground, his arm broken.

Julien did his best to gather up his parachute and look for safety, but he could not move very far. Soon, the pain from his broken arm became agonizing and he found himself drifting in and out of conscience. In this state, Julien thought he spied three men in the distance approaching him. He tried to see if they were in uniform, but he couldn't make out any details as he passed out.

Chapter 16

Italy: Obstacles Encountered September 1943-October 1943

Italy's treatment of its small, highly integrated, Jewish population had been harsh under the fascists, particularly with regard to its refugee Jewish population. In November 1938, the Mussolini regime's hostility toward its Jewish population had come to a head with the enactment of the *Regio Decreto*, a collection of punitive racial laws that deprived Jews of public office, higher education and the professions and which prohibited sexual relations and marriage between Italians and Jews. However, many in Italy, including components of the church, despised the racial laws, not to speak of the fascists. As a result, before the September 1943 armistice, at least the country's non-immigrant Jews had been able to maintain a semblance of ordinary life free from worry of deportation. The treatment of Jewish refugees from other countries was more severe.

Over the years of Mussolini's reign, Jewish refugees from Germany and the eastern countries had been rounded up and placed in internal exile at a variety of internment camps, a policy known as *confino di polizia*. The camps were not necessarily places of cruelty, but they were spartan with few luxuries such as books or libraries practically nonexistent. Inmates were allowed to receive help from the outside, practice their religion and take care of the sick. But, aside from these luxuries, the destitute and stateless inhabitants of the internment camps lived from day to day.

The Jewish support organization, *Delasem*, had been established for the purpose of administering and aiding the interned Jewish refugees. It had the backing of the Vatican and funding from international Jewish institutions such as the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and its work was facilitated by a wide network of Jews, often interns of the camps.

With the German takeover of Italy following the September 8 armistice, *Delasem's* activities were no longer legal. However, the leaders of the Italian Jewish community had prevailed upon the sympathetic Cardinal Peitro Boetto, head of the diocese of Genoa, to continue *Delasem's* humanitarian activities. Boetto had, in turn, looked to his secretary, the Italian priest, Don Francesco Repetto, the devoted and determined administrator of *Delasem's* aid activities and instructed him to maintain his efforts on behalf of Italy's Jews, both citizens and interns. Repetto had taken his charge seriously and, with the assistance of the Genovese Jew, Massimo Teglio, and other leaders of the Genovese Jewish community, had continued his tireless work.

Teglio had acquired the nickname "Scarlet Pimpernel", after Baroness Orczy's hero, Sir Percy Blakeney, in her historical novel of the same name in which Blakeney, like Teglio after him, had risked life and limb to smuggle his charges out of harm's way.

Teglio was the scion of an old and established Jewish family that had made its fortune in the fish packing industry. He had been well connected with the fascists and the Catholic Church. Somehow, he had acquired official state stationery during the chaos following the announcement of the armistice. He had also located a sympathetic engraver capable of producing official-looking rubber stamps for authenticating documents. Armed with counterfeit documents that looked persuasively like the real thing, Teglio had been able to provide a variety of official-looking papers for the Jewish refugees who were fortunate to reach him in Genoa. Equally importantly, he had negotiated a safe crossing point from Italy into Switzerland and had made arrangements with the

Italian representative of the International Red Cross to ensure that, once having crossed the border, Jews fleeing from Italy would not be sent back.

It was Teglio whom Donati hoped to reach once they arrived in Genoa. The avenue of escape provided by Ferraro had taken them through several small villages where the villagers, never having encountered Jews, displayed both curiosity and kindness. The going had not been easy and more than once skeptical German officials had questioned their credentials, but three days after they left the farmhouse, Donati and the others arrived in Genoa.

As instructed, once there, they made contact with Don Francisco Repetto who, as secretary to Cardinal Pietro Boetto, was easy to find. After providing the now ragtag looking group with refreshments, Repetto escorted them to one of the more discrete reception areas of the cardinal's quarters where Teglio had been waiting.

It did not take long for Teglio to supply the group with more realistic credentials as well as more suitable traveling clothes. Before long, everyone was ticketed for the train to Milan. Once there, they would change trains to arrive at the small town in the Swiss canton of Ticino where Teglio had provided for their crossing. Before they left, Teglio warned them to speak as little as possible on the train as there were prying eyes everywhere and informants would likely be on the lookout for foreigners who didn't speak Italian. To reduce suspicion, Teglio recommended the group split up with Bernard, Leon and Gabrielle going on one train and Donati and the others going on a later train. Once on the trains, the parties would also be expected to split up as much as possible.

The trip to Milan had proved uneventful and Bernard and the two adolescents were feeling optimistic as they waited for their connection. But, as they boarded their connecting train, matters started to turn sour. Bernard was so intent on appraising his fellow passengers as he got on to the train that he failed to notice a walking stick that was protruding into the aisle. As he tripped over the walking stick, he was thrown forward and hit his head on one of the overhead compartments. Involuntarily, he released a string of expletives, all in French. In case his outburst had not labeled him as a foreigner, his mute stare when he was offered assistance by a well-intentioned fellow passenger broadcast his status.

With no other recourse available, Bernard took a seat, with Gabrielle seated next to him in the aisle seat. Leon took a seat across the aisle where he could easily make eye contact with Gabrielle and communicate by sign if it could be done discreetly. None of the three took note of the two well-dressed men near the end of the car who had taken in the arrival of the three with great interest. The older of the two had pointed out that, in addition to being French, the three new arrivals were not carrying luggage. In addition, their clothing while neat, was clearly of a poor quality and, in the case of Bernard, did not fit well.

Since the German takeover of Italy, the two men had ridden the train to the Swiss border precisely to take advantage of opportunities such as the one that now seemed to present itself. They were SS agents and their mission was to apprehend any foreigners, especially Jews, who appeared to be making an escape from Italy. As they began to hatch their plan for apprehending the three newcomers, their excitement overtook them and their conversation became more animated and, more importantly, they were now communicating in German.

Sitting by himself, Leon was feeling somewhat bored and he began to glance around the train. Had he been riding on a French train, he would have been able to make out what many of

the passengers were talking about simply by reading their lips. But, he was, of course, in Italy and, as he looked around, it was clear he wasn't going to be able to make out what people were saying because they were speaking in Italian. Soon, however, his eyes drifted in the direction of the two well-dressed men sitting near the rear of the train. They, too, had been conversing in Italian, and Leon almost lost interest before surveying the next set of travelers in the passenger car. But, then something surprising occurred. The conversation between the two men had suddenly become more energetic. More importantly, as he watched with curiosity, Leon began to detect something else—something he had learned while studying with Dr. Durant. The men were now speaking in a new tongue and what they were saying filled Leon with dread.

Quickly, he turned and caught Gabrielle's attention. Leon glanced over his shoulder to ensure the two men were not looking and then motioned to Gabrielle that they should communicate by sign so as not to be overheard. His message was simple, but urgent. The two men had indicated that they would be apprehending Bernard, Gabrielle and Leon at the Domodossala train station two stops away, where they would be detained until further transport could be arranged. Their only chance, communicated Leon, was to leave the train car just as it was departing from the next stop at Omega.

Shaking with fear, Gabrielle passed Leon's message along to Bernard who agreed with the proposed plan. Bernard also recommended that, during the stop, Gabrielle head for the wash closet close to the exit door so that she could get a head start when the train started rolling and so that Bernard could move into her aisle seat to expedite his own escape.

In the back of the car, the two SS agents had little reason to be suspicious as Gabrielle, alone, got up and headed for the wash closet. However, as the train began to leave the station, the two men were dumfounded as Bernard and Leon made a beeline for the exit door and were joined by Gabrielle who had flung open the door to the wash closet as they passed by. The SS agents knew they had been outfoxed and only hoped no one else in a position to report their ineptitude had observed the escape of the three refugees from the train.

At the Omega train station platform, the three escapees looked around and were relieved to note that no one else was present. A sign flashed indicating the train for Verbania was arriving. Quickly, Bernard looked at the large map that was nailed to the platform and smiled with satisfaction. Verbania was to the east, whereas Domodossala was due north. Quickly, he motioned for Leon and Gabrielle to prepare to board the train for Verbania. When they finally arrived at Verbania, the hour was getting late. There would be no more traveling that day and they would have to find shelter for the evening.

Much further south, Maurice, Jacquelyn, Collette and Natalie were embarking on a journey of their own—a journey fraught with as much peril as the one being pursued by Bernard, Leon and Gabrielle.

Following the arrival of the Nazis in Nice, it hadn't taken long for word to reach Saint Martin Vesube. Maurice had already attended several meetings regarding the invading Germans. The meetings had been attended by both the community's Jews as well as its soldiers. Now, the soldiers were spreading the word that it was time to leave, that the enforced residence rules had been suspended and that they would assist anyone needing help.

The soldiers planned to leave on foot using the old salt trails that climbed one thousand meters from St. Martin before descending to the Italian towns of Cuneo and Bogo San Dalmazzo. Saint Martin was in a valley one thousand meters high. By contrast, the mountain passes the soldiers planned to use rose to a level of two thousand four hundred meters over a short distance. The going would be rugged and would require that anyone making the journey would have to leave their belongings in the valley.

Maurice had been talking to two of the soldiers stationed near his family's residence. They had warned him of the demands of the proposed journey, but urged him to get his family together quickly if they were going to make the trek. Maurice was comfortable with the thought of so challenging a climb and thought Natalie would have little difficulty. But he was concerned about Collette and Jacquelyn who had never shown much inclination for mountaineering and who possessed only summer weight sandals that would be no match for the rocky passages.

Quickly, Maurice gathered together their most prized possessions and headed for the village boot maker. There, he was able to obtain more suitable shoes for the two women and felt better about informing them about the journey ahead. Quickly, he returned to his living quarters shoes in hand and convened Jacquelyn, Collette and Natalie to warn them of what lay ahead and of the need to pack essentials as quickly as possible. His timing could not have better. Once back in his residence, the soldiers came by again to say they were leaving in an hour and anyone who wanted to join them would have to be in the village square ready to depart.

As Maurice, the two women and Natalie approached the village square, they could not believe their eyes. More than one thousand Jews, some enforced residents but most recent arrivals who had sought refuge in the mountains, had assembled for the mountain crossing. Several women carried babies and one elderly man had to be older than eighty. However, as daunting as the site must have been, the soldiers did not complain. Quickly, they organized the large gathering for the upcoming journey.

Under favorable circumstances, an experienced hiker could negotiate the crossing between Saint Martin Vesubie and the Italian town of Cuneo in five to six hours. However, with so many inexperienced persons making the trek along with the soldiers, the crossing took far longer. Several times, Jacquelyn and Collette had to take off their ill-fitting mountain shoes, but they continued with little complaint while Natalie scampered along as if on a recreational hike.

Along the way, the soldiers showed great humanity in assisting the elderly and giving aid to the women carrying children. At risk to themselves, they held up the column of travelers on several occasions to give the elderly a break. However, at long last, they began to see the outline of Cuneo and a cheer erupted from the weary travelers.

As some of the members of the group began to quicken their pace, they were momentarily halted by two farmers who came running toward the soldiers. Almost out of breath, they announced that German soldiers had been spotted in the vicinity and that continuing on to Cuneo might pose risks.

For a few minutes, the soldiers parlayed among themselves. Many of the soldiers chose to continue since there had not been any official reports of Nazis in the Cuneo area, a view that seemed to be shared by the throng of Jewish refugees. However, with the encouragement of the farmers, a number of the soldiers decided to stay behind as did a fair component of the refugees who were made to feel welcome by the farmers.

At first Maurice had decided that the women and he would continue with the majority of the travelers. But, as he assessed the farmers, he saw in their faces both empathy and true concern. So, without any further analysis, he gathered up Jacquelyn, Collette and Natalie and joined the two farmers and the remaining soldiers.

For two weeks, Maurice, Jacquelyn, Collette, and Natalie stayed in a barn owned by a sympathetic farmer whose farm was near the farmers who had urged the Jewish refugees to leave the trail. The farmer had never before encountered any Jews. However, he had lost a close family member during an encounter with the Nazis, and he was determined to save any persons he could from a similar fate. The barn was cold, but the farmer generously provided his unscheduled guests with food and blankets. The others from Saint Martin Vesubie who had decided to leave the trail had somehow managed to find similar quarters throughout the mountainous region outside of Cuneo, near the towns of Valdieri and Entracque.

As they began their third week in the barn, Maurice was taking a walk in a forested area. To his surprise, he heard the sound of familiar voices in the distance. Cautiously, Maurice made his way to the edge of the forest. There, he discovered that the familiar sounding voices had come from some of the Jewish refugees who had completed the journey into Cuneo. They had not had the benefit of a sheltering barn or regular meals and their wariness showed. Quickly, Maurice approached the group to find out the reason for their return.

The story they described was a harrowing one. Initially, they had felt secure in Valdieri and Entracque. But, soon after their arrival, posters went up requiring all foreigners, code for Jews, to register with the authorities. They had not known what to do, but realized they would be sealing their fate if they registered. As they pondered their next move, Nazi soldiers began to arrive. Some of the refugees had found shelter with sympathetic villagers. Others hid in the forest. Some made their way to the nearby town of Borgo San Dalmazzo. However, after only a short time, the soldiers had managed to round up almost three hundred and fifty of the Jewish refugees who were placed under arrest and sent to a detention facility.

Miraculously, a number of those refugees who had fled to Borgo had found refuge in the parish of a courageous, anti-fascist parish priest named Don Raimondo Viale. Father Viale, who, having been imprisoned due to his anti-fascist views, was no stranger to oppression and had committed to fight it wherever he could, especially with regard to the country's Jews. Not surprisingly, he had become part of Father Don Repetto's *Delasem* network. As the Jews from Saint Martin Vesubie began to stream into the Cuneo region, Father Viale used the *Delasem* funds and his cunning to orchestrate a large network of hiding places, often in seminaries, convents and monasteries. The Jewish refugees were then spirited away to these unlikely destinations until arrangements could be made for their escape to Switzerland.

Soon, a representative of Father Viale sought out those Jews who were hiding in the countryside to persuade them that Viale's network of hiding places offered a better pathway to escape than remaining in the farms. Appreciating the merit in Father Viale's entreaty, Maurice, Jacquelyn, Collette, and Natalie soon thanked the farmer who had been sheltering them and left for the convent of Maria Rosa.

Chapter 17

Italy: The Goal in Sight October 1943-November 1943

Verbania was a town of twenty-five thousand inhabitants. Situated on the south shore of Lake Maggiore and surrounded by a range of low-lying mountains, the town was only forty kilometers from the north lakeshore Swiss community of Locarno.

As they left the train station, Bernard, Leon and Gabrielle couldn't help but admire the glow of the afternoon sun as it made its descent across the lake. However, they had business that required their attention and, after a moment, began to move quickly in search of a place to stay for the evening. The first hotel they encountered was the Hotel Stella Elvezio, a three-story structure in the traditional style of the lake community.

Hesitantly, they entered the hotel and approached the registration desk. It was off season. As a result, most of the summer help had left for other jobs and the man standing behind the desk, whose name was Lorenzo, was the owner.

Lorenzo surveyed Bernard, Leon and Gabrielle as they walked toward the desk. Immediately, he was wary. He was happy to have guests during the low season, but the three walking toward him made him feel uneasy. In addition to having arrived during an unusual time of year, the three were poorly dressed in clothing that was inappropriate for the increasingly cold weather. Also, when he introduced himself in Italian, it was clear that they were not native speakers, confirming his view they were refugees. So, after asking them what language they preferred, the polyglot Lorenzo commenced speaking in French.

Refugees meant trouble, but Lorenzo didn't want to lose the room rents they represented without at least making some inquiries. So, after introducing himself, Lorenzo asked if the three were a family and if Leon and Gabrielle were brother and sister. In the past, many people had mistakenly thought the cousins were brother and sister and it had always amused them as they, too, thought they looked alike. As they chuckled, they instinctively began communicating with one another in sign to acknowledge they had fooled another observer.

Lorenzo watched the two adolescents signing and almost immediately his manner and receptivity changed. Lorenzo had known about sign language all of his life as his deaf sister, Mariella, was old enough so as to have been trained in that discipline. Lorenzo had always deplored how others had mistreated and underestimated Mariella due to her disability, without giving any thought to the quality of her thought or manner. Now, as he looked at the three shabbily-clothed refugees in front of him, he began to see them in another light—persons who were likely escaping mistreatment, or even death, due only to the circumstance of their birth. He decided he would try to help.

“Let me blunt,” stated Lorenzo. “You are refugees, are you not?”

Surprised by the question and knowing that denials would obviously not sway the perceptive Lorenzo, Bernard nodded affirmatively, hoping for the best.

“I thought so. Are you being pursued by the Germans?”

Again, Bernard nodded affirmatively.

“Well, you shouldn’t stay here. It’s too close to the train station and there aren’t that many towns that are served by trains leaving Omegna late in the afternoon. So, I’m afraid you’ll be found. Tell me who is pursuing you and why you wound up in Verbania.”

After Bernard told Lorenzo about the SS agents’ plan to apprehend the family in Domodossola, Lorenzo thought for a moment. “It’s too late for you to travel anywhere tonight. Tomorrow, you shouldn’t continue to Domodossola since the agents may be waiting for you. Also, it would be imprudent to try to continue by boat because the weather is unpredictable, and you will be easy to spot. I believe your best bet is to find a more remote place for the evening in Verbania and then head out over the mountains from Villa d’Ossala to the Swiss border with a guide.” He then thought for a moment and looked at Bernard. “The children look like they can handle the journey. How about you, sir.”

Gratified by Lorenzo’s concern, Bernard assured the man that he was fit and experienced at trekking in the mountains. He then asked where they should stay.

“I know just the place,” said Lorenzo. The innkeeper is a friend and, like me, he could use a couple of nights’ rent. But you’re going to need clothing and equipment for the trek. Do you have any lire? When Bernard indicated he did, Lorenzo expressed relief.

Asking the three strangers to remain in the lobby, Lorenzo walked outside to make sure no one was watching. He returned with a smile. “I was about to close for the evening. So, let me make one or two calls, and then I’ll take you to where you will be staying.” After he got off the phone, Lorenzo announced with a self-satisfied look that clothes, boots, provisions, and equipment would arrive at his friend’s hotel the next day, as would a guide, a man named Aldo. “Aldo is a personal friend who owes me a number of favors. He is as well-equipped as anyone to get you to the Swiss border.”

Bernard conveyed his heartfelt thanks as Lorenzo dropped the three of them off at the modest Albergo Belvedere Hotel tucked away in a small mountain gorge. True to his word, Lorenzo had arranged for the three to be outfitted and everything arrived the following afternoon. At the end of the day, Aldo came by to introduce himself and brief them on their upcoming journey. There had been no sightings of Germans stopping cars between Verbania and Villa d’Ossala. Accordingly, driving seemed reasonably safe, provided they didn’t drive to Domosossola. They would leave at first light in the morning and drive to Villa d’Ossala. From there, they would cross the mountains on foot to the border. There was a small border crossing at Weisslmeis near the ski resort of Saas Fee. That would be their destination. There would be shelters along the way. Depending on condition they might have to stay in one overnight.

The next morning, Aldo along with his three travelers left as the sun was beginning to rise. Remarkably, all the provisions worked out and they only required two stops along the way. As the sun was beginning its descent, Aldo pointed ahead to the checkpoint and announced they had arrived at the Swiss border. He agreed to continue with them in case they needed an interpreter.

Relieved, all four headed to the border crossing. At the last moment, however, Bernard reminded himself that he had no entry papers. A *Delasem* representative was to have met him with the papers in Domodossola. Of course, they had never made it that far and now they were without proper documentation.

Switzerland had welcomed many refugees as the Nazis had devastated the surrounding nations, with as many as thirty thousand foreigners having entered the country. Among these had been 1,350 children from occupied countries who, with funding provided by the World Jewish Congress, had managed to find sanctuary in Switzerland. However, Bernard knew that the Swiss had rejected almost as many would-be entrants and had heard that as many as twenty thousand Jewish refugees, desperate to avoid certain death, had been denied entry. He wondered which side of the equation the children and he would fall now that they were seeking sanctuary without the necessary papers.

Three soldiers manned the checkpoint, a corporal and two privates. The sergeant had taken a cigarette break and the privates were sticklers for the rules. As Aldo and Bernard negotiated with the privates, it was becoming clear they were not inclined to break the rules at their own risk. Bernard was beginning to feel that their arduous journey had been for naught.

As these discussions were taking place, Gabrielle made eye contact with the young corporal who was standing nearby enjoying his smoke in an area shaded from the glare of the setting sun. As the man smiled back at her, Gabrielle was taken by curiosity and walked in his direction. As she got closer, she could see the man liked her and she decided to befriend him in the off chance he might help. She hoped he spoke French; however, German was his native tongue and he greeted her in that language. Gabrielle responded graciously using what German she had learned in school.

The young soldier said his name was Hans and offered Gabrielle a cigarette which she declined. However, as he made his offer, a thought occurred to her—the kind of thought that had occurred to women in distress throughout the ages. *Why not offer Hans something—a gift he could not pass up, in return for which, perhaps, he might help her family and her.* Girding herself for what she knew she must do, she pointed to her breasts. The young corporal could not believe his good fortune and shook his head excitedly and encouragingly.

Shielded by the shade, Gabrielle methodically took off her coat and sweater. It was cold, but she didn't care. She then walked toward the young soldier and placed his hands on her bare breasts. He was now wild with desire. Taking off his uniform was out of the question but he could relieve himself in other ways. As he pressed forward hungry with desire, Gabrielle put out her hand and asked the all-important question—the question that might be the difference between her family getting into the safety of Switzerland or being rejected. When Hans agreed to her request, Gabrielle placed her arms around him and encouraged him to rub his loins against her groin. As Hans swayed back and forth, Gabrielle swayed in rhythm with him. Finally, the moment arrived and Hans climaxed ecstatically.

After smoothing out his uniform, Hans walked over to the two privates who were engaged in heated conversation with Bernard and Aldo and instructed his subordinates to escort the three travelers through the checkpoint. Bernard was stunned but proceeded happily. With equal happiness, Gabrielle grabbed her cousin's hand and the three walked the all-important few steps that would likely save their lives.

Following Italy's entry into the war on the side of the Germans, its industrial cities of Milan, Turin and Genoa had become fair game for Royal Air Force bombing raids. During late October 1942, RAF bombers dropped well over one hundred tons of bombs on the city of Milan. A pause

then ensued. But four months later during February 1943, the RAF bombers were back and, in a second major bombing run similar in destructive power to the October campaign, again dropped over one hundred tons of ordinance on the hapless Milanese, destroying factories, monuments, churches, transportation hubs and residential areas. But the final blow had not yet arrived. After the fall of Mussolini in August 1943, the RAF decided that a show of strength was required to induce the successor Badoglio government to come to the side of the Allies. The onslaught that followed was more than just a demonstration. British Lancaster and Halifax bombers dropped more than twelve hundred tons of bombs on Milan, in the heaviest one-day air raid of the war aimed at an Italian city.

Milan had been devastated. Its infrastructure and residential areas were a tangled mess. Many in the city lived in close quarters, often as a way of affording larger homes in the country. The massive destruction compounded the crowded conditions. Those who could leave the city did so and headed to their country homes, far from the flight path of the deadly RAF bombers. One of those who managed to escape from Milan's tattered remnants was Luciano Elmo, a Milanese lawyer, who, with his wife, headed for their country home in Borgo.

Elmo was not a particularly religious man. However, over the years, he had become friends with Don Viale whose parish was not far from the Elmo country home in Borgo. As the war looked like it was taking a turn for the worse, the two had sat on the steps leading to the parish and discussed the implications for Borgo. Elmo knew that Don Viale was giving shelter to a number of refugees in the parish, but did not think it was appropriate to raise the matter until Don Viale broached it himself.

Elmo was accustomed to taking a daily walk along the established mountain paths before breakfast when the light was just beginning to shine. Now, as September was coming to a close, he began to notice a number of shadowy figures—some hauling water, some carrying firewood and some gathering food—as he took his morning stroll. Understandably, he thought the situation was unusual and decided to consult with Don Viale the following morning.

The priest had just completed morning prayers when the lawyer appeared. “May I offer you a cup of tea, counselor?” Don Viale intoned in his usual friendly manner.”

“Actually, I’ve come to ask for your advice.” At this, Don Viale looked alarmed.

After assuring the good father that nothing was amiss, Elmo continued and described what he believed to be a large influx of refugees from the nearby villages.

Smiling, Don Viale responded: “I’ve been wondering how long it would take you to notice we have many new neighbors. By my count, there are over seven hundred of them if you don’t include the thirty or so who are living under my protection.” Don Viale described the roundup of the Jews in Valdieri and Entracque and the fate that awaited the refugees in the mountains if they were apprehended. He then surprised Elmo with a request the latter had not been expecting.

“Your wife and you have a large country home with extensive grounds. You have no children. But, most important, I know that both of you have a conscience. Will you help the Jewish refugees in our area?”

Elmo saw no purpose in trying to recover from his surprise so he flatly blurted out, “What would you have us do?”

“First, every parish, monastery and convent in the area is overflowing with Jewish refugees. Can you house as many as thirty just as I have? Second, you are a man of influence. I have funds I have received by way of Rome from the American Joint Distribution Committee and also from *Delasem*. Massimo Teglio, whose name you may not recognize, but who is one of the leaders of the Genovese Jewish community, has provided documentation for the area’s Jewish refugees. But I’m afraid that, over time, his efforts may not hold up to scrutiny. What I need is someone to help me use the available funds for providing better exit documentation and to arrange for their escape to Switzerland. I was hoping that you might be willing to assume that role.”

Elmo tried to explain why he wouldn’t be the best person for the job, as neither he nor his wife had any prior experience with Jews, let alone those who did not speak Italian and who lacked proper documentation. But, under the influence of Don Viale’s disarming stare, Elmo slowly began to relent. Finally, signaling capitulation, Elmo threw up his hands. “Let me discuss it with Anna this evening. I’ll get back to you tomorrow.”

The next day, Elmo returned to Don Viale’s parish. “Don Viale, I have a story to tell you.”

“I’m all ears.”

“When Anna was growing up, she lived with her parents, sister and grandmother in a nice neighborhood in Milan. Her grandmother’s name was Beatrice. Beatrice loved to shop at the local grocery store, but she was too unstable to carry the bags of groceries home and didn’t want to admit it. So, she asked the proprietor of the store, a man named Edmundo, if his daughter, Greta, would help carry her bags until she was close to home. Edmundo refused payment and cheerfully agreed that Greta would be happy to help any time Beatrice came to the store. Anna later found out from her grandmother that the service provided by Greta lasted for several years until she began her studies at the university. Anna also found out something more surprising.”

“Well, don’t keep me in suspense!”

“I won’t. It turns out that Edmundo and his family were Jewish. Beatrice found out one day when she went to the grocery store. Greta had just graduated and proudly showed Beatrice her diploma. The diploma, of course, had her full name written on it, showing Greta’s middle name as Miriam. Greta’s family had not tried to hide the fact they were Jewish, but Beatrice had had little exposure to Jews and failed to notice the signs of Jewishness. However, she knew enough to recognize that Miriam was a Jewish name. Years later, Beatrice told Anna’s family the story of what Greta had done and mentioned the episode involving the diploma. Anna’s family wanted to do something to express their appreciation for Greta many kindnesses over the years. But, before they had a chance to do anything, Beatrice passed away and the matter got dropped.”

“I’m sorry,” responded Don Viale sympathetically.”

“It’s okay. In fact, Anna now sees your request as a way to repay the Jewish family that was so kind to her grandmother. She asked me to tell you that our property is bigger than your parish and that, if you can shelter thirty Jewish refugees on your smaller property, so can we on our larger estate. I would also like to say that I wish to do my part.”

Don Viale was truly grateful. “Thank you. I’m sure the reward you will reap from your compassionate gesture will far outweigh any inconvenience. Tell me what you have in mind for yourself?”

“As you may be aware, I am a man of some influence. You’ve indicated you require documentation for the unfortunates we will be sheltering. I believe I can improve on the improvised citizenship documents you’ve been using.”

“How do you propose to do that?”

“One of my trusted friends, who has despised the fascists, is counsel to the Vatican. I trust him implicitly and believe I can call upon his church influence to obtain passports for our new mountain residents.”

“Sadly, I wish that I could rejoice in what you propose. But, I have reservations.”

“I don’t understand. Surely, what I propose is a worthy effort to aid the very people for whom you seek protection.”

“I’m sorry for being oblique. Of course, what you propose is honorable. It’s just that you might encounter problems in Rome due to the church’s position when it comes to the Jews.”

“But, haven’t you advised told me of the church’s willingness to find sanctuary for the country’s persecuted Jews in parishes such as your own, in monasteries and even on the very grounds of the Vatican? Doesn’t that indicate a willingness to do what is required in the face of a ruthless enemy?”

“Thankfully, yes. But, on the public stage, the church’s attitude toward the Jews has been considerably less evident owing to the Holy Father’s position of neutrality when it comes to the Nazis. He has said as much earlier this summer at a conference of the sacred college of the cardinals. In light of his position, I fear he would not approve of any action by a person connected to the Vatican that could be construed as undermining the Vatican’s neutrality.”

“You have nothing to worry about. It has taken me many years to nurture my reputation and to develop a network of valued contacts. What I have in mind can be done discreetly and by a person who I know to be tireless when it comes to injustice.”

Elmo soon left for Rome. A few weeks later, he appeared at Don Viale’s parish accompanied by another man. Don Viale was delighted to see Elmo. “It is good to see you. Who have you brought with you?”

“A fair question. But the real question should be what have you brought with you? The answer resides with the two boxes of documents this gentlemen and I have just brought from Rome.”

“The passports?”

“Yes, and letters of safe conduct from a sympathetic member of the Swiss Embassy in Rome, who has also arranged for a contact to assist us at the Swiss border. Now, let us talk about how to distribute them and the means by which the new passport holders can head to safety.”

Don Viale had planned several church related activities for the afternoon. But these were soon cancelled. For the rest of the day Elmo and he mapped out plans for the exodus of the refugee Jews of Borgo. Those refugees known to Don Viale would have their pictures taken for use on the passports obtained from Rome. Then, under cover of claimed business meetings in Switzerland, Elmo would take the train to Switzerland twice a week. When he traveled, he would be accompanied by four or five of the Jewish refugees. Each would be instructed to sit in a separate train car and remain quiet, in order not to raise suspicion as few of the refugees spoke Italian. The groups would travel at the earliest time of morning, so as to feign drowsiness if queried by a train conductor. At the end of the train ride, Elmo would join up with the designated Swiss contact who would guide the refugees to safety.

Word of the exit trips soon spread throughout the refugees in Borgo, among them Maurice, Jacquelyn, Collette, and Natalie. They were ecstatic but heedful for they knew that the scourge of Naziism hung over every Jew and that any form of escape, no matter how well thought out, carried immense risks.

The next morning, the four of them were at the train long before dawn and were greeted by Luciano Elmo who provided them with tickets and passports. Collette and Jacquelyn would travel together. However, each of Elmo, Maurice and Jacquelyn would travel in separate passenger cars.

The journey had gone flawlessly when the conductor came by to ask Jacquelyn for Natalie's and her tickets. Jacquelyn reached into her otherwise empty pocketbook and, in a moment of panic, realized that the tickets were nowhere to be found. She had no idea what to do as she had been directed not to speak French and, in any event, she did not know whether the conductor would understand her even if her speech had not been embargoed.

Jacquelyn looked forlornly at the conductor. At first, he didn't understand. But then he smiled, as he spotted the missing train tickets in the aisle just behind Jacquelyn. Graciously, he picked up the tickets, punched them and then returned them to Jacquelyn. Jacquelyn thought she may have exposed her fellow travelers and herself due to her awkward encounter with the conductor. However, to her relief, the train soon stopped in Milan where Jacquelyn, Natalie and the two other members of their small cohort left the train to make connections to their destination.

Two hours and forty-five minutes later they arrived at their journey's end where they were met by the contact arranged by Elmo. Looking at his four charges, the man flashed a reassuring smile and welcomed them to Domodossola.

Chapter 18

Washington, DC: The War Refugee Board Emerges August 1943-January 1944

For almost three months, little involving refugees crossed Welles' desk. Then, in late July, Wise called him with some startling news. Through the good offices of Roosevelt's confidant, Harry Hopkins, Poland's ambassador to the United States, Jan Ciechanowski, had arranged a meeting between himself and Roosevelt to discuss the increasingly distressing news of Nazi atrocities against Europe's Jews. Most intriguing, however, was that Ciechanowski would be accompanied by Jan Karski, who earlier in the year, had presented conclusive evidence of Nazi abominations in Poland to Count Edward Raczynski, the Polish Foreign Minister in exile in London, as well as to the British section of the World Jewish Congress.

The meeting with Roosevelt took place as planned on July 28. Word of Roosevelt's reaction got back to Welles through Cordell Hull as well as from a lengthy talk with Wise, both of whom had met with Karski shortly after the Roosevelt meeting. Unfortunately, their assessment of Roosevelt's reaction was the same. Roosevelt had been gracious and listened to Karski for almost an hour. At the end, however, he had little to offer other than his oft-stated mantra that the most important thing for all parties concerned was to win the war.

Welles had discussed the outcome of the Karski meeting when he met with Lester following Welles' talks with Hull and Wise. He tried his best to temper the impact of what he had heard by telling Lester about a new initiative that Secretary Henry Morgenthau, Jr., at Treasury had proposed to Hull regarding the deployment of modest funds to aid the Romanian Jews. He had asked Lester to coordinate the Treasury proposal within State. Unfortunately, as Lester soon discovered, the Morgenthau initiative never advanced beyond Treasury as there was continued widespread resistance within State to any proposal that might be interpreted as the United States paying ransom to an enemy country.

One evening later in August, Lester and Welles were discussing the Romanian proposal when Welles became pensive.

"You probably know by now that I have many detractors here at State."

Not sure of what was coming next, Lester could only nod his head in concurrence.

"Well, it's true and some of them will stop at nothing to see that my policies are stifled, no matter my relationship with the president. Sadly, I've been guilty of some pretty glaring indiscretions in my past. I'd be surprised if you hadn't heard about them."

Again, Lester nodded, this time dejectedly, knowing that Welles was referring to several episodes in the past when he had propositioned black railroad porters for sex. On one occasion, he had even done so while on an official presidential train.

"The bottom line is that my time at State will likely soon be coming to an end and, with it, the work I've been doing on behalf of the Jewish refugee problem. But your efforts don't have to end with mine. I've been talking to my likely successor, Ed Stettinius, as well as to my contacts at Treasury. Ed is a good guy, but he has his own handpicked assistant. In addition, he'll have his

hands so full that he likely will not have much time to focus on what's happening to the Jews of Europe."

Welles could see the disappointment written on Lester's face.

"Why the long face?"

"Well, it's just that I like the work I'm doing and hate the idea of having to give it up and return to a desk at JAG."

"I understand completely. Fortunately, Ed wants to keep informed of the Jewish situation in Europe and of any initiatives that are taking place at Treasury. I told him that no one here at State knows more about the Jewish victims of Nazi cruelty than you and that you've already made good contacts at Treasury. From what I told him, Ed agrees that you'd be an excellent person to coordinate with Treasury on matters pertaining to the oppression of European Jews."

"That sounds very interesting, but what does Treasury have to say about such an arrangement."

"From my discussions, I understand that Secretary Morgenthau has assembled a team to take on the entrenched elements here at State. These are fine people and they have indicated their willingness to work with you. They've even reserved a small office for you at Treasury. From JAG's perspective, you'll still be on detail to State. So, there won't be any paperwork required or any chance that you might be called back. Stettinius will expect you to meet with him on a regular basis to report on developments. Otherwise, you'll be spending most of your time at Treasury. You could easily wind up playing a significant role in one of the war's most important and demanding issues. What do you say?"

Lester was excited but understandably saddened by what Welles had said about the reason for his departure and felt he had to clear the air before responding. "First, I'm very excited about the liaison position you've described. But, equally importantly, I want you to know that I've never allowed any rumors I've heard about your personal life to interfere with my respect for you and your work. I hope you know that."

Welles responded reassuringly. "I do. I never thought for a moment you were walled off from the Department's rumor mill and I never sensed it entered into your thinking or attitude toward me."

"Thank you. Then, I would consider it an honor to continue your efforts, while coordinating with Treasury. I've enjoyed my interactions at Treasury and I'm optimistic I could help."

"Excellent. I'll make the arrangements. It may take a while for the paperwork to go through. But it will be done. In the meantime, I want to thank you for your tireless support in helping me during my tenure here at State. If there's ever anything I can do for you, please do not hesitate to ask."

A sheepish look overtook Lester as he considered what he was about to say. But then he just blurted it out. "Several months ago, I met this girl named Marcia Goldfarb. We hit it off, but, in my excitement, I never got her phone number. I've tried to reach her, but to no avail since she's living with another family whose name I don't know and must be using their telephone. But I do

know her father is a senior advisor to Leo Crowley at the Foreign Economic Administration. I was wondering if you might have contacts at the FEA who might be able to get Goldfarb's daughter's telephone number or at least find where she works."

Lester, as you're aware, I support love wherever it flowers, particularly if it leads to someone whom I admire. I'd be happy to do it. I'm good friends with Oscar Cox who's the general counsel at the FEA and who, incidentally, is quite sympathetic to the plight of Europe's Jews. In fact, Oscar was quite instrumental in setting up the recent meeting between Jan Karski and the president. I think I can count on his discretion and would be happy to make an inquiry on your behalf.

A few weeks later, Welles called Lester into his office for one last chat. "As I indicated, I'll be leaving soon, but you're all set. Randolph Paul, general counsel at Treasury, has set aside an office for you and, from what I hear, there's a whole slate of assignments awaiting you."

Slyly, Welles gave the impression that the meeting was over, but, when he saw the look of disappointment on Lester's face he couldn't hold back any longer. "Oh, by the way, I did speak to Oscar Cox at the Foreign Economic Administration."

Without any effort to hold back, Lester's face turned from gloom to excitement as he waited for Welles to report of his conversation.

"It looks like you're in luck. I couldn't get the young lady's telephone number or address as Cox thought that would be inappropriate. But Cox was able to find out from her father that Marcia works at the IRS in one of their policy divisions and that she apparently has some dealings with Treasury. The rest, I dare say, is up to you."

Lester thanked his mentor profusely and, as soon as the opportunity arose, began making telephone calls to the IRS. Eventually, he was able to find the office where Marcy Goldfarb worked. After bracing himself against the wave of nervousness that had suddenly overcome him, he called her number. For, better or worse, she was not in. So, he left a message with his telephone number.

For the next two days, Lester waited for a return call from Marcy. But none came. Finally, he tired of jumping each time the phone rang and decided to try calling one more time. Again, he announced his name, but was told that Marcy was not in. He tried again the following day with the same result. Now, bereft of all pride, he began calling every day. Finally, after five days of calling Marcy came to the phone.

"Hello. This is Lester Abelstein. We met at the Tidal Basin a little while ago. I've been thinking about you ever since. But you never gave me your telephone number."

"Thanks so much for calling. Of course, I remember you. I really enjoyed meeting you and I'm sorry I have been so difficult to reach. But I intentionally didn't give you my number."

"I don't understand. I'm sure you're Jewish as am I and I thought you were really enjoying yourself talking to me and it didn't sound as if there was anybody else in the picture."

"I don't want to lie. I agree that we did hit it off."

“Then, why the mysterious brush off?”

“I’m so sorry if I led you on. There is someone else. But he’s not here.”

“What do you mean?”

“His name is Elliott and he’s somewhere in Italy. Sorry for being emotional, but I don’t even know if he’s alive.”

“I’m so sorry.”

“We weren’t engaged or anything like that. But, before he left, I promised him I’d be faithful. I know it sounds old fashioned. However, I’m just not ready to break that promise.”

Lester tried to hide his disappointment, but knew it showed through in his voice. “I would be the last person to ask you to break that vow. Even so, I do hope our paths will cross one of these days.”

“Thanks so much for your understanding. This war has been awful for all of us. If our paths do cross, I would be happy to catch up and see how you are doing.”

Lester’s first day at work at Treasury was a happy one. He had spent most of the morning in Randolph Paul’s office discussing possible assignments with both Paul and Josiah DuBois, Jr., Paul’s assistant general counsel. The powerful Paul was in his early fifties and had already authored the Revenue Act of 1942, taught at Yale Law School, and written a six-volume treatise on tax law. However, despite his extraordinary accomplishments, Paul, the grandson of a butcher and a graduate of the lowly New York Law School, managed to maintain a gracious and accessible manner. Lester also liked DuBois, a New Jersey native and graduate of the University of Pennsylvania Law School who was about eight years older than Lester.

Most of their discussion had centered on Treasury’s recent attempt to rescue the 70,000 Jews of Romania. Treasury’s Foreign Funds Control office had allocated \$150,000 in response to a proposal by the Romanian government to release 70,000 of its Jews in return for such a sum. DuBois pointed out that even Secretary Cordell Hull at State had signed off on the idea. However, the weak secretary’s subordinates, aided by the British who were concerned about Jewish refugees seeking sanctuary in Palestine, had resisted the idea, causing the money to languish as the Romanian Jews suffered.

Toward the end of the meeting, the chief of the Foreign Funds Control office, John Peale, stopped by to say hello to Lester. Like DuBois, Peale, a Nebraskan and a Yale Law School graduate, was also about eight years older than Lester, and, like DuBois, Peale was incensed at the intransigence shown by the State Department in failing to act on the Romanian rescue proposal. “I can sum up the whole sad affair by the headline in a New York Times advertisement taken out by Peter Bergson, the Jerusalem-born nephew of Abraham Isaac Kook, the former chief rabbi of Palestine, back in February. The heading read ‘For Sale to Humanity: 70,000 Jews’.”

For the next two months, Lester was busy interacting with the Congressional offices of Senator Jay Gillette of Iowa and Representative Will Rogers Jr. of California. The two lawmakers had introduced a resolution calling on Roosevelt to establish a commission on saving the Jews of

Europe. Lester's meetings with Stettinius had become infrequent as Welles' replacement grappled with the myriad issues brought on by the war. However, at a meeting with Lester in early November, Stettinius reported that Roosevelt had come around to doing more to support the Jews of Europe and that he had advised his colleagues at State accordingly.

Happily, Lester reported the thrust of his meeting with Stettinius to his colleagues at Treasury. However, as if Roosevelt's and Stettinius' words had never been spoken, the senior members of Morgenthau's office continued to encounter intransigence from their counterparts at State regarding immigration or any other measures that might give prominence to the plight of the European Jews. The embodiment of such opposition was Breckenridge Long, the State Department's patrician Assistant Secretary in charge of immigrant affairs, who insisted that the State Department was doing everything needed to address Jewish issues. In fact, so opposed was Long to opening up the United States to Jewish immigration that, during his administration, ninety percent of the immigration quota for persons living in countries under Italian or German control went unfilled.

Finally, in December, the matter came to a head. Lester was busy drafting a memo on the taxation of wartime windfall profits, when he was called into DuBois' office.

"Lester, you know from your own conversations with Stettinius that the president is on board with doing more for the Jews of Europe."

"Of course."

"Well, we don't seem to be getting anywhere with State. At the same time, Secretary Morgenthau is adamant that we have to take the initiative. So, I'm working on a report about how much more we could be doing to help rescue the Jews and how little we have done in the past. I'm afraid much of it will be an indictment of the intransigence displayed by certain officials at State, including the suppression of the Riegner telegram intended for Rabbi Wise. To give you an idea of how serious I am about this report, I've agreed to title it 'Report to the Secretary on the Acquiescence of this Government in the Murder of the Jews'."

"That's very commendable, although it's quite an indictment."

"It is and I'd like you to work on it."

"I'd love to be a part of the project. But how can I be part of a report that points an incriminating finger at State while I am still officially detailed to State, not to speak of the fact that I have an obligation to keep Under Secretary Stettinius advised of developments that affect his office?"

"You obviously can't and the undersecretary is well aware of the pressure you're under. At the same time, he's not unsympathetic to our cause and agrees that something should be done to relieve you of your untenable position even if it means severing your connection to State. So, with Stettinius' awareness, we've pulled some strings on your behalf. Secretary Morgenthau has been in touch with Major General Myron C. Cramer who heads the Judge Advocate General Command and has advised the general of your essential service here at Treasury. Based on the Secretary's urging, Cramer agreed to recommend that you be decommissioned and given an honorable discharge. The paperwork from the office of the Secretary of War came through this morning.

Congratulations Lester. You're now a civilian and a deputy assistant general counsel here at Treasury."

So dumfounded was Lester that all he could say was "what are we waiting for—let's get to work". The work culminated in a damaging report, watered down only in its title but not its import. Armed with the report, Secretary Morgenthau accompanied by Pehle and Paul met with the president on January 16, 1944. By the end of the meeting, Roosevelt had been convinced that the United States had to take action to aid Europe's suffering Jews and had agreed to issue a presidential directive creating the War Refugee Board that would be headed, at least in name, by the secretaries of War, State and Treasury. The Board would be tasked with working with Jewish organizations, neutral countries, and European resistance groups with the goal of rescuing and providing relief to those Jews who had managed to avoid the Nazi noose.

Chapter 19

Sweden: After the Rescue October 1943-September 1944

Hans Hedtoft had boarded a ship immediately upon hearing his daughter, Hilde, had been shot and taken to Sweden on the same small craft that had rescued her best friend, Sarah Kreisler, and her family.

As a result of her turbulent passage across the Oresund, Hilde's wounded arm had proved to be more serious than originally thought. She had been awake when her father arrived at the hospital in Malmo. All color had drained from the face of the elder Hedtoft as he sat down next to his wounded daughter. Hilde smiled feebly as she observed her father and felt his hand caressing her face. Looking tenderly at his daughter, Hans expressed relief she was alive. He thought about berating her for having placed herself at risk, but saw no useful purpose in upsetting his daughter. Their conversation had lasted only a few minutes before Hilde's eyes began to close.

As he sat by his daughter, Hans reflected on the last year. Hilde had been a star political science student at the University of Copenhagen where she had met and, improbably, become best friends with the refugee Jewish dance major, Sarah Kreisler. Hilde's affinity for politics and government had given Hans hope she would follow in his footsteps as chairman of the Danish Social Democratic Party. He knew it might prove to be a vain hope as the Nazis had occupied the country since April 1940. Still, it had been a relatively benign occupation—a model protectorate as the Nazis had been wont to call it—with King Christian X having retained his rule and the *Rigsdag*, the Danish Parliament, having continued to meet and legislate.

But, in the wink of an eye, everything had changed. First, the Danish resistance, inspired by Nazi defeats in North Africa and the Soviet Union, had increased its attacks against the country's German occupiers. Then, the Danish electorate had humiliated the Nazis with a devastating repudiation of the Nazi party in the March 1943 election. The euphoria of the election had led to a heightened feeling of nationalism and even greater instances of civil disobedience. The inevitable result had been a Nazi crackdown resulting in the dissolution of the *Rigsdag* the following August and the institution of martial law. Soon, the demand came that Denmark's seventy-eight thousand Jews be handed over for deportation. Courageously, the Danes had pushed back and organized a patchwork of boats, from skiffs to trawlers and everything in between, to transport Denmark's Jews to the safety of neutral Sweden.

The last thing the elder Hedtoft wanted was to leave his daughter in Sweden. But he had to return to his family in Denmark. As Hilde fell asleep, Hans got up from Hilde's bedside and sought out Sarah's father, Lorenz Kreisler.

Lorenz was easy to find as he had made a point of remaining near the wounded Hilde ever since their arrival. Hans's eyes showed wariness and apprehension as he approached Lorenz. They had never met during the years Lorenz's family had found refuge in Denmark, but now they were bound together by a shared concern for Hilde. Hedtoft spoke first: "You are probably aware that Hilde is experiencing complications from her wounded arm and is still under observation. As a result, her doctors have cautioned against her making a return voyage in her fragile condition over

the Oresund's unpredictable waters. But the political situation in Denmark is very tenuous and I have to get back to my family. It's just that I'm so uncomfortable about leaving her here."

"How could you not be. If it's of any consolation, Sarah has already promised Hilde to stay by her side day and night until Hilde is fully recovered. In addition, Hilde is welcome to stay with us."

Hans nodded in appreciation, but he was clearly uneasy.

As a fellow father, Hans' dilemma was obvious to Lawrenz who tried to be as reassuring as circumstance would allow. "I know the prospect of Hilde staying with a refugee family, such as my own, is not very reassuring. Let me try to allay your concerns. I've been checking on work opportunities. It's well known that the refugee community usually has to put up with the most difficult and least well-paying jobs. Can't say I'm surprised and, in the abstract, I would do whatever was offered to me to provide for my family. However, I am in the unique position of being a German national and a gentile. As a result, I have been able to speak to several government officials who were impressed with my military background and prewar civil engineering experience with the *Reich*. If things work out for me, as I hope they will, there will be a roof over my family's head and food on the table. Hilde will benefit as much as any other member of the Kreisler family."

For the first time in a while, Hans allowed a small smile to creep across his face. "That's very kind of you."

"Nowhere near as kind as the courageous effort by you Danes to rescue my family and so many other Danish Jews. The Swedish officials tell me they estimate ninety-four percent of Denmark's seventy-eight hundred Jews were rescued due to your countrymen's selfless bravery."

Lorenz's remark made Hans feel proud, although he had not been as involved in the rescue effort as Hilde. But, as he considered his situation, another unpleasant thought occurred to him. "If I go back to Denmark without Hilde, I don't know when I will again have the opportunity to return to Sweden to retrieve her."

"That must be a very painful thought. Travel across the Oresund to and from Denmark must be increasingly dangerous since the humiliation of the Nazis by the rescue at sea of the Jews, not to speak of the uncertainty caused by the German military takeover of your country."

"Those are certainly concerns in their own right. I'm hoping my position as chairman of the Danish Social Democratic Party will provide me with some protection. But I can't be sure now that all Danish political parties have been disbanded. Unfortunately, I have an additional and more pressing worry."

As Hans' eyes begin to moisten, Lorenz put his arm around the shoulder of his new comrade in adversity. "It must be a heavy burden."

"It is. My family is well known in Denmark as a result of my position in politics. On many occasions, my wife and children have accompanied me to political rallies. Their pictures have appeared alongside mine in the Danish press."

“That does not surprise me. Sarah mentioned she had seen a picture of Hilde in a magazine.”

“Well, it may have been a thrill to Hilde at the time. But now it’s a liability. When Hilde was shot, it was getting dark. It was still light enough, however, to allow a German marksman to shoot her. In addition, it was also light enough for the marksman, who had seen Hilde’s picture in the Danish press, to identify her as my daughter. I’m worried for the well-being of my family. But I’m worried beyond description about Hilde’s safety were she to return to Denmark and be denounced as a Jewish enabler.”

Now, Lorenz could barely hold back his emotions. “Your daughter has done so much for my family, both in befriending Sarah and in helping with the rescue flotilla. Please take what I’ve said as a solemn promise. We will take care of Hilde for as long as it takes. While with us, she will be a member of our family.”

“I’m relieved. I wish the circumstances were otherwise, but you’ve helped ease my mind. Now, I have to prepare for my return trip and for my goodbyes to Hilde.”

The days that followed Hedtoft’s return to Denmark were painful ones for Hilde both physically and mentally. She missed her family and her previous way of life. However, Sarah’s constant presence was a great consolation. As promised, she was at Hilde’s bedside every day, smiling, cajoling and providing reassurance. As the dark Swedish winter began to set in, Hilde’s arm began to return to normal.

Neither Hilde nor Sarah had had a chance to complete their studies at the University of Copenhagen and they both would have loved to continue their studies at Malmö University. Sarah could have enrolled on her own, but she lacked any desire return to school without Hilde at her side. However, by the time Hilde had fully recovered from her injury, it was too late for them to matriculate for the next session.

By then, Hilde had become well acquainted with the expatriate Jewish community in Sweden and started to feel a kinship with the recently arrived refugees. In Denmark, she had known the Jews of Europe were suffering grievously at the hands of the Nazis. But Danish society had been welcoming of its Jews and, as a result, she had been generally unaware of the magnitude of the atrocities being committed against the Jews in the rest of Europe. However, now in Sweden, she was bound up with the community of refugee Jews. If her own wounded arm hadn’t been lesson enough, she was now privy to an endless stream of accounts detailing the Nazi’s limitless capacity for cruelty. What she heard defied comprehension. It also made her aware of the uniqueness of both Denmark and Sweden as regards their respective Jewish populations.

Denmark, though under Nazi dominion, had had the relative advantage of conducting its day-to-day activities as a protectorate and had used that status to resist Nazi attempts to deport the country’s nearly eight thousand Jews. Sweden, by contrast, was a non-belligerent—a neutral. As such, the plight of its more than seven thousand Jews had never been a serious issue. However, until late 1942, its willingness to offer assistance beyond its borders to what it considered to be Europe’s “Jewish problem” had been very limited.

The consequences of the Great Depression had been felt no less in Sweden than in any other country of Europe. In addition, prior to the war, had it been no less anti-Semitic, particularly

regarding the Jews of eastern Europe, than had most of the other countries on the continent. Its immigration policies reflected both circumstances and had been designed to protect the population from an influx of immigrants whose numbers might threaten Swedish jobs and whose so-called ethnic characteristics might offend Swedish society.

Political refugees had been allowed to enter the country under Sweden's immigration laws dating back to 1927. However, those laws had never been interpreted to allow Jews fleeing the Nazi chokehold from being regarded as political refugees. There had been exceptions, largely at the behest of the *Mosaika Forsam-Lingen i Stockholm*, the Jewish Community of Stockholm or JCS, but they had been selective and not very numerous.

Above all, Sweden's tenuous state as a neutral had placed it in an uneasy position with Nazi Germany being so close. Since 1940, there had been German pressure to allow its troops to cross Swedish territory to and from occupied Norway. This had been particularly evident in the summer of 1941 during the German invasion of the Soviet Union. The Nazis had demanded the right to transport their 163 Infantry Division by train from occupied Norway across Swedish territory to the eastern front in Finland. There had been much ambivalence in Sweden regarding rendering assistance to the Nazis. However, Sweden's King Gustav V had threatened to resign, endangering the stability of the country, if German demands were not met. In response, the government of Per Albin Hansson had given its approval to the German troop transport. The episode, which had tarnished Sweden's reputation, had become to be known as the "Midsummer Crisis."

The same ambivalence had contributed to the export of Swedish ore and steel to Germany, exports that were essential to the German war effort. The Swedes had managed to preserve their neutrality by a trade policy that attempted to ingratiate both the Germans and the British. However, German blockades had managed to choke off much of Sweden's trade with England. With the decline of British trade, Sweden's economy had become increasingly vulnerable to German demands for Swedish ore and manufactured products.

Before 1942, the effect of the Swedish economy's increasing dependency on German trade had been to cut off almost all Jewish emigration to Sweden. Then, in late 1942, word reached the Swedish population that 532 Norwegian Jews had been loaded onto the SS Donau bound for Poland and Auschwitz. The tragedy playing out in Norway had come on the heels of reports in the mainstream Swedish press of the wholesale murder of European Jewry. The collective effect of these revelations dramatically affected Swedish attitudes toward Jewish immigration. In part emboldened by a sense that the *Reich* was on the decline, Sweden finally expressed a willingness to grant entry permits to Jewish refugees, particularly those who had connections to the country. For most, the new posture toward Jewish immigration had come too late, but it had paved the way for the entry of Norway's remaining Jews and for the stunning rescue of almost the entire Jewish population of Denmark.

As Hilde processed all of these factors, her sense of rage heightened as did her determination to aid her fellow Danish refugees. She had sought out Sarah and, together, they had resolved they would do whatever they could to assist their fellow Danes who had arrived with little as they waded onto Sweden's shores. Their daily routine now included long hours circulating within the refugee community to offer their assistance.

One day as Hilde and Sarah were completing their rounds, they came across a young Jewish family from Norway. Following the SS Donau incident and the opening of Sweden's borders to Norway's Jews, they, along with seven hundred of their Jewish countrymen, representing most of

Norway's remaining Jewish population, had managed to escape the Nazis by crossing into Sweden. Most of the Norwegian refugees who had entered Sweden in this manner, had settled in the northern Swedish city of Upsala, where Norwegian was commonly spoken. However, the young family in front of Hilde and Sarah had encountered almost endless obstacles ranging from ruthless Norwegian border police to bone chilling weather and had been prevented from crossing the border near where they had lived in northern Norway. As a result, they had crossed into Sweden much further south and had settled in Malmo where the JCS had representation, but where there was, nevertheless, little awareness of the needs of the few Norwegian Jews who had arrived in that region of the country.

The young family had found meager accommodations in a crumbling shack in Malmo's fishing district and had managed to eke out an existence largely as a result of the generosity of the region's fishermen. Compounding the family's challenges, shortly after their arrival, the mother had given birth to their second child. The sickly state of the child had pulled on Hilde and Sarah's heartstrings and had led them to search for the best Jewish immigrant health service to address their needs.

As they searched for help, the young women encountered a bewildering array of services, often with limited authority. The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee had long been the primary source of support for the needs of Jewish refugees in Sweden, with most of its funding being distributed by the Jewish Community Services of Sweden, or JCS. However, JCS had primarily served the country's Jewish citizenry rather than immigrant refugees, and, in addition, was based further north. Smaller Jewish community organizations were also participating in aiding the influx of Jewish refugees. But these community organizations had relatively little influence. In addition, since Nazi atrocities against the Jews of Europe had become well known, the diplomacy-oriented World Jewish Congress had also entered the relief field and become active in Sweden. The jurisdictional issues associated with the overall aid effort had required that certain individuals take the lead. One of these individuals was the World Jewish Congress's representative in Stockholm, the indefatigable Jewish Latvian entrepreneur, Gilel Storch.

Though based in Stockholm, Storch had journeyed to Malmö to evaluate the Danish refugee situation. Word of Storch's visit had reached Sarah and Hilde. Somehow, they had managed to obtain an appointment with him. As they waited in the anteroom to Storch's temporary office, they were amazed by the frenzy of activity that was playing out before them. Storch's activities were not limited to providing relief to the Jewish refugees within Sweden. He was also involved in negotiations to provide food and aid to the Jewish inmates of dreaded labor camps such as Ravensbrück and Theresienstadt which, though not death factories, were the scene of forced labor, disease, starvation, and misery, and often served as the launching pad for deportation to the termination camps in Poland. Storch had also been engaged in discussions with Raul Wallenberg, who would soon be Sweden's ambassador to Hungary, home to the largest remaining Jewish community in Europe.

Following what seemed like an endless array of visitors to Storch's quarters, with many speaking unfamiliar languages and dialects, Storch finally welcomed Sarah and Hilde into his office. After hearing about the refugee family and observing the obvious sincerity of the two young women, the now-charmed Storch knew he had to set aside the mountain of pressing matters that weighed down his desk and make arrangements for the Norwegian family. He was also fascinated by Hilde and Sarah's descriptions of their own families and by their maritime rescue from Denmark. By the time Sarah and Hilde had left Storch's office, he had recruited the two young women to his own refugee and relief efforts. In addition, intrigued by Sarah's father's military

service in the Great War and his experience as a civil engineer working within the pre-war German transportation ministry, he had asked to meet with Lorenz Kreisler.

Chapter 20

Belgium: A Narrow Escape and an Endless-Feeling Wait May 1943-September 1944

Julien opened his eyes and looked around at the barn where he had slept. He rubbed his eyes in confusion. *Where was he and how had he gotten here*, he wondered. Then, his injured arm, now in a sling, began to pulsate with pain. Slowly, he willed himself to remember his harrowing aerial escape from the Fairy Lady. He thought he remembered three men approach him after he had bundled his parachute. But he could not recall any more, no matter how much he tried to probe his memory. Soon, however, he heard voices and suspected his questions would be answered.

A moment later, the door to the barn opened and a middle-aged man and a woman entered. Julien could tell by the look of concern on the woman's face that they had come to help. In halting English, the man, assuming Julien to be British, asked him how he was doing. "My name is Lucas Janssens and this is my wife Emilia. How are you feeling and how is your arm? We had someone come by last night to take care of it. But we couldn't determine whether you had any other problems from your fall, like head injuries."

To the surprise of Lucas and Emilia, Julien responded in French and with an intonation that could easily have been mistaken for Flemish. "Aside from my arm, I think I'm okay. But please tell me where I am."

"Monsieur, we will try to answer all of your questions. First you must explain. From your flight uniform, we assumed you were English. But you sound like a Frenchman, in fact, one who might even have come from Belgium."

"It's a bit of a complicated story. I was raised in the South of France. However, my mother was from Belgium and most of my sister's and my contact was with her family when we were growing up. So, we grew up speaking French with a Flemish accent. Some of my schoolmates used to kid me about my accent. But I got used to it."

"That explains some things. But how were you on an English plane?"

"Some years ago, I moved to Montreal to go to university. There I met my wife. I stayed there to study law and then, with my wife, became a Canadian citizen. When war broke out, I joined the Canadian Air Force and was sent to England. Most recently, I was assigned to captain a bombing run to the Ruhr Valley. Our plane had engine trouble on the way back and my crew and I were forced to abandon the aircraft and parachute out. But please tell me where I am."

"Of course, monsieur. Emilia and I own the small farm where you now find yourself. We are about a ninety minute drive from the coast in a small community not too far from Flanders. We knew that a plane went down nearby because the sound of the crash was so loud. When we looked up at the sky, we could see a number of parachutes opening. Yours was the closest to our farm."

We didn't know whether your plane was an Allied or Nazi craft. So, I asked a member of the local police force to accompany my son and me as we approached where you had landed. But when we got closer, it was obvious you were wearing a British flight uniform."

"What about my crew members?"

"I don't know for sure. But I suspect my neighbors were also tracking the other parachutes. When my son and I and the policeman found you, you were passed out. It was pretty obvious your arm was injured, so we found someone to come and tend to you. He's not a doctor, but believes your arm will heal. Our most important concern is the Nazis. If we could hear the sound of your plane crashing and observe your crew and you parachuting out of the plane, then the Nazis could as well. I fear it will only be a matter of time before they come this way asking questions."

Gamely, Julien sat up and looked into the eyes of his rescuer. "Lucas, I am very grateful, but I don't want to endanger your family and you."

"Monsieur, in this bloody war, everyone is endangered. Now, what we must do is prepare for the inevitable visit of the Nazis. We must first start by giving you a history in the community and a reason why your arm is in a sling. It's also pretty clear that you do not have the hands of a farmer. Your injured hand will be bandaged. But, if the Nazis do arrive we'll make sure you have a glove on your good hand and, perhaps, set you to work doing something easy with that hand."

Three days later, the Nazis arrived. The young captain, a man named Stemmer, could not have been more than twenty-seven or twenty-eight, but he had the menacing look and stern manner of one many years older. He had already questioned the Janssens and had asked to question anyone else who worked on the farm. As Julien and he had rehearsed, Lucas advised that his cousin was helping at the farm and could be found near the barn.

Julien immediately determined that Stemmer's French was poor. So, it was unlikely he would detect any variation in Julien's accent. However, the man's menacing look was not to be dealt with lightly. Using his gloved hand, Julien placed the log he had been holding onto the wood pile and then looked up at the captain whose eyes bore into him in skeptical appraisal.

"What is your name?"

"I'm Julien Janssens. Lucas father and my father were brothers. I'm a bookkeeper, but business has been slow. So, I've been helping Lucas around the farm in my spare time, ever time since his older son was killed in the early the early days of the fighting."

"Yes. He told me about his son. It of course might have been avoided had the Belgian government not been so stubborn. Do you know why I'm here?"

"I don't know for sure, but I imagine it has something to do with the plane that went down the other night."

"Precisely."

Julien watched fearfully as Stemmer's brow tightened into a menacing frown. "Do you also know what happens to those who fail to answer questions from a German officer?"

“Of course. But why would you need to ask me such a question?”

“Let’s just say it’s a conversation opener. But more to the point, I see that your arm is in a sling much the way a flyer’s arm might wind up in a sling if he had a hard parachute landing!”

Julien’s stomach began to cramp as he fought to hold back the fear he was feeling. Somehow, he managed to find the words he hoped would defuse the suggestion being made by Stemmer. “Captain, as I mentioned, I help out at the farm. But that does not make me a farmer. I tried to use a ladder to move some farm equipment from the loft in the barn. I was being stupid because the equipment weighed too much. In the process, I fell and you can see the results of my stupidity.”

“It’s a nice story. But how do I know you didn’t fall from the sky?”

At this, Julien put on the most dumfounded look he could muster. “Captain, I don’t even know what kind of plane crashed. But I’m guessing it was English or you wouldn’t be here.”

“You would be correct. But please don’t play games as my patience is not without limit. What is your point?”

“My point is very simple. As you can see, I’m not an Englishman. I never been to England and don’t even know English. So, how could I have fallen from the sky?”

Embarrassment washed over Stemmer’s face. But he could not leave the conversation in such a state. Without warning, he took out his sidearm and clubbed Julien who instantly fell to the ground. The captain then turned toward Lucas who was looking on in disbelief. “Let that be a lesson to you. Insolence has its consequences. Please remember that the next time you think about insulting a German officer.”

It was several hours before Julien awoke from his pistol lashing. A bandage now covered the gash on his head and he hoped he would not lose the tooth that had been loosened by the blow. But, miraculously, he was fine and the captain had long since gone.

“You shouldn’t have taunted him,” observed Lucas.

“I didn’t try to. I was only hoping to reason with him.”

“If reasoning with the Nazis is going to be your strategy, you have a lot to learn. Fortunately, you’re alive. I’m afraid, however, that you will have to remain with us for a while as you are now clearly on the captain’s watch list and you don’t want to draw any attention to yourself.”

“Is there any way of getting word to the English authorities that I’m alive?”

“I wish there were. But keeping a communications radio is an offense punishable by death. Nobody that I know wants to risk it. Getting you across the Channel would be even more foolhardy. So, I’m afraid you’re here for a while until the tide of the war begins to turn.”

Julien’s arm and his head wound healed quickly enough, but his sense of being adrift did not leave him. Each day, he learned more about working on the farm, and each day he strove to

make himself useful to the hosts who had saved his life. But time continued to pass slowly and painfully. Months went by without the opportunity to contact the outside world. Not being able to communicate his circumstances, not to speak of his inability to hear about his family, was taking a toll on his frame of mind. Finally, Julien decided to take action.

He knew that one of the local farmers would be taking a truckload of produce to Flanders. Word had it that the French underground maintained a network of communications outposts in Flanders. Julien reasoned that he might be able to broadcast word of his whereabouts if he could contact one of the communication cells.

He mentioned his plan to Lucas and Emilia who cautioned him against such a move because of the suspicions previously raised by Stemmer. Nevertheless, Julien's sense of need drove him to contact the farmer who, though reluctant, agreed to take on Julien as a passenger. The farmer emphasized that, once in Flanders, Julien would be on his own. Further, he would be left behind if he wasn't at the truck by the time specified by the farmer.

Julien agreed and the two set out in the farmer's truck. For the first fifteen kilometers after leaving town, the road ahead was clear and nothing eventful seemed to be on the horizon. Then, the farmer spied a Nazi roadblock ahead with a number of vehicles backed up as they awaited inspection. The farmer looked at Julien sympathetically, but there was no way to mistake the intention reflected in his eyes. "I wish it would otherwise, but I have a family and I can't risk in incident. You'll have to get out."

Julien was unhappy but knew there was no other choice. Reluctantly, he left the vehicle and then began to walk back to Lucas and Emilia's farm. He was fortunate to hitch a ride most of the way. There were no recriminations when he arrived back at the farm. Instead, the Janssens greeted him warmly. The experience was sufficiently sobering that Julien resigned himself to wait out events more patiently.

A year managed to go by without Julien being able to reach his unit in England or receive news of his family. Then, on the evening of June 6, momentous news spread like wildfire throughout all of France and the Lowland Countries. A huge battle was taking place on five beaches on the Normandy coastline. During the preceding night, 13,000 parachuters followed by 4,000 glider-borne Allied fighters had landed on a fifty-mile expanse of coastline thirty miles southwest of Havre and sixty-five miles southeast of Cherbourg.

Then, in the grey light of dawn, the airborne fighters were followed by the arrival of the largest armada the world had ever seen. Seven thousand ships grouped into seventy convoys had steamed across the Channel choppy waters during the night, and, by morning, countless landing craft had deposited more than 150,000 heavily laden Allied troops into the breaking tide as they slogged their way onto five German-defended beaches, denominated Utah, Omaha, Gold, Juno, and Sword. As the day wore on, Allied casualties mounted particularly at Omaha Beach where more than three thousand American soldiers fell, out of the 36,000 who stormed the beach. In total, more than 9,000 Allied soldiers would lose their lives during the invasion. However, by day's end a beachhead had been established and, with it, a direct path to the German heartland.

Despite Allied command of the skies, unrelenting firepower and being encircled in what had become known as the *Falaise Pocket*, the Nazis resisted doggedly for nearly six weeks, preventing an Allied breakout. Then, on July 25, American bombers launched a terrifying carpet-bombing assault along a 6,000-meter attack zone on the western edge of the German lines. Soon,

the last German strongholds of Saint-Lô and Caen were in Allied hands. The American breakthrough under recently arrived General George S. Patton and his Third Army would soon begin.

In Patten's Third Army, a Jewish medic named Jonathan Sternbloom surveyed the 6 Armored Division to which he had been assigned. What he observed both excited and worried him. Spurred on by the strength of Patton's indomitable personality, the men of 6 Armored Division displayed extraordinary grit and stamina as they motored across the Moselle River Valley on their way to the heavily defended German fortress at Metz. The spirit of the men heralded success. But it also meant casualties and Jonathan had already seen too many victims of war.

As Jonathan contemplated the fighting ahead, Julien tried not to let his spirits get ahead of him. Belgium was still occupied. However, he had cause for optimism. On August 19, one month after the battle for the *Falaise Pocket*, the French 2 Armored Division under General Phillippe Leclerc had arrived at the outskirts of Paris. After a week of fighting, Leclerc's army, supported by the U.S. 4 Infantry Division, had won over the city. On August 25, General Dietrich von Choltitz, the commander of the Nazi garrison in Paris, formally surrendered. In the process, von Choltitz had defied the *Fuhrer's* demand that the city be destroyed. After four years of Nazi control, Paris was once again in French hands and, thanks to von Choltitz, had been left intact.

For Jonathan, the worst fighting still lay ahead during the frigid winter of 1944. Allied forces had liberated Antwerp and Brussels the previous September. However, in one last gasp effort to regain control of Antwerp, Hitler's forces had crushed through the Ardennes forest and advanced to a bulge in the Allied defenses near the critical Allied stronghold of Bastogne. It was at Bastogne that Jonathan, newly assigned to the 4 Armored Division, would see the worst fighting of the war, earn Stanley Rothman's everlasting gratitude and receive a commendation for bravery.

For Julien, however, the liberation of Brussels and Antwerp meant that the communication lines to the outside world had reopened. Ecstatically, he watched as a radio operator in Flanders confirmed he had reached Commodore James Pittson in County Durham and that Julien was to stand by for evacuation orders. However, Julien's euphoria would not end there as the delighted radio operator also reported that Pittson had heard from Donati. In the best news Julien could have imagined, Donati had advised that Julien's family was secure in Switzerland and would join him in England as soon as safe travel allowed.

Chapter 21

Washington, DC: Frustration and Success January 1944-October 1944

With the support of the president, activity at the War Refugee Board began to pick up steam, particularly after the appointment of John Pehle as its executive director. In addition to Pehle, a number of Treasury officials who had worked with Secretary Morgenthau on Jewish rescue issues were assigned to the new Board. With the unsuccessful effort to ransom the Romanian Jews behind them, Morgenthau's supporters turned the Board's focus to Hungary.

Hungary was the home to 750,000 Jews, most of them well assimilated and living in Budapest. In addition, an estimated 100,000 more Jews had converted to Christianity but, in the eyes of the Nazis, were still considered ethnically Jewish. In return for Germany having ceded part of Czechoslovakia to Hungary, Hungary had supported Hitler in a noncombative capacity during his invasion of Russia. However, the country, under Regent Miklós Horthy, had been unwilling to send its troops to the Russian front. In addition, Horthy had refused Nazi demands to hand over the country's Jews, an action the Nazis had tolerated due to their need for Hungarian oil.

Hungary's somewhat precarious relationship with Germany continued until March 1944. Anticipating the Allied invasion of France and the demise of the Nazi war effort, Horthy had attempted to negotiate a favorable arrangement with the Allies. When Horthy's negotiation attempts came to light, a concerned Hitler, fearing that Hungarian oil would fall into the hands of the Allies, made the decision to invade the country. To those at the War Refugee Board worried about Hungary's Jews, the Nazi takeover of the country caused dread, particularly in light of a remarkable account confirming the genocidal slaughter of Jews at the Auschwitz death camp.

Six Jewish inmates of Auschwitz had discovered a cavity in a wood pile outside the camp's perimeter. Four of the inmates had hidden in the cavity and managed to escape from the camp before being caught. They had not revealed their method of escape, enabling their two remaining comrades, Rudolf Vrba and Alfred Wetzler, both from the small town of Trnava, Slovakia, to try the same means of escape. After three suffocating days in the woodpile, followed by fourteen days of wandering, Vrba and Wetzler, aided by the kindness of strangers, managed to find their way to freedom. The stories they told of the barbaric slaughter of the Jews at Auschwitz seared the conscience of the world. For the War Refugee Board, in particular, it highlighted the plight of the Jews of Hungary, who were now under Nazi control and only a freight train journey away from Auschwitz. It didn't take long for the Nazis to begin deporting Hungary's victimized Jews to Auschwitz; the death trains began rolling on April 29.

At the War Refugee Board, Pehle and his staff strained for any avenue that might alleviate the flow of hundreds of thousands of Hungarian Jewish victims to their deaths. An opportunity appeared to arise when Joel Brand and Rezs Kasztner, both major figures in the *Va'adat Ezra ve-Hatsala*, the Jewish Relief and Rescue Committee of Budapest, arrived in Istanbul on a German plane with what they claimed was a proposal from Gestapo head, Adolph Eichmann. According to Brand and Kasztner, Eichmann had proposed an exchange pursuant to which he would release a million Jews in return for ten thousand trucks and other war implements needed for the German war effort against Russia. The offer had reached the president who was intrigued. However, consistent with past practice, England was opposed to any action that might produce a flood of refugees with Palestine in their sights. In addition to the risk of the proposal creating a rift between

England and America, the Office of Strategic Studies, the intelligence unit run by the military's Joint Chiefs of Staff, expressed concern that any consideration of the proposal would provide the Nazis with a propaganda tool they could use against the president. In the end, the proposal withered, leaving the War Refugee Board to look elsewhere for a way to save Hungary's remaining Jews. The "Eichmann initiative" never made it any further.

One option that had caught the attention of the Board was a proposal that the Allies bomb the rail lines leading from Hungary to Auschwitz. At Treasury, Lester was sitting in his office reviewing the proposals to bomb the rail lines and the War Department's reluctance to devote military resources to achieve humanitarian rather than military ends. Lester was so deep in thought that he almost did not hear the polite knocking on his closed office door. However, after a moment or two, he realized he had a visitor and got up from his chair to see who was there.

As he opened the door to his office, his mouth dropped. Standing in front of him was Marcy Goldfarb with a briefcase in her hand. On the spur of the moment, all Lester could say was "what are you doing here?" Almost at the same time, Marcy blurted out the same question. Then, as they realized the ridiculousness of their reactions, they both began to laugh.

When their laughing had ended, Lester had the presence of mind to invite Marcy into his office and offer her a seat. "I'm going to make a wild guess that visiting me is not what brought you to Treasury today. But since you're here, why don't you have a seat."

"I have to confess that finding you in this office is not what I expected. But it was my intention to knock on your door."

Surprised by Marcy's response, Lester could only shrug in bewilderment.

"You see, I've been working on an IRS memo regarding a proposed renewal of the wartime windfall profits tax. The memo's in my briefcase. I was instructed to bring it to the General Counsel's Office at Treasury for review. When I arrived here, I asked where I should deliver the memo. Without mentioning your name, the receptionist pointed me to your door, saying that you were the person overseeing windfall profits issues. So, in a funny way, it was my intention to see you. But, in all seriousness, what are you doing here? When we met, you told me you worked at State."

"So, I did. I've been reassigned to Treasury. In addition to working on the excess profits tax and several other routine Treasury matters, I'm now spending most of my time working with the War Refugee Board."

"That's fascinating. You know, my father works at the Foreign Economic Administration where he meets with Oscar Cox, the FEA's general counsel, almost daily. He says that Cox is very well connected and, equally important, very committed to helping the Jews of Europe and working with the War Refugee Board. As a result of my father's conversations with Cox, I've learned about the importance of the work being performed by the Board."

"Now, I'm fascinated. Look, I heard you loud and clear when you told me about Elliott. But it's a beautiful day outside and we obviously have windfall profits tax issues to discuss, not to speak of your interest in the work we're doing here at the Board. Why don't we go to the park. We can have lunch as we talk shop and I can tell you a little more about the Board."

“That’s a very nice proposal. But I made a chicken sandwich for myself and its waiting for me back at the IRS.”

Lester tried to look sternly at Marcy while at the same time suppressing a grin. “Marcy, to my chagrin, I understand that I’ve been bested by Elliott. But to be bested by a chicken sandwich is too much. If need be, we can walk back to the IRS and chat on a bench in front of the building while you eat your much heralded sandwich.”

Now laughing, Marcy threw up her hands. “Okay. You got me. No need to go back to the IRS. I’m a sugar addict and I love the pies at Sholl’s Cafeteria. Let’s get sandwiches and deserts there and have a working picnic at Lafayette Park.”

The day was as bright as Lester had suggested. As they walked to Sholl’s, Lester felt as if he had springs in his shoes. Their conversation mainly consisted of pleasantries, but, to Lester, their words didn’t matter as long as it was Marcy’s voice speaking. Soon, they covered the three blocks to Sholl’s and ordered egg salad sandwiches and banana cream pies to go. With the expectation of a delicious lunch, they hurriedly made their way back to Lafayette Park.

The bench they chose was perfect as it both protected them from the sun and also provided an excellent vantage point with which to observe the various passers-by. They were both hungry and devoured their sandwiches almost in silence. Lester had thought about taking a break before diving into his desert, but Marcy couldn’t wait. As they took the wrapping off their slices of pie, they realized that they had not brought any utensils from the cafeteria.

With a sigh of resignation, they both concluded that eating desert with their fingers would be the order of the day. Unfortunately, their banana cream pies had not been designed to be eaten with fingers and Marcy’s pie, in particular, was uncooperative. As she attempted to use two fingers to place a generous chunk of the pie into her mouth, a large glob of the whipped topping stubbornly landed on her nose. At the sight of Marcy’s pie-covered face, Lester began to laugh. Instinctively, he reached over to his companion and began scooping the pie topping from her face.

As Lester’s fingers grazed Marcy’s nose and then her cheek, their eyes met. In that instant, Lester thought he saw a glimmer of need, if not desire. However, the moment passed and soon Marcy was laughing along with Lester as he made a show of licking the pie filling off his fingers. Somehow, they managed to finish their deserts without further mishap and began talking. They tried to stick to their intended agenda, but after a short while Marcy was clearly losing interest in discussing tax policy and, instead, wanted to know more about Lester’s work.

“What were you working on when my shadow so unceremoniously crossed the threshold to your office?”

“Unceremonious, perhaps. But, not unwelcome. You see, your visit helped pull me away from a painful memo I was writing involving the Hungarian Jews.”

“The slaughter of the Hungarian Jews is awful. Even the New York Times has acknowledged Hitler’s intention to annihilate Hungary’s Jews. But what specifically was bothering you?”

“The railway lines from Budapest to Auschwitz.”

“What in particular about the lines?”

“Their length. Do you know how many miles a train must travel from Budapest before it reaches Auschwitz.”

“I’m afraid I don’t.”

“One hundred and sixty-nine miles, during which time the train has to slow down for innumerable railroad crossings and curves in the track. At any point along that distance, an Allied bombing attack could wreak incalculable damage on the track, slowing down dramatically the flow of Jews condemned to their deaths at Auschwitz.”

“Well, why don’t we or the British go ahead and bomb the tracks?”

“That was the subject of my memo and the answer, though complicated, is still painful. First, the Allies have not yet established a beachhead in France. Although everyone believes a Channel crossing is imminent, it hasn’t yet happened which means that bombing flights would have to originate from England. Each mile of the way, the pilots of a bombing mission aimed at destroying the rail lines leading to Auschwitz would be exposed to enemy fire and surveillance.”

“Aren’t bombing crews who fly into enemy territory already exposed to such risks?”

“Yes, but those runs are in pursuit of military targets which are considered to be essential to the war effort. In addition, the British are not keen on word getting out that they are willing risk military aircraft in furtherance of promoting a Jewish cause. It’s an open secret that the British believe Zionism is harmful to the war effort. Aiding a Jewish rescue effort would be antithetical to that point of view.”

“That’s a shame.”

“True. However, the employment of bombers to attack non-military targets on humanitarian grounds also goes against United States military doctrine. In addition, there are arguments that bombing the tracks would require a level of precision that exceeds current capability. Of the various objections, I believe that one is technically the weakest. For, once Allied air bases are established in France with the ability to employ better reconnaissance and shorter bombing runs, the targeting of the rails leading to Auschwitz, if not the ultimate destination, should be manageable.”

The conversation had ended on a depressing note, but not the lunch itself. As they got up from the bench, they both realized how much time they had spent together and how much more they had to discuss. So, they agreed to have lunch again in the near future when their schedules would permit.

Lester returned to his office and set about the task of completing his memo. His observation that an Allied invasion of the French coast would soon take place had proven prophetic. Only a few days following his lunch with Marcy, Lester learned, as had Julien Krauss in Belgium, that the greatest amphibious landing in the history of warfare was underway on a fifty-mile stretch of the Normandy coastline. The invasion of Europe was now underway, and, in its path, the defeat of Hitler’s savage empire and all its bestiality could soon be a reality.

The Normandy landing had so electrified the country that many activities had been disrupted in the excitement and euphoria that followed. One of these events was the follow-up lunch that Marcy had agreed to have with Lester. Two times she had called to apologize for postponing planned luncheon dates and Lester had begun to get concerned. However, they finally had gotten together, this time without the threat of an assault from one of Sholl's pies.

As they sat on the park bench, their talk was of the recent invasion of France. But Marcy's thoughts were of Lester. Despite her reservations, she was studying Lester's features for what amounted to her first serious observation and she liked what she saw. He was a nice height, not too lanky but not too short. He had a pleasant smile and a strong chin and his eyes communicated both warmth and confidence. She had tried to avoid the question after seeing Lester the first two times, but now she couldn't avoid asking herself "what's happening to me?"

Marcy snapped herself out of her preoccupation. Warmly, she congratulated Lester on his sagacity in having forecast the invasion and asked whether others might now agree with him that a bombing of the rail lines or a bombing of the camp at Auschwitz might be more feasible. "I'm afraid it won't change much. But there are a number of important targets near the camp including a large synthetic gas facility operated by the IG Farben company just five miles away. I wouldn't be surprised if these industrial sites were targeted one of these days and, when that happens, maybe compassionate minds will decide to bomb the camp as well."

Their lunch concluded, Marcy promised Lester he would not have to wait for as long a time for their next lunchtime get together. Happily, Lester said goodbye and headed back to Treasury, still preoccupied by the situation in Hungary. Once again, Lester's predictions would be proven correct, especially with regard to the Allied bombing of the IG Farben facility only five miles from Auschwitz's gas chambers. But, as events would unfold, there would never be a bombing of Auschwitz itself.

Since the Nazi occupation of Hungary, the number of Jewish deportations to Auschwitz had climbed beyond imagination. An early July 1944 New York Times account had estimated that in the short time span of two months, more than 400,000 Hungarian Jews had been sent to their death. The deportations had been carried out with startling efficiency by the *Sondereinsatzkommando der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD in Ungarn*, the SS-Special Commando Operation in Hungary, with Adolph Eichmann having come from Berlin to Budapest to direct the operation in person. Sadly, the SS Special Commando units could not do it on their own. Immense help was needed from the Hungarian puppet government, especially from the local police whose role in the deportations was indispensable. The local gendarmerie had systematically participated in rounding up the Jewish population, corralling them in deportation centers, and then, cruelly, stuffing them like cattle into the airless box cars that would take them to their deaths.

As Lester pondered the most recent deportation numbers, he couldn't help but marvel at the inhumanity of the deportations. Since the landings at Normandy, Allied infantry and armored divisions were already sweeping into France with Paris, and then Berlin, in their sights. By all accounts, the Allies were winning the war in Europe and winning it handily. If so, Lester mused, "why was so much Nazi energy being devoted to the extermination of the Hungarian Jews when so much more was needed to shore up the German war effort?"

He had discussed these issues with his colleagues at the Board and with Marcy whose presence at what had become weekly lunches was both a sense of comfort to Lester as well as an

increasing indication he was winning her affection. Alas, his many conversations regarding the Nazis' genocidal actions in Hungary had yielded no satisfactory answers. With the help of Nazi sympathizers in the country and the local police forces, it had all been too easy. Clearly, age old banalities claiming Jewish aspirations to control the world and Jewish responsibility for the death of Jesus were at the core of Nazi, if not Hungarian, hatred toward the Jewish population. But hatred was one thing. Mercilessly, sending hundreds of thousands of women, children and the elderly to a horrible death preceded by the torture of a suffocating journey in rail stock never intended for humans was a different matter entirely.

Marcy had been instrumental in helping Lester maintain his sanity throughout the ordeal of trying to do something, anything, to aid the Jews of Hungary. She had proven to be well versed in international matters. Lester had grown up under the wing of his dentist father, for whom no issue was off limits at their Friday night Shabbat dinner table. Marcy had been raised under the influence of equally strong parents. Her attorney father, in particular, had been intent on his two daughters growing up to be more than southern belles. At their Friday night dinner table, he had made a point of educating his daughters about the world around them.

Lester's and Marcy's talks had veered into the realm of the personal as they became more relaxed with one another. With the exception of any discussion of Elliott, they were excited to talk about all manner of things. But invariably the discussion returned to Lester's preoccupation with the slaughter of the last remaining major Jewish community in Europe.

There had been entreaties on behalf of the Hungarian Jews from the Vatican and the King of Sweden, both of which had been welcomed by the War Refugee Board. Frustratingly, however, the Board had been unsuccessful in trying to induce Portugal, Spain, Switzerland, and Turkey, four of the five neutral nations with embassies in Budapest, to increase their embassy staffs so as to both monitor and exert pressure on the Horthy government to stop the deportations.

Sweden had been a different story and the Board's success with Sweden was now the subject of most of Lester's thoughts and his conversations with Marcy. For some time, Iver Olsen, the War Refugee Board's representative in Stockholm had been promoting the idea of using a Swedish diplomat in Budapest who would help to relieve the desperate plight of Hungary's remaining Jewish population. The Swedish government had consented and allowed the Board to identify an appropriate person for the job. After consulting with Gilel Storch, the World Jewish Congress's representative in Stockholm, Olsen had chosen Raoul Wallenberg, a young businessman from a prominent Swedish family. In addition to an American college degree, Wallenberg had a Jewish business partner with ties to Budapest and was, himself, familiar with Budapest, having been there on several occasions for business reasons.

Wallenberg had expressed enthusiasm for his intended role and had sought out the views of a number of persons, including Lorenz Kreisler, who was able to provide insights based on his experience as a German civil servant. Lorenz had made an invaluable contribution to Wallenberg's understanding of his future German counterparts, by emphasizing their attention to formality and documentation. Lorenz's parting advice had been for Wallenstein to enshrine any action he might take in the form of official-looking papers so as to give any skeptical Nazi pause before taking action at variance with the documentation.

The time for Wallenberg to leave for Budapest was fast approaching. Wallenberg's instructions from Washington, along with funds in the amount of \$50,000 provided by the Board and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, had been encompassed in a detailed

telegram which had been circulated to all of the professionals on the Board. Lester smiled as he read the telegraphed instructions. The telegram had made it unambiguously clear that Wallenberg was to use whatever means and contacts were at his disposal to accomplish his mission and to use the money for any purpose, including bribes, if needed to aid Hungary's Jews.

As the Board was sending its final instructions to Wallenberg, events in Hungary appeared to take a turn for the better. On July 2, Allied aircraft had given the Horthy regime a wakeup call by dropping mines on the Danube clogging Hungary's shipping lanes and by unleashing a fearsome bombing attack on Budapest, itself. The attacks had wreaked untold physical damage, but the countless leaflets dropped by Allied planes over the city on the same day may have had an equally damaging psychological effect. Directed to both the Hungarian puppet government and its citizenry, the leaflets promised swift justice after the war for anyone responsible for sending the country's Jews to the death camps in Poland. In any event, whatever the cause, the deportations suddenly stopped on July 8.

The day after the cessation of the deportations, Wallenberg arrived in Budapest. True to the advice given him by Lorenz and others, he immediately set out to issue safe conduct passes to the city's benighted Jews, with each protective certificate bearing the imprimatur of the Swedish Government. Using a list of contacts and possible escape routes provided by the Board, Wallenberg also set out to provide safe houses for as many Jews as possible, as well as to chart paths for their escape. Wallenberg's actions were also instrumental in persuading the Hungarian government to preserve the Jewish Ghetto in Budapest and not harm its occupants. Felicitously, many other Swedish diplomats followed Wallenberg's lead and provided many Jews with places of hiding and provisions.

Wallenberg's efforts could not have been better timed. A month after his arrival, the Soviet army crossed into Hungary. Though Hungary's military leaders chose to fight on, Horthy announced on October 15 that he had requested an armistice with the Soviets. The armistice had little chance of success as Horthy's German overseers would have none of it. In addition, soon after Horthy's announcement, the Germans kidnapped his son, Miklos Jr., forcing Horthy to renounce the armistice, resign as Regent and name the leader of the far right Arrow Cross Party, Ferenc Szálasi, as Prime Minister.

Based on the reports coming in, Lester knew that the protective passes issued by Wallenberg and the safe houses he arranged, had placed thousands of Hungarian Jews under the protection of the Swedish government and had preserved for the time being the lives of those Jews living in the Budapest Ghetto. The War Refugee Board had had other successes. One was the establishment of an Emergency Refugee Camp at Fort Ontario in Oswego, New York, which quickly became home to almost 1,000 European refugees. But the protection provided by Wallenberg's safe conduct passes would prove to be its greatest success, particularly considering the ruthlessness of the Ferenc Szálasi government.

Lester's happiness at the rescue measures taking place in Hungary was enhanced by the fact that he could share such news with Marcy. They were now meeting for lunch more frequently and Marcy seemed to look forward to their lunchtime get together as much as Lester did. One autumn afternoon, Lester said that a friend of his had offered to lend Lester his car and suggested that Marcy and he take advantage of the offer to drive into the Virginia countryside to view the changing leaves and go apple picking.

Lester had given the idea much thought before making the proposal as he did not want to undermine the progress they had been making by any action, however well intentioned, that might give the impression of rushing matters. He could barely contain his enthusiasm when Marcy agreed without any hesitancy.

“Apple picking sounds like a lovely idea. I’ve now been living in this area for a number of years and I’ve never had a chance to go to Virginia apple country when the countryside is awash in fall colors. If you like, I could also pack a picnic dinner for us to have after we are finished with our apple picking.”

“That’s a terrific idea. But there’s a lovely country restaurant in Middleburg which would be on the way back. Would you mind terribly if we stopped there for dinner, even if you didn’t prepare it?”

“Are you kidding! That sounds like a wonderful conclusion to a day in the country picking apples.”

The following Sunday, Lester and Marcy were on their way to Shenandoah National Park and the newly constructed Skyline Drive. Time would not allow them to traverse anywhere near the full length of the Drive. But what they were able to cover filled them with delight as the mountainous road showed off the fall colors in all of their splendor. Having reserved ample time to spare, they then headed for one of the numerous orchards bordering the route home.

Many of the apples could easily be picked by reaching up from a standing position. However, there was one tree whose branches were unusually high, but which offered the reward of McIntosh apples which both Lester and Marcy both liked. The proprietor of the orchard had thoughtfully provided ladders for picking higher hanging apples. Lester grabbed one of the ladders and motioned for Marcy to climb it to pick some of the inviting fruit. At first Marcy demurred claiming she was uncomfortable with heights. However, with Lester’s urging she got on the ladder and climbed two rungs. She was still not high enough, but hesitant to climb any further on her own.

“I’m not sure I can go any higher.”

“Perhaps, not on your own. But why don’t I give you a hand? I have a solid record for having lost few apple pickers while supporting them on a ladder.”

Lester’s joke immediately relaxed Marcy and, gleefully, she agreed. However, as she attempted to climb to the next rung, she lost her footing and began to fall backward. Fortunately, Lester had committed every ounce of his attention to making sure that nothing untoward happened while Marcy was on the ladder. So, as she let out a distressed cry of surprise, Lester was prepared to break her fall.

Lester had little time to congratulate himself on his gallantry. Preventing Marcy from experiencing what might have been a dangerous fall from a high rung was one thing. But bearing the impact of Marcy’s body falling on his and managing to stand throughout was quite another. In the event, both Marcy and he went sprawling to the ground with Marcy landing on top.

At first they checked themselves to make sure they were both okay. Having concluded they were fine, they both began to get up. As they did so, their eyes locked and, as they did, they both knew they were experiencing something indefinable but special.

Armed with more apples than they could possibly eat in a week, Lester and Marcy headed back to the car and the short drive to where they would have the dinner. The meal proved delightful, made even more so as Lester's and Marcy's private thoughts continually returned to the episode on the ladder.

The conversation on the ride home was pleasant enough. However, there was clearly an uneasiness as Both Lester and Marcy struggled to say what was really on their minds. Night had fallen as Lester turned on to Marcy's street. Parking was at a premium in Washington. As they neared Marcy's house, Lester observed there were no spaces available on the street, necessitating that he look elsewhere. The closest space turned out to be in front of a park about two blocks away. Lester hadn't expected to be able to accompany Marcy into her house and was pleased that the space provided an alternative form of privacy.

Lester was about to turn off the engine. But he hesitated as he knew what he had to do. Gently, he put his arm around Marcy. With the little light provided by the moon, Lester could see that Marcy was looking at him in the same way she had after her fall from the ladder—a look of dreaminess and longing. Lester leaned over and allowed his lips to brush against Marcy's. As he did so, he felt Marcy's body relax as she welcomed his kiss.

Lester now stroked Marcy's face and was delighted at Marcy's welcoming moans. Marcy's arms were now around Lester as her lips gently explored his face, first his cheeks, then his eyes, then his neck. Then, with a lust and eagerness reflecting the desire that had built up in her during their many weeks of constrained lunches, Marcy eagerly sought out Lester's mouth.

Lester was in ecstasy as he felt Marcy's tongue, exploring, searching and encouraging his excitement. Their bodies had come together as closely as the front seat of the car would permit. As Lester felt the warmth emitting from Marcy, he cupped her breast and began rubbing gently but invitingly. He did not know what to expect, but all doubt was soon removed as he felt Marcy's hand rubbing on his thigh. Her rhythmic motion had now taken over his body completely. Without hesitating, he unhooked the clasp on her brassiere and reached under her blouse. As he caressed her breasts, first gently and then more forcefully, Marcy's rubbing assumed the same rhythm as did her moans. Marcy was now arching her body and moaning loudly. The sound filled Lester with indescribable satisfaction as he felt his own loins explode.

Lester walked Marcy to her house where they lingered for one last kiss. It was only a short drive to Lester's apartment and soon he was in bed thinking there could not be anything more beautiful in life than what he had experienced.

Lester awoke the next day and headed for work with more enthusiasm than he had thought possible. However, work proved difficult as his thoughts continually returned to Marcy and their love making. Somehow, he managed to concentrate and was deep in thought when his phone rang.

Marcy was on the line and Lester could not have been more delighted. But then he sensed a brittleness in her voice and before he knew it she had broken down and was crying.

Thinking he had done something wrong the previous evening, he asked Marcy whether he had upset her in some way.

In between sobs, she answered that he had done nothing wrong.

“Then what is it? You seemed so happy last night!”

The silence on Marcy’s end of the phone might only have lasted for a few seconds. But for Lester, an eternity might just as well have gone by.

Finally, Marcy responded. “Somehow, Elliott’s parents found me. They called just a little while ago to tell me the Nazis killed him. Lester, he’s dead! What am I going to do? What am I going to do?”

Chapter 22

Alabama: A Rescued Soldier finds Solace February 1944—April 1944

Jimmy Wilkins missed his family. Each weekend since his arrival at Northington General Hospital, his parents and the younger of his two sisters had made the one hour and fifteen-minute drive from Birmingham to Tuscaloosa to visit their wounded son at the 2,131-bed army hospital near the University of Alabama campus. They had all stayed at a nearby motel and their presence made Jimmy's painful recovery considerably more tolerable than it might have been.

The middle child in Jimmy's family, his sister Rita, was a student at Vanderbilt and away at school. His younger sister Barbara, or Babs as the family was wont to call her, was still in high school. As a result, his mother and sister had to return to Birmingham at the end of each weekend visit. Jimmy's father, Vance Wilkins, was now in his fourth term in the Alabama state senate and the chair of one of its most powerful appropriations committees. The senate was in session and his duties required that he return to Montgomery at the end of the weekend. So, as visitor hours ended at 5:00 each Sunday, Jimmy found himself alone, comforted by his nurses but always attuned to the moaning sounds of his fellow patients as they, too, endured their recoveries from grievous wartime wounds.

How different life had been since his small company of five soldiers out on a reconnaissance mission had unexpectedly encountered a German unit of similar size. The ensuing fire fight had claimed the lives of all six of the Germans. Three of Jimmy's comrades also lay dead, while Jimmy and another GI, a towheaded fellow southerner named Lane, lay on the ground wounded. Jimmy had done his best to stem the bleeding from his leg, but the bullet wound had defied his efforts. As his bleeding continued, he found himself drifting in and out of consciousness. When he was awake, he glanced at Lane who, still awake, clutched his firearm firmly next to his chest. But that was all the effort he could muster as blood gushed from his wounded stomach.

Jimmy awoke from one of his fitful episodes of sleep and at first thought he was seeing a mirage. When he looked again, he realized that a German medic was hovering over the dead Nazi soldiers to see if any were alive. As best as he could, Jimmy pulled himself up using a nearby rock for support, not knowing what to expect.

It did not take long for the medic to realize that all of his countrymen were dead. Then, to Jimmy's surprise the medic approached the rock he was sitting on and flashed a smile in a gesture of peace. Jimmy did not know what to do. But one thing was clear: he was in no position to resist. In addition, Jimmy knew that German medics, like those in the US army, did not carry weapons. So, Jimmy merely sat back and allowed the man to survey his wounds. Quickly, the man bandaged Jimmy and applied a tourniquet. Then, he turned his attention to Jimmy's fellow wounded soldier.

By then, Lane was showing signs of delirium and had no way of knowing that the German medic was not a foe. To Jimmy's horror, Lane let out a shrill scream and pointed his weapon at the German medic. Jimmy could not let the man who had just rescued him fall to one of the bullets from Lane's gun. Quickly, he thrust himself in Lane's direction, hoping to throw off his aim. However, in his weakened and awkward condition, he was only able to divert one of Lane's two

shots. As Jimmy fell to the ground, opening the wound the medic had bandaged, he observed with horror as the medic also collapsed, bleeding from one of Lane's bullets. Jimmy's last memories before he passed out were hearing Lane's blood curdling cry before his comrade went completely limp and watching the wounded medic apply a tourniquet to his own wound and crawl behind a nearby bush.

It was the middle of February 1944 and the battle for Monte Cassino in the Liri Valley of Italy had already been raging for several weeks. A number of platoon aid stations had been set up nearby to assist with the countless American casualties who had required medical assistance before being taken to base for possible transport to the closest army field hospital. Just as the Germans had sent out search parties of medics like the one who had tended to Jimmy's wound, so, too, had the Americans. As Jimmy willed himself to stay awake, despite the pain and bleeding from his wound, he was cheered to see two other medics approach him. These two were wearing American insignias. Relieved, Jimmy passed out, but not before drawing the medics' attention to the German medic who lay hiding behind the nearby bush.

One of the American medics hastily started to evaluate the four GI's strewn on the ground and presumed dead, while the second was able to restore Jimmy's tourniquet and stop the bleeding. After taking care of Jimmy, the second medic, a Jewish man with two years of medical school training named Jonathan Sternbloom, then turned his attention to the German. It had taken Jonathan only one look at the German medic's self-applied tourniquet to discern that the German had also tended to Jimmy whose tourniquet had been applied in the same manner. The medic's heart went out to the compassion displayed by the German and he ached to help him. However, his fellow medic, who had now completed his rounds evaluating the dead, looked worriedly at Jimmy's wounds and insisted that their first responsibility was to bring Jimmy back to the field hospital. Reluctantly, Jonathan agreed, but took careful note of the area's surrounding landmarks as he did.

Later, as Jimmy received medical attention at the base camp, Jonathan made the decision to go back into the battlefield and bring in the wounded German medic. To do so, he had given the sentries the impression he would be searching for wounded GIs. Then, as the German and Jonathan hobbled into camp, the same sentries were aghast to see the person supported by Jonathan was wearing a German uniform. Later, Jonathan's commanding officer, a colonel from Jimmy's Wilkens hometown in Birmingham, Alabama named Blaine Stewart, called Jonathan into his office. Stewart first advised Jonathan that he was a close friend of Jimmy's father and expressed his deeply felt appreciation for Jimmy's rescue. The Colonel then got down to the business of Jonathan leaving camp under false pretenses.

Jonathan listened apprehensively to the reprimand that followed and prepared himself for the worst. Then, the look on the colonel's face changed as he extended his hand to shake Jonathan's. "Son, what you did was stupid. But it was also heroic and reminded us that there are pockets of humanity even among the Nazis. I'm indebted to you for saving Jimmy, but also for reminding me that there still may be hope in this God forsaken war. Now, tell me a little about yourself."

The next two weeks had been harrowing for Jimmy. As the battle for Monte Cristo roared toward an eventual Allied victory, Jimmy's condition worsened. The doctors not only had to contend with his original bullet wound. In addition, his subsequent fall had shattered several bones. The fractures had been clean breaks, but, while Jimmy's was being transported on the

stretcher, one of the bones had broken through the skin resulting in blood poisoning. Jimmy had already undergone several surgical procedures to debride the wounds when the decision was made to evacuate him to a more permanent facility for follow-up surgery.

Ordinarily, a soldier in Jimmy's circumstances would have been sent to one of the permanent hospitals in England. However, Stewart had intervened and arranged to have Jimmy shipped stateside to the Northington military hospital near his home in Birmingham. Jimmy's voyage home had been on a convoy of troop-carrying Liberty Ships modified with hospital beds. The convoy had managed to avoid German U-Boats as it successfully navigated the Atlantic. But, by the time Jimmy reached the large facility built as an army hospital in 1942 and now operated by the Army Zone of the Interior, he was exhausted.

It had taken little time for Jimmy's parents and the younger of Jimmy's two sisters to visit him and offer whatever comfort they could as Jimmy prepared for the two surgical procedures that would be required and the convalescence that would follow. He had often thought about the medic who had saved his life. He had been under sedation much of the time and had only had an opportunity to offer a cursory thank you. Now, that he had a chance to gather his thoughts, he wanted very much to express his appreciation. He only knew the medic's name but didn't know how to reach him. So, when he finished writing his words of appreciation, he gave his letter to one of the military orderlies and hoped that the army would be able to transport the letter to its intended recipient.

The ensuing surgeries had gone well much to the relief of Jimmy and his parents. But, as he began his rehabilitation, depression set in as he contemplated his four comrades who had died during the firefight in Italy and all of the other GIs who had succumbed to their wounds, even as he was being rescued. His condition was not unusual but his doctors were concerned, particularly since a persistent limp had also dampened Jimmy's spirits. The rehab therapists had assured him that the limp would resolve itself in time. But the timing was bad and the limp had only fed into Jimmy's feelings of despair.

Jimmy's depression was further compounded by the absence of his sister, Rita, who was still in school in Nashville. Rita was only two years younger than Jimmy and she and her brother had been inseparable while growing up. After Jimmy decided to attend Vanderbilt, Rita had chosen to do the same two years later. So, for the one year before Jimmy's enlistment, brother and sister had been together on campus and their close attachment had continued as they found ways to see one another regularly despite Jimmy being a junior and Rita being a freshman.

Finally, the time arrived for Rita to return home during her spring break from Vanderbilt. She had barely had time to hug her parents and sister, when she asked to borrow the family car to visit Jimmy who was now in his final week of rehabilitation. An hour and half later, she had registered at the Northington visitor's desk and was running up the stairs to see her brother. As she entered the room, Jimmy roared with delight, and, as much as his wounded leg would allow, fairly vaulted from the armchair where he was sitting. As he strode the few steps between Rita and himself, Rita immediately was able to detect his slight limp but said nothing.

Happily, brother and sister embraced and started talking as if they'd only been separated by a few days, not two years. The day was bright and warm, a perfect opportunity for Jimmy to get outside for some fresh air. So, Rita insisted that the two of them spend their time in the facility's pleasant courtyard.

Jimmy observed his sister as Rita sat down on one of the courtyard benches. She was just as he remembered her. Jimmy and Babs favored their father and were by any reasonable measure both engaging and pleasant in appearance. But Rita had inherited her mother's good looks, not to speak of intelligence, and was unquestionably the family beauty. It was noon and the sun was high in the sky. As Rita sat down opposite her brother, the sun's rays bounced off her brunette hair giving it a lush, silky sheen. But her most alluring feature had always been her doe like eyes. Warm and inviting, they had always made Jimmy feel he was appreciated and part of her life. Today, would be no exception. Rita had been told about Jimmy's depression and had thought hard about how she could lift her brother's spirits.

"Mother says you're going to be out of this place by the end of the week while I'm still home on spring break."

"I sure hope so. But I still need a seal of approval from my physical therapists to whom I've been tethered ever since my last surgery. If they say I'm ready to go, then I'll have the green light to leave."

"Physically, you look good to me. How do you feel inside?"

"You mean, do I feel depressed?"

"I guess that's a pretty straight forward way of putting it!"

"It's pretty complicated and being around so many sick and wounded men doesn't lend itself to a very upbeat attitude. Mostly, I just miss my buddies and am so sad for the ones who'll never see a beautiful sunny day like today. I'm also discouraged that I still have this limp."

"Well, as I understand it, the limp should go away it time. Equally importantly, soon you'll be going home where mom and dad can take care of you and help you lift your spirits."

"I know how much they care. But truthfully, I wish it were you I was coming home to."

"Don't be silly. Everyone in the family misses you and wants to help, and the neighbors are dying to see you. After all, you are a wounded war hero. And, I'll be there, as well to greet you when you arrive."

"Yes, but you'll be going back to school."

"So, I will. But in two months I'll be home for the summer."

"And, then you'll be off to Nashville again."

"Look, if that's what's bothering you, I've been thinking about things and have an easy solution. Come back to school with me in the fall. While you've been away, I've caught up with you, so to speak. With the accelerated courses they're offering to returning soldiers, we'll both be able to graduate at the same time next May. You can have the whole summer to prepare."

Jimmy fidgeted as he thought. "I just don't know if I'm ready! I've spent most of the las two years in fox holes rather than in classrooms."

“All the better. You’ll be welcomed as a returning hero and treated like royalty. I’m sure everyone will bend over backwards to help you with the transition. From a social perspective, I’m going to be president of my sorority next year. There are a lot of attractive sisters in Lambda and, with my introductions, you could have an absolute blast. There are very few men on campus aside from the enlisted men working round the clock in one of the army specialized training programs. If the tables were turned, I’d love to be in your situation.”

“You do make it sound attractive.”

“That’s because it is.”

“I’m still a little hesitant. I can’t even remember what my major was let alone think about pursuing it next fall.”

“Forget it! You won’t believe the accommodations the school is making for wounded veterans. In addition, I know dad would love to have you work with him on legislative matters over the summer. Who knows! With your charm and the experience dad can offer, maybe you’ll want to go into political science as a steppingstone to following dad’s career in politics.”

“Well, it’s something to think about, but I just don’t know. The last two months have been so overwhelming.”

Rita looked sternly at her brother and then got up from her chair and walked over to where Jimmy was sitting. She kneeled in front of him and looked into his eyes. “Jimmy, you have talent, charm and good looks and now you have a war record. I don’t want you merely to think about what I’ve said. I want you to get excited about it and about everything else that awaits you. I’ll be home when you arrive at the end of next week and, when you walk in the door, I want to see a look of enthusiasm and a smile on your face.”

Somehow, Rita’s words had struck home. For the first time in a while, Jimmy felt himself experiencing optimism. “How’s this?” he uttered, as his face broke into a wide smile.

Chapter 23

Nashville, Tennessee: School and Reality May—September 1944

It had taken several months, but, at long last, Jimmy's family had arrived for their last visit and to take him home. During the months that Jimmy had been at Northington, the army had provided the more than 2,000 patients there with entertainment. Best known were the twenty-eight enlisted musicians with the U.S. Army Special Entertainment Services, who performed for the hospital's residents and staff on weekends. The band formed by the musicians was scheduled to play the day of Jimmy's discharge.

While the family waited for Jimmy's papers to go through, they took seats in the hospital's improvised outdoor amphitheater and listened as the band played a medley of the most popular songs of the day. The decision to listen to the concert had been a good one as the strains of Bing Crosby's "Don't Fence Me In," Dinah Shore's, "I'll Walk Alone," Judy Garland's "The Trolley Song," and Glenn Miller's "Moonlight Serenade," helped the family distance themselves from the recent months of Jimmy's difficult recovery and feel hopeful about what lay ahead. At last, a messenger arrived with Jimmy's official discharge papers and all five members of the Wilkins clan climbed into the family's waiting station wagon for the relatively short ride home.

As with most of America's industrial heartland, Birmingham had suffered during the Great Depression. However, with the outbreak of war, the city had come back to life as its great steel furnaces sprang into action in support of the war effort. The city's Ingalls Iron Works had been awarded a quarter of a billion dollars in government contracts and had become a national leader in the construction of the Liberty Ships such as the one used to transport Jimmy home. Alabama's governor, Frank W. Dixon, had designated Birmingham as the seat of the state's Home Front scrap metal drive. The city's airport had been leased to the United States government for one dollar a year to be used for testing planes before they were approved for wartime use. Volunteerism was everywhere as were the ubiquitous Victory Gardens that had seemingly emerged out of nowhere to augment the supply of food that was being rationed in support of the war effort.

However, as the city labored on, its elite social destinations managed to provide an element of luxury if only on a scaled down basis. Of these, the most distinguished was the Country Club of Birmingham where Jimmy's father, Vance Wilkens, was one of the club's most esteemed members. Founded in 1898, the club had moved twice until finally assuming its permanent location in the Birmingham suburb of Shades Valley. Featuring two 18-hole golf courses, separated by a hilltop club house, and a large pool, the Club was the preferred venue for the city's rich and famous.

With great pride, Vance Wilkens had reintroduced Jimmy to the leaders of the Club who had shown the appropriate respect and admiration for their returning war hero. Over cocktails and limited offerings of hors d'oeuvres, Jimmy had been presented to just about every big name in the city and, of course, their daughters. After spending almost two years in the battlefield and then time in a rehabilitation hospital, the introductions and liquor gave Jimmy a somewhat other-earthly feeling. But Jimmy knew that, however boring and predictable, the introductions might well help him out after the war. Equally importantly, they filled his father with pride and provided valuable political capital.

The other venue for which Jimmy's attendance was important to his father was the All-Saints Episcopal Church, another Birmingham icon, and the longstanding Sunday morning worship site for Jimmy's family. One Sunday after Jimmy's family had attended church services and were sitting down for a traditional Sunday meal, Rita took Jimmy aside.

"I've been watching you in church the last few Sundays. You used to love going to church. But now it's clear your heart isn't in it. What's going on?"

"I wish I knew. I think it has something to do with the war."

"What do you mean?"

"I know Hitler is not much of a Christian, but the German people are Christians. As I lay on the ground near my dead comrades, I wondered how a country that professed to be Christian and believe in Jesus could act so viciously toward its fellow European countries, not to speak of its hideous actions against the Jews. It just didn't make sense to me. Nor, as I looked around at my dead buddies, did it make any sense that the all-knowing, altruistic God I had learned about all of my life would allow such good men to be so senselessly killed."

Rita reached over and gave her brother a reassuring hug. "I'm so sorry. It must have been awful."

"It was. In the field hospital, I began to focus on myself and put aside my quandaries regarding God and Christianity. But then I arrived at Northington. You know, it's a burn center and many of the soldiers sent there have suffered hideous wounds. As I became friends with some of these grievously burned men, my reservations about the God I had always known became even more acute."

Rita nodded understandingly. "I saw some of the burn patients when I visited. It tore me up. I can understand how anyone would have a broken spirit after witnessing so much maiming and disfiguration."

"I had talks with some of the men and many agreed with my doubts. Many, however, were even more committed to their Christian faith and gave thanks they were still alive. I took comfort from their conviction and tried to use their faith to rebuild my own. But it's been very difficult. So, if you've suspected I've been distracted in church, it's because it's true. I'm trying my best to come around. That my going to church is so important to dad makes it a little easier. But I do worry how he'll react if one day I wake up and decide that church is not for me and that I need another source for spiritual support."

Again, Rita expressed appreciation for her brother's feelings. "Frankly, I don't think anyone would be surprised by your reaction and, luckily, you've got a whole lifetime to work things out. In the meantime, help is just around the corner when we return to school. I know who in my sorority I want you to meet. I just have to talk to her when we get back to campus."

At Vanderbilt's suggestion, Jimmy had been doing extra reading during the summer. Combined with the busy country club schedule demanded by his father, the scholastics caused the summer to fly by. On a fine September morning, Rita and he arrived back at Vanderbilt for their last year of college.

The first thing that Jimmy did was walk around the Vanderbilt campus. The school had been designated as an arboretum in 1879, six years after its founding, and for good reason. The 230-acre campus boasted more than five hundred examples of the Southern Magnolia, the *Magnolia Grandiflora*. In late spring, the campus was awash in the magnificent white flowers for which the magnolia was so revered. In addition, there were northern hackberry, sugar maple, and sixteen species of oak, especially the school's symbol, the stately white oak, as well as the wispy willow oak.

The trees set off the campus' venerable buildings. Jimmy delighted in contrasting the architecture of Kirkland Hall, the campus' oldest building built in 1874 with his favorite building, the relatively newer Furman Hall, built in 1899 as a memorial to one of Nashville's most revered citizens, Francis Furman. As always, the school's impressive edifices set off against its beautiful grounds filled Jimmy with pride. However, on this occasion, what impressed him most was the relative absence of men.

According to the official pronouncements by the school, Vanderbilt's male population had been depleted by sixty percent because of the war. As Jimmy looked around, though, it looked to him as if the few males he observed represented a much smaller percentage of the student population. In addition, many of them were in uniform and presumably on campus as a part of an army specialized training program.

However, Jimmy's self-guided tour and the memories the campus conjured quickly came to end as registration and class scheduling required his attention. Two days after he arrived, Jimmy was in class. Jimmy had always been an excellent student, but, even with his summer's reading, he soon found it difficult acclimating to his newly resumed life as a student. Books, rather than the enemy, now occupied almost all his waking hours. So, for the first week, he saw little of Rita other than to wave when he passed her on the way to class. Finally, once the school week ended, they were able to get together on the weekend.

Sitting under one of Jimmy's favorite trees on campus, they exchanged tales of their first week back at school. But, just as Rita had observed Jimmy's preoccupation at church that summer, Jimmy was immediately able to tell that Rita's heart wasn't in the conversation.

"We have so much to talk about, but you have this far off look. Is something going on? Boy problems?"

"No. Nothing like that."

Then, what?"

"Do you remember I wanted to introduce you to someone in my sorority?"

"Of course. I've been looking forward to meeting her. Is that strained look because she already has a boyfriend and is taken?"

"No. She had a boyfriend. But they broke up over the summer and she's completely unattached."

"That would seem to resolve matters. When can we meet?"

Rita's already gloomy facial expression suddenly turned even darker, and it was clear to Jimmy his sister was trying to hold back tears. "Please tell me what's going on. I can't help if we don't communicate!"

Rita took out a hanky and dapped her eyes. "Her name is Pam Winston and she's a wonderful person. She pledged last year as a sophomore. Upperclassmen don't have to go through the same indignities as first year pledges and they don't go through anywhere near the questioning that first year pledges must endure. So, even though we had only known her for a short while, we invited her to become a sorority sister in less than a month."

"So far that doesn't sound too bad. In fact, it encourages me to want to meet her."

"It wasn't bad at all. She confirmed our original favorable impressions many times over during the year and was one of the most popular girls in the sorority. In fact, she was so popular that we voted for her to become chair of the charity committee. During the war, with so few guys on campus, our annual charitable event has overtaken the spring ball as the sorority's most important activity."

"Good for her! But please tell me what's bothering you?"

"The night before last, we had our first meeting of the charity committee which Pam chaired. The purpose of the meeting was to think about what charitable cause we'd like to support at our charitable event."

"So far, so good!"

"Yes, but it deteriorated very rapidly."

"How so?"

"After Pam called for suggestions, she made a proposal of her own. Her suggestion was that we use our fundraiser to help provide support to the war refugees in Europe."

"From what I've seen of the displaced persons all over Europe that sounds like a very noble and much needed idea."

"I would agree. But then, one of the girls named Melanie pointed out that many, if not most, of the refugees were Jews."

"I would have guessed that most people would know that."

"Yes. But, in Melanie's mind, there's a difference between being aware of the makeup of the European refugees and helping them. In any event, she objected to the sorority linking its name to Jews, no matter the worthiness of the cause. Then, out of the blue, Pam announced that the sorority was already linked to at least one Jew, herself. She explained that her father, a lawyer in New Orleans, also went to school here, and that, before he applied, her grandfather changed the family name from Weinstein to Winston to enhance Pam's father's chances of being admitted to the university."

"That must have been a surprise."

“It was! There was quite a hush in the room. But then she continued and described how happy she had been with the sorority that she never felt the need to say anything about her religion. When she finished her explanation, Melanie got very upset and started making accusations against Pam and calling her a deceiving Jew. At that point, people started shouting from all directions.”

“I never realized being Jewish on campus was that much of an issue. I guess it’s because there aren’t that many of them. But, if she’s so popular, why does it matter?”

“It shouldn’t matter. As I said, she’s a lovely person and I like her well enough to want to introduce you to her. However, that’s not how everyone feels. A lot of the sorority sisters believe that, if word got out we accepted Jews, we’d never be able to attract girls from the best families. Now, they want to have a meeting to discuss expelling Pam from the sorority.”

“Does Pam know about it?”

Yes, and it’s made her sick. Even worse, she’s told her father about what’s going on and he’s threatened to sue if she’s expelled from the sorority. But I don’t think it will get that far because Pam would never want to be where she’s not wanted.”

“When’s the meeting?”

“Tonight.”

“Are you going to do anything to try to resolve the problem?”

“I’ve already started. But it’s clear that a lot of the girls side with Melanie. So, I’m trying to suggest a middle ground in which Pam continues to be welcome at our sorority but as a friend rather than as a sister. Since we don’t actually have a sorority house, it should be workable.”

“Do you think the idea will catch on? More importantly, do you think Pam will accept such a solution?”

Chapter 24

Nashville, Tennessee: Controversy and Romance September 1944-November 1944

The meeting had not gone well for either Rita or Pam, with Rita's proposed compromise having been rejected and Pam having been expelled from the sorority for deceptive practices unbecoming of a sorority sister. The result had not only crushed Pam, but it had also soured Rita on her sorority sisters—the very girls who had comprised the centerpiece of her social experience at Vanderbilt.

Several days after the vote, Rita and Jimmy got together to discuss what had happened. "I just don't understand how my sorority sisters could be so mean. It's not as if Pam did anything dishonest. To the contrary, she was merely proposing that we support helpless people. To me, that should be the essence of charity, whatever the religion of the people being helped, and it's very consistent with the values our charitable committee espouses. In addition, I remember dad saying last year that both branches of the Alabama legislature unanimously adopted a resolution for the establishment of a Jewish state to help deal with the refugee issue. I bet many of the girls in my sorority have relatives in the legislature just as we do."

"I wish I had something constructive to say. But I've only recently come back from a war where the Germans seem to have been as intent on destroying European Jewry as they were on beating the Allies. I think most of us knew what was happening not far from where we were fighting, just as our legislature did. But we rarely brought it up, maybe because so much was going on. But I think deep down, not many of us really cared. In the best of circumstances, it's hard to worry about people who seem different like the Jews of Europe. It's even more the case when, in a case such as theirs, we've been told from birth that they bear the guilt of history on their shoulders."

"So, what are we going to do?"

"That's easy. You and I are going to get together with Pam so I can have an appropriate introduction. We'll then take it from there."

The introduction occurred the following weekend. As expected, there was sadness in Pam's eyes, but there was also a warmth that demonstrated why Rita was so fond of her friend.

Jimmy extended his hand as his sister introduced Pam. It was a formality, but Jimmy was already feeling an attraction to Pam and wanted more than an introduction, if only the feel of her hand in his. His senses were rewarded as her touch projected tenderness and interest.

Jimmy spoke first. "Rita told me about what happened at Lambda. I'm so sorry."
"Thank you."

"What she didn't tell me was how stupid your sorority sisters must have been to cut loose someone as attractive and kindly as you."

Pam knew Jimmy's words may have been spoken with sincerity but were also the opening stanza of a predictable male mating ritual. Nevertheless, after what she had been through, she really craved some positive attention and appreciation, and she responded graciously.

“Thanks Jimmy. I’ll take flattery any day. But, in your case, it’s unnecessary. Rita has told me many good things about you and I’ve been looking forward to meeting you. How’s your leg doing?”

Jimmy made a mental note of Pam’s solicitude. “It feels well enough to do a good job of twirling an attractive lady around the dance floor and I’m pretty sure Rudy’s has a live dance band tonight. Do you know the place?”

“I’ve only been to Rudy’s once before, and I liked it.”

“What do you say we give it a try it tonight?”

Pam was now looking at Rita. “That sounds awfully attractive as a way of putting the events of the last few days behind me. But I’d feel awful abandoning Rita after all she’s done for me, not to speak of introducing us.”

Rita, who had been listening to the conversation approvingly, waived her hand in dismissal. “Don’t worry about me. I’ll be fine. Besides, there are a bunch of girls in the sorority who are very upset about the way Pam has been treated and want to discuss starting a new sorority.”

Later that day, Jimmy picked up Pam who had dressed for the occasion. Jimmy admired her long plaid skirt and angora sweater, accentuated by a perky polka dot scarf. There was no question in his mind. She looked even more attractive than she had that afternoon.

Despite the dearth of men on campus, the dancehall was busy when they arrived, and they were relieved to find an available table. The band had contracted to perform until midnight and Jimmy and Pam danced every dance.

Around eleven, after a night of performing swing numbers, the band began playing slow ballads. Pam was just the right height for slow dancing with Jimmy. As her face snuggled into Jimmy’s shoulder, Jimmy had no difficulty in bending down so that his cheek rested on Pam’s forehead. Soon they were dancing cheek to cheek and Jimmy couldn’t believe his good luck anticipating they would be kissing on their first date. But then he noticed the clock on the wall. It was eleven thirty and just enough time to get Pam back to her dormitory before her twelve o’clock curfew.

The evening had been so great a success, there was no doubt in the mind of either Pam or Jimmy that it was the beginning of something special. Each woke up the following Sunday morning thinking of the other. Jimmy had a Monday quiz which meant he had to study most of the day. However, Pam and he still managed to see one another that afternoon, as they happily walked around campus holding hands.

The romance took off rapidly from there. Jimmy was reluctant to talk about his wartime experience as it evoked memories of the platoon comrades he had lost during the night of the ambush. But he wanted to know all about Pam and New Orleans, where she had grown up.

Pam’s grandparents had come to New Orleans as immigrants from eastern Europe and had lived long enough to tell Pam about the harsh conditions experienced by Jews in their small village in Eastern Europe and of their fear and excitement when they had decided to pick up stakes and

move to America with their two young sons. As with most of New Orleans' immigrant Jews, they had moved to the central part of the city near Dryades Street, where the Jewish community had become known as the Dryades Street Jews.

Pam's grandfather, Isaac Weinstein, had been a tailor. Soon his renown with a needle reached the Jewish owners of the Krauss Department Store and he was hired as the head tailor in the men's clothing department. From there, he soon became manager of the men's clothing department, itself, and ultimately its principal buyer. Isaac's success had enabled the family to move to better quarters and he even began thinking about sending his two boys to college. His decision to change the family name from Weinstein to Winston had been suggested by a successful family friend who had similarly changed his family's name and watched happily as his two sons were both admitted to Yale.

Isaac had never forgotten his humble beginnings and had always kept an eye peeled for the needs of the city's less fortunate Jewish inhabitants. One of the main rooms in the synagogue attended by the family bore his family's name in tribute to his charity. He had not been content to allow his good deeds to end at his generational level and had instilled a sense of civic and Jewish communal pride in Pam's father, Horace, and in his brother Manny. Equally importantly, Isaac had insisted that his sons stand tall and not shy away from bigotry or conflict. So it was that Horace's first reaction after hearing of Pam's distress was to threaten to sue the sorority. Fortunately, Pam, had talked him out of it.

Jimmy's and Pam's discussions had of course touched on religion as it had played so central a role in what had happened at the sorority house. Pam had done her best to describe the major teachings of Judaism. But she had dwelled more on how oppression—especially the murderous pogroms to which her grandparents had been subjected and the ongoing slaughter of European Jewry at the hands of Hitler—had created a fortress-like mentality within many members of the Jewish world. Jimmy's obvious appreciation for what Pam was saying filled her with reassurance and made it easier for her to open to Jimmy. However, as she thought increasingly of Jimmy as her life's partner, she knew she would have to ask more of him.

Thanksgiving break seemed to come out of nowhere. For Jimmy and Pam, the prospect of separation felt unbearable. Pam's train would be the first to leave. Jimmy insisted he ride with her in the taxi to the station. As they sat holding hands in the back seat of the taxi, Pam leaned closer so her words would not be heard by the driver.

"Jimmy, you know how I feel about you. I can't even imagine being away from you for the next four days. But at some point I'm going to have to tell my parents about us. I want them to be happy for what we have. But they'll never be happy if I tell them I'm falling for a gentile and I could never hurt them."

Jimmy's eyes widened. However, his expression was more one of recognition than surprise. He had not been oblivious to the decisions that might lie ahead, particularly given his own background and his family's dedication to the church. But it was one thing to contemplate and another to hear the issue being verbalized out loud. He smiled as best as he could, but it was a pallid smile.

Pam took in Jimmy's distressed look and wanted to take back her words. But she knew how much she wanted Jimmy and she knew with equal certainty that they would never move forward without confronting their different religious backgrounds. So, painfully, she continued.

“I found out there’s a young rabbi in town. Like you, he’s a wounded war veteran who only recently returned from the front. I’ve spoken to him about you and he would love to meet you. Would you consider talking to him?”

Jimmy was thinking about what Pam had said in the taxi as he later went through the motions of packing for his own trip to Birmingham and Thanksgiving with his family. By the time he met his sister at the station, the train to Birmingham was already at the platform and Rita’s face showed she was not happy with her brother’s tardiness. However, once settled on board, Rita began to relax and noticed Jimmy’s brooding eyes. There was no question Jimmy was preoccupied and Rita guessed her brother was worried about Pam. As casually as she could, Rita started the conversation. “How are Pam and you doing?”

Jimmy knew that Pam confided in Rita. He decided he did not want to shoulder his dilemma alone and that talking things out with Rita might be helpful. So, he responded in a way that would give Rita a large opening for continuing the conversation. “You know Pam and I have become very close.”

Rita looked at her brother and responded half laughingly and half mockingly. “*Close!* Is that what you call it? You’ve got to be kidding! I’d call it something far more serious, as in hopelessly stuck on one another. At any rate, of course, I know. Even if I’d been in a bubble the last three months, Pam and I do talk.”

Rita’s attempt at humor, sarcastic though it might have been, had had its desired effect as Jimmy’s mood lightened almost immediately. “Okay, we’re pretty serious.”

“Now, we’re talking big brother!”

“But that’s also the problem.”

“What do you mean? We’re on Thanksgiving break. My mind can’t deal with philosophical riddles!”

“I mean Pam’s made it clear that her family would never accept a gentile.”

“Oh, is that all?”

Jimmy looked at his sister in disbelief, not believing her apparently cavalier response to his dilemma. Jimmy’s look registered with his sister who instantly regretted her misguided attempt at humor. “I’m sorry Jimmy. I didn’t mean to make light of what you’re saying, particularly since I’ve seen how hard Pam has struggled with the issue.”

“You mean you’ve discussed the issue of religion with her?”

“Yes. She even told me she had found out about a young rabbi in town who might be helpful in guiding you through some of the issues you might have.”

“Pam mentioned him. His name is Howard Amsterdam. Like me, he’s a wounded veteran. But I don’t even know where to begin.”

“I think I know where Pam would want you to begin. For that matter, so would I.”

“Where?”

“With the simple question of whether taking the next step with her is more important to you than anything else. If you think the answer is yes, then you have to examine whether you feel that way even when it comes to religion--an issue about which you've been having second thoughts as it is. For that purpose, I think an excellent place to start would be to talk to Rabbi Amsterdam when you get back.”

Jimmy struggled with his thoughts throughout the Thanksgiving Holiday. More than once, his parents asked him if he was okay. As the loneliness of being separated from Pam for only a few short days began to weigh on him, the answer to Rita's question came into focus with remarkable clarity. Pam was indeed the most important thing in his life and he would talk to the rabbi.

Chapter 25

Germany: Lorenz Kreisler's Improbable Return to the Reich April 1944-April 1945

Heartsick, Gemma La Guardia Gluck sat knitting socks next to her fellow prisoners at the *Ravensbrück* concentration camp about an hour's drive from Berlin. The work was endless and her sore fingers kept her up at night as she tried to fall asleep in the frozen barracks that served as housing for the camp's women prisoners.

She had been a prisoner at the camp since early in June 1944. Fortunately, her younger daughter, Irene, had earlier emigrated to the United States. However, Gemma, her husband Herman, a banking official, and her older daughter, Yolanda, had all been taken from their homes in Budapest and rounded up for deportation to the camps.

Now, ten months later, April had arrived. As she strode outside on a warm spring morning, she realized she could no longer hear the screams of terrified women being subjected to medical experiments or the protests of the Romani women consigned to sterilization. Most importantly, the acrid smell of burning flesh from the crematorium installed by Heinrich Himmler the preceding November was beginning to wane. There was still, however, a sense of dread as word of Allied advances filtered into the camp and the prisoners speculated what would happen to them.

For Gemma, the uncertainty was unbearable. Up to now, she had been spared from the back breaking labor imposed on many of the women in the camp, not to speak of the experiments and the gas chamber, because she had value as a bargaining chip. It was a consoling thought. Her brother, Fiorella La Guardia, was the celebrated mayor of New York City. But too many months had passed, and she had heard nothing.

Then, a few days later, Gemma's fears came to a head as the camp authorities began organizing the women into columns under the watchful eyes of Nazi doctors who had been assembled for the occasion. Those whom the doctors regarded as capable of walking would be sent barefoot on a forced march to some ungodly destination.

New activity at the camp was never welcome news for the inmates as any break in routine often augured disaster. Some prisoners believed that the purpose of the march was to remove proof of what had taken place at the camp. If so, there could only be one goal of the march. For Gemma, it was irrelevant speculation. At age sixty-four and frail from malnutrition, the doctors had deemed her unsuited for the rigors of the march. She and thousands of her fellow inmates would be held behind in the shadow of the crematorium and its imposing chimney. With so much suffering around her, Gemma shrank from the idea of favoritism. But instinct took over and all she could think about was whether her celebrity status might yet save her.

At about the same time as Gemma La Guardia Gluck was despairing over her future at *Ravensbrück*, Lorenz Kreisler was talking to Gilel Storch in Stockholm. Since his first meeting with the former German civil engineer, Storch had acquired an admiring respect for Lorenz' caring attitude and his overall savvy, in particular his command of circumstances in Germany. Their relationship had quickly evolved from disparate spirits focused on a common goal to what both recognized as friendship. As they talked on a late March evening in Stockholm, the subject of their

discussion was a forthcoming meeting between Storch and another colorful Stockholm resident, the Estonian, Felix Kersten.

After serving in the Great War, Kersten had trained as a therapeutic masseur. The therapist's practiced hands had led him to care for the aches and pains of a number of prominent figures. His success had been so great that he was able to afford an impressive home in Berlin where he resided with his well-born Aryan wife.

It was only a matter of time before Kersten's renown came to the attention of the *Reichsführer* Heinrich Himmler, Germany's Minister of the Interior and head of the dreaded SS. Himmler's sulphureous stomach pains were the bane of his existence. Not a meeting went by between Hitler and his principal deputy, Himmler, that Himmler didn't double over in a spasm of debilitating stomach indigestion. However, after submitting to what Himmler called Kersten's magic hands, his pains began to abate, and he was able to return to his diabolic duties with renewed vigor. Himmler's thankful response was to require that Kersten become his personal physician and care for him on demand. The alternative was deportation to one of the camps.

No fool, Kersten quickly agreed. Even so, he had been able to obtain special permission to live in Stockholm. Himmler had given his permission reluctantly as Kersten had taken on a larger-than-life role in the *Reichsführer's* day to day existence. However, Himmler's permission had been conditioned on Kersten coming to his side whenever the need arose

Unavoidably, the greater Kersten's contacts with Himmler, the more he heard about the atrocities committed in Himmler's name. As time passed, his influence over Himmler became so great he began to feel confident in asking favors for his services. Just as fate had thrown him in with Himmler, he believed the same fate had positioned him to mitigate some of the *Reichsführer's* murderous instincts. Numerous figures incarcerated by Himmler had Kersten to thank for their sudden release from prison or the camps.

Kersten had approached Storch with a proposition so improbable and so outrageous that Storch had serious qualms about Kersten's grip on reality. But no matter how preposterous, Storch could not resist Kersten's invitation to meet. However, before the meeting, Storch wanted to confer with Lorenz. Now, in Storch's small apartment over tea and pastry, Lorenz listened with astonishment as Storch described the substance of Kersten's call.

"I know nothing about this man other than he practices alternative medicine and managed to obtain papers enabling him to move from Berlin to Stockholm. So, he clearly knows someone of importance."

Lorenz face took on a knowing look. "Rumor has it that he knows someone of more than mere importance. He is reputed to be Himmler's personal physician."

"That may be the case as he said his reason for wanting to see me was to discuss a high-ranking German figure."

"Well, there you have it!"

Storch's forehead knitted into a frown. "Frankly, I don't know what to make of it. I would feel uncomfortable in meeting with him alone as I my understanding of how actions are taken in Germany is limited. By contrast, you spent most of your adult life in either the German military

or in the halls of its bureaucracy. I would like you to come with me. A second pair of ears never hurts.”

Kersten was reluctant to have a second person present at the meeting, but ultimately relented when Storch assured him of Lorenz’s discretion. The meeting took place several days later at a nondescript destination following a clandestine series of cab rides that took Storch and Lorenz to the designated meeting place. The man who was waiting for looked decidedly eastern European but otherwise was unremarkable in appearance. What he proposed, though, was both remarkable and audacious. Based on his entreaties to Himmler, Kersten claimed the *Reichsführer* had agreed to meet with a Swedish representative from the World Jewish Congress. Kersten wanted to know whether Storch would be willing to be that person.

Storch tried to conceal his surprise but to no avail. The idea that the head of the SS, the architect of the murderous plan to destroy European Jewry would want to meet with a Jew defied belief. Equally mind boggling was Himmler’s expectation that any Jew, even one whose safe conduct was assured, would willingly agree to meet with him.

Lorenz did not want to upstage his colleague but could see that the shock of Kersten’s proposal had left Storch almost wordless. “Dr. Kersten, I know from many years of experience that German officials operate from a precise set of rules, no matter how high their rank. What you propose would not seem to fit into any rulebook I could imagine, not to speak of the fact that a meeting with a Jewish official in Berlin would be considered treasonous. If there is anyone who knows how to enforce rules it is Himmler. So, what’s the rationale for Himmler’s willingness to act in defiance of the rules of the day and to put himself in harm’s way at the same time?”

Rather than be put off by Lorenz’s brash line of inquiry, Kersten was undaunted. “During Himmler’s role as second in command to Hitler, I have managed to exact many concessions from him not to speak of learning how he thinks. I can tell you he is now thinking about the day after the war ends. He knows the Reich has already lost the war and he is trying to position himself for lenient treatment once the hostilities reach a conclusion and the Allies seek retribution.”

Now, it was Storch’s turn to speak. “The man has to be delusional to think his actions in causing the death of countless millions might be overlooked due to some belated act of contrition.”

“You may well be correct as to his mental state, but that is exactly what he is hoping to accomplish by a meeting with a representative of the World Jewish Congress. He has not directed the deaths of so many Jews because he thinks you people are harmless. Rather he believes that the Jews have a hold on some form of extraordinary power and the desire to use it to achieve world dominance. So, it would not be inconsistent with that world view for him to think that a meeting with a high ranking official in an international Jewish organization might lead to a favorable payoff. I can’t guaranty you anything, but I believe you will not be harmed if you fly to Berlin.”

Kersten could see that Storch was hesitating. So, he decided to ramp up the appeal of a meeting with Himmler. “If I may say so, you may find Himmler’s proposed subject matter unavoidably compelling given your well-known efforts to provide relief to the inmates of the *Ravensbrück* concentration camp.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean Himmler wants to discuss the possible release of thousands of *Ravensbrück’s* inmates. Please think it over. If you agree, Himmler will fly you and a trusted colleague or two to Berlin in a German aircraft piloted by one of his committed subordinates.”

After the meeting, Lorenz and Storch spent most of the night discussing Kersten’s proposal. “How can I go there empty handed. The man is not dumb. He’s going to want something in return?”

“Kersten didn’t say anything about a *quid pro quo*. So, I guess it comes down to whether you think you can trust the healer!”

“That’s a pretty tall order since I don’t even know him. In addition, what if Himmler makes a demand for something in return for releasing the prisoners. I won’t be able to offer him anything and, even if the man is only a fraction of the beast we believe him to be, he may see fit to take out his frustration on me.”

“True and, admittedly, I’m not the one going. But, if I were the recipient of the invitation, I would accept. Himmler has nothing to gain by killing one more Jew, particularly if word were to leak out as to the purpose of the meeting. Look, you haven’t come this far to pass up the chance to rescue what could be thousands of desperate prisoners whose prospects are otherwise dismal.”

In the end, Storch agreed to the meeting. However, at the last minute, he was forced to forego the trip. Quickly, he called his fellow World Jewish Congress representative in Stockholm, Norbert Masur, and asked Masur to take his place. After calling Masur, Storch picked up the phone and called Lorenz. Lorenz was disappointed to hear of Storch’s inability to travel. However, his disappointment soon turned to amazement as Storch asked if Lorenz would accompany Masur in meeting with Himmler. “You said that if the invitation had been extended to you, you would have gone. Well, it’s now being extended. What do you say?”

Lorenz hesitated for a moment thinking about what he would tell his family and how they would react. But his hesitancy was short lived as Storch’s argument spoke for itself. “I’ll call my wife first. But, yes, I will do it.”

On the afternoon of April 19, Lorenz and Masur waited expectantly in Stockholm for the small airplane that would carry Kersten and them to Berlin. Around 2:00 PM, the plane landed on a private runway and the three men climbed in. Not long after, the plane landed at Berlin’s *Tempelhof* airfield. Lorenz strained to act calmly as he marveled at being back in Germany, the country that had forced his Jewish family and him to become refugees. Given the combination of fear and expectation that was consuming his every thought, Masur, too, was anything but a model of composure. Only Kersten stepped off the plane seemingly bereft of emotion.

Soon a car arrived that would take the trio to Kersten’s estate about seventy kilometers north of Berlin. The hour was late as they arrived and Lorenz and Masur were happy to see that refreshments were waiting for them. Eventually, another car arrived. It was not Himmler who alighted from the vehicle, but his trusted thirty-five year old second in command, Walter Schellenberg.

After ensuring that his guests were not armed, Schellenberg dismissed his security detail and sat down in front of his guests. His youthful appearance belied his status not only as Himmler’s plenipotentiary but also as the Reich’s head of intelligence and a primary implementer of the Final Solution. His widely despised activities had spanned the European continent from the

Soviet Union to Portugal. In eastern Europe, Schellenberg had been responsible for arming and expanding the activities of the *Einsatzgruppen*, the SS killing units charged with implementing the wholesale killing of Jews prior to construction of the more efficient gas chambers. To help implement the Final Solution, he had been the moving force behind the ban on Jews leaving Germany. In Italy, he had been responsible for spiriting away the notoriously anti-Semitic Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin al-Husseini, as Allied forces marched toward Rome where Husseini had been residing under Nazi protection. If, next to Hitler, Himmler was the face of evil in the Reich, then Schellenberg was one of the principal brains behind that evil.

Both Lorenz and Masur looked warily at Schellenberg as he began to speak. "As you must know, I have been communicating with Count Folke Bernadotte, the deputy head of the Swedish Red Cross. If you have any qualms about my sincerity in being here, the Count will vouch for my interest in saving Jewish lives, now that the inevitable demise of the *Reich* appears to be on the horizon."

Again, Lorenz spoke first, bitter sarcasm punctuating his words. "Your newly found humanitarian instincts are most unusual given your role in the execution of millions. I expect you have a price in mind for your sudden change of heart."

Schellenberg smiled unctuously, but quickly recognized no pretense was required. "I think it best that we put that matter aside until the *Reichsführer* arrives. Mr. Kreisler, I know you are a German citizen. I understand that you may feel justified in reviling my work on behalf of the fatherland. However, it is still refreshing to be in the presence of a fellow German who knows how to speak from strength rather than cower as has been true of the unfortunates of whom you speak."

Lorenz knew that rage would be totally unproductive. Even so, he could not hold back completely. "Those unfortunates, as you call them, might have included my wife and my children had I not had the presence of mind to lead them to safety in Denmark. But our purpose in being here is not to exchange recriminations. How long will it be before Himmler arrives?"

"Soon, I hope. He's been an attending Hitler's fifty-sixth birthday party. For a variety of reasons, it may take the *Reichsführer* a little while before he can break away."

Fortunately, Lorenz and Masur did not have long to wait as Himmler's armored vehicle with a one car security entourage soon arrived. As the bespectacled 45 year-old Himmler entered the room, Lorenz, Masur and Kersten all stood and Schellenberg saluted his Nazi superior.

Masur felt his legs wobble as he did his best to steady himself. He was relieved when Himmler signaled the meeting attendees to sit. Only then was Masur able to take in Himmler. What he saw surprised him. The man whom he had regarded as the embodiment of wickedness appeared quite ordinary in appearance, almost forgettable. However, he was quickly disabused of any notion that the otherwise ordinary man appearing in front of him might also be mild mannered.

As soon as he seated himself, Himmler began to speak. Soon his presentation turned into a rant punctuated by both contempt and condescension. After nearly two hours of fulminating, he finally got down to business. "I know we have made errors. I would have done things differently if the *Führer* had given me authority and a lot of people would have been spared. However, no one is going to crown me with laurels for what I might have done."

Himmler glanced around the room but received acknowledgment from only Schellenberg. Eventually his eyes fell on Lorenz. “I see from your expression that you are unimpressed with my modest statement of contrition.”

Lorenz knew he could not do anything to alter Himmler’s mood or they might come out of the meeting with nothing, not the least of which was their lives. “I mean no disrespect. As I mentioned to your subordinate, we came here to negotiate, not to pass judgment.”

“Wisely put and nice to hear it expressed so well by a fellow German speaker. The fact is I have come here in the hope that what I have in mind might mitigate the judgment that awaits me.”

The room was now completely silent as Lorenz and Masur waited for what Himmler would say next. Then he spoke.

“As a good will gesture, when we leave this place, one thousand Jewish prisoners from Ravensbrück will be released. The immediate release of more prisoners would cause us logistical issues. However, I have directed *Brigadesführer* Schellenberg to work with the Swedish Red Cross representative, Folke Bernadotte, for the expeditious release of thousands more additional prisoners, a number of whom will likely be Jewish. All that will be required is for Bernadotte to provide buses for their transportation.”

In the morning, Lorenz, Kessler and Masur boarded their return plane to Sweden. While in the air, Lorenz reflected on the remarkable meeting that had just taken place and the success they had achieved. But then he thought about the many who would never come back from the war with the Nazis, including his wife’s sister, Vanessa Sternbloom, who had been killed during the Blitz, and her husband, Anton, the scholar turned soldier, who had died a hero in the North Africa campaign.

Shortly, after the meeting with Himmler, a dozen guards at Ravensbrück began emptying the barracks of older women prisoners. At first, Gemma La Guardia Gluck expected this was the end. However, as she stood in the staging area and looked around, she noticed something remarkable. The guards were not armed. In addition, unlike the earlier evacuation of women prisoners who had been consigned to the recent forced march, neither Gemma nor her fellow prisoners were directed to take off their shoes. Then, to her further amazement, the guards began meting out chunks of freshly baked bread. Gemma hadn’t tasted anything so wonderful in ten months. As she and her fellow prisoners were escorted to the vehicles that awaited them, she could tell that the drivers were not speaking German. She didn’t know for sure, but she thought it was Swedish. But, as she got onto one of the vehicles, she didn’t care. All that mattered was that she was being led to freedom. Two weeks later, Folke Bernadotte arrived with a fleet of white buses and vans, bearing the insignia of the Red Cross. In a tense operation, the three hundred volunteers who had arrived with the buses managed to rescue fifteen thousand concentration camp prisoners, among them about 1,500 Jews.

Chapter 26

Nashville, Tennessee and Birmingham, Alabama: Confrontation and Romance November 1944

Nashville was uncommonly cold when Jimmy and Rita returned to campus. Pam had decided to remain in New Orleans to stay with her sister who had had an emergency tonsillectomy over the holiday. Jimmy decided to surprise Pam by meeting with Rabbi Amsterdam before she returned.

Getting an appointment with Rabbi Amsterdam had been surprisingly easy, particularly when Jimmy described to the rabbi the purpose of his desired visit. The man who greeted Jimmy was no older than his early thirties, tall and good looking, except for a jagged scar that ran up the rabbi's right cheekbone and ended just under his right eye.

The rabbi had been an army chaplain. The preceding January, he had accompanied the men of the Army VI Corps during their amphibious landing at Anzio, a marshy area, surrounded by a ring of mountains, on Italy's Atlantic coastline. The Corps had not been told in advance where they would be landing. So, no one knew what to expect. Fortunately, the landing had been a complete surprise, and the rabbi had breathed a sigh of relief as his regiment, and he walked on to the beach at Anzio relatively untouched.

The success of the operation required that no time be lost in moving inland lest the element of surprise be squandered. However, the invasion's commanding officer, Major General John P. Lucas, had hesitated long enough for the German defenders to move into the surrounding mountains and entrap the Allied forces who were still gathered on the beach. Even with the assistance of Allied air cover, the ensuing German attack had led to an Allied bloodbath. Among the wounded was Rabbi Amsterdam whose cheekbone had been shattered by a nearby explosion. Miraculously, his eye had been saved. But, like Jimmy, he had recovered only after having undergone several operations, in his case at Thayer General Hospital in Nashville.

"Rabbi, thank you for seeing me."

"Please call me Howard."

Jimmy was momentarily surprised but found the rabbi's informality to be in keeping with his overall relaxed manner. Jimmy liked what he saw and felt much of the tension he had been feeling begin to melt away. Still, he hesitated. "Are you sure? We were never on a first name basis with our minister back home."

"Well maybe your minister and you don't have as much in common as you and I do. After all, we're brothers in arms, though we may be of a different religions. On that score, where did you do your hospital time and convalescence?"

Jimmy liked the sound of the rabbi's response, in particular the way he placed Jimmy and himself on the same plane. "In Tuscaloosa," he replied.

“Another noble university town, though the locals in Nashville might disagree. I did my hospital time right here in town at Thayer General Hospital. While I was holed up in the hospital, a delegation from the local conservative synagogue paid me a visit and offered me the rabbinical post at their synagogue. I had no place else to go. So, I took it. But enough about me. These days my fellow rabbis and I don’t receive too many calls about conversion. So please tell me about yourself.”

“You’ve spoken to my girlfriend, Pam Winston. So, you must know we’re serious. She’s concerned her family won’t accept me unless I’m Jewish. I don’t want to risk that and Pam’s description of her family’s practice of Judaism makes it sound very easy, maybe even inviting. So, that’s why I’m here. But tell me, why don’t you receive too many inquiries about conversion. I’m a little confused.”

The rabbi’s cheery manner momentarily turned serious. “I’m afraid I was being a little too flippant with my off-handed remark.”

“I didn’t take it that way. But I am curious.”

“As you should be. Judaism is both a rewarding religion and beautiful culture. Otherwise, I wouldn’t have chosen to be a rabbi. The problem is that much of the world doesn’t agree. I’m not limiting myself to Hitler. I also have in mind the Axis countries that have allied themselves with Germany and turned a blind eye to the *Reich’s* slaughter of Europe’s Jews, not to speak of the British who have done everything possible to prevent the continent’s ill-fated Jewish refugees from reaching Palestine.”

“I understand. Both the medic who saved my life at Monte Casino and the doctor who painstakingly cleaned my wounds at the nearby field hospital were Jewish. Neither cared about my religion and it got me to wondering why Hitler was so intent on slaughtering the Jews of Europe.”

“Hitler’s anti-Semitism is both despicable and the product of a psychopathic mind. But, one doesn’t have to slaughter Jews to be anti-Semitic. Look around in the United States. It’s prevalent here as well. That’s why we rabbis insist that prospective converts know what they are getting themselves into. Have you heard of Father Charles Coughlin here in the America?”

“Yes. Isn’t he the famous radio talk host?”

“Yes, during his celebrity run on radio, he had the largest audience in the country and captured the attention of tens of millions of listeners. Unfortunately, much of his talk focused on blaming the Jews for the nation’s ills. His anti-Semitic vitriol got so bad that the Roosevelt administration was forced to cancel the show. Then, there was Charles Lindbergh.”

“What about him?”

“Of course, he’s famous as a presidential candidate and is a hero to many due to his flying exploits. But he was also decorated by the Nazis and even testified before Congress recommending that America and Germany sign a neutrality pact. He then became a relentless critic of this country’s involvement in the war, in no small measure because he saw our intervention as benefitting the Jews, a people he loathed. There are many other examples, public and private, among them the hospitals that won’t give Jewish doctors medical privileges, the law firms that

won't hire Jewish lawyers, the banks who make it impossible for Jews to move into numerous neighborhoods, the fraternities and sororities who refuse to have Jewish inductees, and, sadly, the church leaders who arouse anti-Semitism among their congregants by teaching that the Jews crucified Jesus."

"That's quite a list! I'd like to talk about your last point sometime as it certainly represents church dogma and is something I've never questioned. In fact, aside from what I learned in Europe, I haven't really given anti-Semitism much thought. However, I now see how it plays out, especially since I've been dating Pam who experienced a terrible episode in her sorority due to her being Jewish."

"Yes. She told me a little about it. Unfortunately, the list goes on and on. If you wish to continue meeting, we can talk about the blame ascribed to the Jews for the death of Jesus. But, while I want you to understand the reality of being Jewish, my job is not to frighten you. The word *rabbi* means teacher. That's how I view my job with you—to teach. So, let's start with what you know about Judaism."

"I'll give it a try. As I mentioned, Pam and I have been talking about Jewish thought and practice. But I still hope I don't disappoint you. So, here goes!"

"Excellent. What have you discussed?"

Feeling surprisingly relaxed, Jimmy responded. "I know first and foremost that Jewish people believe in one God."

"Excellent. Belief in one God, even considering the Christian view of the Holy Trinity, is something both Judaism and Christianity have in common. That should be a comforting starting point."

"I wish it were. But ever since my time in Europe and the loss of four of my buddies at Monte Cassino, I've had doubts about the existence of God."

"I understand and once again I have to apologize for my casual manner. If there is any people on the face of the earth who have been called upon to question the existence of God, it's we Jews. They are already estimating that Hitler's diabolical targeting of the Jews may have caused the deaths of five or six million people of the Jewish faith. That's something to think about when it comes to placing one's faith in God."

"How do Jews reconcile so many deaths with the presence of God in the world?"

"For a first meeting, we are about to navigate through some pretty challenging theological waters on questions for which there may be no good answers, or at least no answer that will provide you with the comfort you seek. So, using your words, here goes. Some impressive Jewish theologians have argued that the Holocaust demonstrates that God broke his covenant with the Jews or that an all-knowing God never existed in the first place. Yet, there are numerous Jewish authorities who have not lost their faith in God despite the carnage that took place under his watch. These authorities argue that numerous catastrophes such as the Inquisition have befallen the Jews in the past, though perhaps not of the same magnitude as Hitler's atrocities, but that we have managed to survive as a people under God's protection. They argue that, to abandon God now, would give Hitler the ultimate victory he has sought—the supremacy of the *Reich* over everything else, even God. Am I making any sense so far?"

“Yes, but I’m still very perplexed.”

“Not surprising. There exist a number of other points of view often depending on one’s Jewish denomination. The explanation I find most comforting as a rabbi is that God is present in the world, but so is free will among his ultimate creation, mankind. The result is that there are both good and bad people, with Hitler being the very worst. Had God intervened to stay Hitler’s hand, or had he manifested himself during any prior period of Jewish persecution, the element of free will would have been lost.”

At this point, Jimmy had perked up. “That’s really interesting.”

“It gets even more interesting. In Judaism, there are thought to be two instincts that reside in everyone, one evil and one good. In addition, we Jews believe that, as God’s chosen people, we have the added burden of repairing the moral fiber of the world wherever we find it beginning to fray. Were free will to be eliminated, the result would be a world where Jews in particular, but all people, in general, would no longer have the experience and satisfaction of defeating their evil instincts by doing good through the repair of the world. One cannot know the result of a such an existence where all moral inclinations are dictated. But, for some, if not most, the result would be worse than the experience of God staying his hand during Hitler’s bestiality. As I suggested, a lot of very smart people are grappling with the same question and, like you, don’t have a clear answer. But, if it’s okay with you, why don’t we move on. What else do you know about Judaism.”

Jimmy sat for a moment, looking somewhat stunned. “I never imagined there would be an explanation I found satisfying that attempted to reconcile God’s existence with the evils of the world. But I think you may have found it. It’s a lot to digest, but I’ll try get back on task. So, I know that Saturday is the Jewish day of rest and also that, as you have just pointed out, there are different denominations within Judaism, of which your Conservative stream is one. I’m also aware that Jews pray from a scroll called the Torah, what we call the Old Testament, and that Jews believe in circumcision—something I don’t have to worry about since I was circumcised as an infant due to an infection.”

“Lucky you. Is there anything else that comes to mind?”

“I guess there’s the obvious. But I don’t want to sound contentious!”

“Ah, you mean that Jews don’t believe in Jesus.”

“Yes, and that Jews killed Jesus.”

“Again, let’s hold off on that second thought because it’s getting a little late and I do want to offer some historical insights into why it would have been difficult for the Jews of Jesus’ time to adopt Christianity and why it continued to be difficult.”

“Okay. Let’s go on.

“You mentioned that Jews subscribe to the Torah. Let’s focus on that.”

“Sure.”

“You know about the Ten Commandments, of course.”

“Yes, but don’t quiz me.”

Laughingly, the rabbi continued. “A great twelfth century Jewish sage named Maimonides determined that, rather than ten, there are actually six hundred and thirteen commandments in the Torah that have to be observed. I imagine that Jesus who lived long before Maimonides preached the importance of many of these commandments although he might not have employed the same interpretation as Maimonides. In any event, Jesus lived and preached in a world where observance of the laws of the Torah was the central religious pillar of the people. However, after Jesus’ death, things began to change.”

“How so?”

“After his death, Jesus’ followers, in particular, Paul, taught that belief in Jesus as God was the primary ingredient for salvation on earth and for being embraced by him at death. This new theology had great appeal to many. In addition to promising redemption based solely on faith, it also promised a benevolent and heavenly afterlife as compared to the hardships of living on earth. However, the new theology no longer promoted the laws of the Torah. For most Jews, that was a tough pill to swallow as it went against the grain of fifteen hundred years of Jewish learning.”

“That’s also a perspective I never really appreciated.”

“I’m sure. In addition, in Jewish thought, there was a long-established belief that the messiah would one day come. But there was no tradition to support the idea of a dying and rising God, such as Jesus.”

“But, if that was the case, how did Christianity expand?”

“Given how difficult it must have been to recruit Jews to this new theology, Jesus’ disciples, foremost among them, Paul, began looking outside of Israel to recruit new Christians. You can imagine that many of these recruits would not have been interested in the Judaism of Jesus’ lifetime with the religion’s unappealing strictures such as the observance of the Sabbath and the Jewish dietary laws. Fortunately, for Paul’s construction of Christianity, most of these vestigial Jewish practices were no longer important to his message. Instead, he could focus solely on Jesus’ rise to heaven from the cross and promise that all who accepted Jesus as God would have their sins expiated and spend their afterlife in heaven with their savior. Circumcision, a particularly important aspect of Judaism, might have been a potentially devastating obstacle to any convert to Christianity. For Paul, however, it was not an issue since he did not consider circumcision to be a requirement for belief in Jesus. Paul was a good teacher and eventually recruited many followers from the Greco Roman world. But, for Jews, the promise of redemption without the Torah was as much of a problem as was belief in Jesus as the messiah.”

“What happened after that.”

“About forty years after Jesus’s death, the Second Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed, and the Jews of the country were expelled. These events followed decades of Jewish revolutionary fervor going back to the time of Jesus and were a response to Roman oppression and blasphemy. The resulting expulsion of the Jews began a diaspora that still exists in the modern world. It was also a difficult time for Christians who for the most part also left Palestine, but the Christians managed to separate themselves from the Jewish revolutionaries who were the subject of Rome’s

ire. Over time, Christianity became ascendant and the plight of the Jews in the diaspora was seen by the Christian world as punishment for rejecting Jesus as God. After that, the chasm between the two faiths only widened, as Christian theologians reviled the Jews in both writing and practice.”

Nearly overwhelmed, Jimmy thanked the rabbi and walked back to campus, preoccupied with all the rabbi and he had discussed. He couldn't wait to tell Pam who was arriving the following day. As planned, Jimmy met Pam at the station. When he greeted her, he could see the worry on her face and the expectant look in her eyes. However, she was quickly relieved of any concern as Jimmy threw his arms around her and announced he had already met with the rabbi and had agreed to meet again. Pam was of course curious about what the rabbi and Jimmy had discussed. She was so impressed with the depth of their discussion that, despite the cold of being outside, her questions and observations were almost unending. Before they knew it, it was getting dark, and they were beginning to freeze. Back on campus, the discussions went on and on until Pam's curfew arrived.

Jimmy and the rabbi did meet again when they discussed various aspects of Shabbat observance, the principal holidays, respect for family and elders and communal responsibility for the unfortunate. Their meeting led to another meeting and then another. One week before the Christmas break, Jimmy asked Pam if she would come home with him.

Pam was delighted with the idea but struggled over how to tell her family. She hadn't told her parents about Jimmy and wasn't ready to tell them she was going to meet her gentile boyfriend's family. Instead, somewhat guiltily, she employed a half-truth and asked if she could spend Christmas break with Rita, her friend who had been so helpful during her recent difficulty with the sorority. Pam's parents were more than happy to provide their consent and added that they were looking forward to meeting Rita in person.

On the eve of their departure for Birmingham, Jimmy returned to the rabbi's office to pursue the question that had dogged him during his prior meetings with the rabbi but which they had continued to put off. But first he told the rabbi the good news that Pam would be coming home with him for Christmas break.

“Do her parents know she is going home with you?”

“Well, not exactly. They think she is going home with Rita.”

“I'll let you be the judge, but that doesn't sound like a good foundation for your relationship with her family.”

“Perhaps not. But, because of our meetings and my talks with Pam, I think I know the religious direction in which I'm heading. So, I think we'll be able to deal with Pam's parents at the right time. It's my parents I'm worried about, particularly my mother. As you know we're Episcopalian. However, my mother was raised Catholic, and the essence of her faith is Jesus' death on the cross at the hands of the Jews. I need some answers for her and that's why I'm here today.”

“That's a tall order, but I promised we'd discuss it. What I have to say represents what I learned in rabbinical school where courses in early Christianity are now fairly common. It's a version of events that many will regard as self-serving, and to a degree it is. Further, I have no illusions about overcoming years of catechism such as your mother most likely experienced, not

to speak of almost two thousand years of prevailing Christian thought. So, I may not satisfy her, nor you for that matter. But I hope my insights will provide both of you with a different perspective of the political currents that may have made it advantageous for the Gospel writers to shift the blame for the death of Jesus from Pontius Pilate, who as the Roman governor, was the only person with authority to condemn Jesus to the cross.

“If it will help me explain matters to my parents, it will be worth it whatever they choose to accept.”

“You recall I mentioned there was revolutionary fervor at the time of Jesus owing in general to Roman oppression.

“Yes.”

“Much of the public’s hostility toward Rome was due to the cruelty of Pilate. Executions during Pilate’s time were widespread, among them John the Baptist. Crucifixion, the vilest form of execution and a punishment that could only be used against a non-citizen, was also widespread but generally reserved for those deemed a threat to the stability of Roman rule. When Jewish demonstrators objected to Pilate raiding the Temple treasury to pay for the construction of aqueducts, Pilate instructed his soldiers to club the protestors with many perishing. His cruelty went much further. A Jewish philosopher at the time, Philo of Alexandria, described Pilate’s rule as bloodthirsty with a penchant for summary executions. A few years after Jesus’ death, Pilate apparently went too far and directed the slaughter of a group of Samaritans at a village near Mount Gerizim, where the group was seeking out Jewish artifacts. The slaughter was so barbaric that Pilate was recalled to Rome to be judged for his brutality.”

“Not a pleasant fellow!”

“By no means. In addition, he infuriated the people of Judea by defying Jewish tradition. First, he quartered his troops in Jerusalem. Under cover of night and as a demonstration of the might of the army, he brought the imperial standards bearing the likeness of Caesar into the city, the site of the Holy Temple, callously disregarding Jewish law against worshipping human images. Then, he raised the golden shields of the empire over King Herod’s palace with an inscription that described the Emperor Tiberius as *divi Augusti filius*. Translated, the inscription means “son of divine Augustus.” The insensitive projection of the divinity of the Roman emperors could not have been more blasphemous to a people whose faith was rooted in one God.”

Jimmy shifted for a moment, before finding the courage to say what was on his mind. “In spite of Pilate’s hideous behavior, the four gospels claim that Jesus’ death was caused by the Jews despite Pilate’s objections.”

The rabbi took a breath before continuing, thinking of how he would respond meaningfully without sounding too accusatory. He then answered. “Despite his prior insensitivity, Pilate understood that the primary job of a Roman governor was the administration of order. In this regard, Pilate looked to the Jewish authorities, in particular, Caiaphas, the high priest, for the purpose of helping him maintain that order. In Jerusalem, the principal symbols of the religious establishment were the Temple, the priestly hierarchy, and the religious practices of the people. Any challenges to that establishment would not only have been of concern to the religious authorities but would also have caused Pilate to be worried about instability among the people.”

Alert to what the rabbi was getting at, Jimmy asked him to continue. “I think I understand your point, but please go on.”

“Of course. Do you recall from your readings of the New Testament that Jesus claimed that the existing order would be overturned by the establishment of the Kingdom of God ruled by the Son of Man?”

“Vaguely. Didn’t he also say that his twelve apostles would sit on twelve thrones by his side?”

“Correct. Obviously, such a claim would have been a threat to the priestly class. In addition, Jesus’ description of a new cosmic world order would also have constituted a direct threat to Pilate’s rule as well. As a result, when Jesus was brought before Pilate during Passover, a traditional time of unrest among the Jews gathered in Jerusalem, it would have been reasonable for Pilate to want to rid himself of this messianic figure who not only stood as a challenge to the religious establishment, but whose message also constituted a threat to the authority of Rome itself. So, it would not have been a surprise for Pilate to have agreed with the religious authorities about the need to eliminate Jesus. However, the idea enshrined in Christian theology that Pilate would have ordered Jesus’ execution at the behest of the city’s religious leaders despite his own misgivings begs credulity. Not only would such an act of submission have been totally out of character for a man who during his time had ruthlessly ordered executions at will, but in addition, a Roman governor such as Pilate would never have willingly shown weakness by giving in to those under his dominion.”

Thoughtfully, Jimmy considered the response, but still had more on his mind. “That makes sense. But why do the gospels paint a different picture?”

“The truth is we may never know. But there is a plausible answer. To investigate that answer, it is important to remember when and where the gospels were written and what was happening at the time. Do you recall my telling you about the destruction of the Second Temple in the year seventy?”

“Yes.”

“The Temple was destroyed after four years of Jewish rebellion and only after a five-month siege, during which hundreds of thousands of Jerusalemites were subjected to starvation. At the end of the siege, Roman soldiers sacked the city and slaughtered all of its residents except those who were taken as slaves. The historian Josephus estimates that more than a million Jews met their deaths during and after the siege. It was clearly not a good time to be a Jew.”

“I guess not!”

“I mention this because the three so-called synoptic gospels, first Mark and then Mathew and Luke, are thought by most experts to have been written during the twenty years following the destruction of the Temple, with the gospel of John having been written about two decades later. These were years when the followers of Jesus would have been dispersed throughout the Roman world in places such as Damascus where the gospel of Luke is thought to have been written, Antioch where the gospel of Matthew is thought to have been written, Ephesus where the gospel of John is thought to have been written, and other destinations such as Rome, Corinth, Thessalonica, and Alexandria. In such places, it would have been wise for the emerging Christian

communities to disassociate themselves from the rebellious Judeans whom Rome had recently crushed. Correspondingly, it would have been unwise, not to speak of a poor tactic for recruiting members of the Roman establishment, to promote Christianity by claiming that Pilate, the face of Rome in Palestine, had been responsible for the death of the movement's deified leader."

Now, Jimmy was becoming intrigued. "Interesting."

"Yes "The result was a series of gospel stories where Roman culpability for the death of Jesus is progressively lessened by painting Pilate as an unwilling player who was somehow coerced into doing the bidding of the Jews. Thus, in all four gospels, but particularly in the first gospel, Mark, there is the creation of a custom not found or described anyplace else in the literature or practices of the day where, during Passover, a Roman governor such as Pilate would offer to release a prisoner of the people's choosing. In Mark's telling, the people are given the choice of releasing Jesus or a revolutionary named Barabbas. In response to the claimed choice of the people to release Barabbas and retain Jesus, Pilate, who undoubtedly had condemned countless many men to their deaths without so much as a thought, somehow found the need to plead with the people and ask why Jesus should be executed."

"Was there any explanation for the introduction of this previously unknown custom?"

"There may be, but none that I am able to provide. Would you like me to continue or have you had enough?"

The rabbi was relieved when Jimmy showed no hesitancy. "Please continue."

"Well, the narrative gets progressively more deferential to Pilate in the next two gospels. In the Gospel of Matthew, which is thought to have followed Luke by about twenty years, not only is Pilate unhappy about being urged to kill Jesus, but, in addition, his wife pleads with him not to do so in consequence of a dream that had tormented her. Matthew then describes Pilate heeding his wife's urging and, in an uncharacteristic act of sentimentality, symbolically washing his hands of the matter, leaving the Jews to acknowledge that Jesus' death is on their heads. In the Gospel of Luke, which is thought to have been written about the same time as Matthew, Pilate's reluctant submission to the people is further emphasized as he asks the religious leaders on three separate occasions why they want him to put Jesus put to death. In addition, in an effort to absolve the rest of the Roman establishment from the death of Jesus, Matthew's Pilate gratuitously exonerates Herod Antipas, the Roman appointed tetrarch of Judea, from any responsibility for Jesus's death. This is the same Herod who, among many other ruthless acts, had ordered the execution of John the Baptist."

"Not your basic Sunday school stuff!"

"You're quite right there. The final rehabilitation of Pilate appears some twenty or so years after Luke and Matthew. The writer of the Gospel of John, in a screed seething with contempt for the Jews, once again reenacts Pilate's supposed entreaties to the Jews to release Jesus in favor of executing Barabbas. Now, Pilate is seen pleading with Jesus to help Pilate out of his dilemma. Jesus declines, but, in the process, reassures Pilate that the responsibility for what is about to happen to him lies with the Jews who handed him over to Pilate."

When the rabbi had finished, he looked at Jimmy who was deep in thought. “Jimmy, I don’t expect unquestioned acceptance of what I’ve said, just some understanding that there is a different point of view and one that might be of help in dealing with your mother.”

“You needn’t worry. You’ve been great and I really do think I understand. Whether I can get my mother to see this other perspective is another matter entirely!”

Chapter 27

Birmingham, Alabama: Religious Intervention from an Unlikely Source **December 1944**

Pam had been a hit with the Wilkins household from the moment of her arrival during Christmas break. Rita had not said anything about Pam being Jewish. So, the incident at the sorority had not entered the conversation at the dinner table, offering Jimmy a reprieve until he felt comfortable in raising the issue of Pam's religion. Owing to her father's involvement in local politics, Pam had acquired a fair amount of political savvy and Jimmy's father was quite taken with her astuteness. Jimmy's mother, Gloria, was eager to hear about Mardi Gras and Pam regaled her with reminiscences of the storied New Orleans public spectacle.

Pam, as had been true of most of her Jewish contemporaries, had grown up at a time when singing Christmas carols in school was both natural and required. She had a good voice and was complimented on her rendition of many of the family's favorite Christmas standards. As a result, there was no cause for suspicion when she feigned illness while the rest of the family prepared to attend Christmas eve mass. Out of respect for Vance, Jimmy joined the family for the traditional Christmas service, while Rita, expressing concern for her friend, stayed home with Pam.

As the Christmas holiday neared its conclusion and New Year's approached, Jimmy decided that Pam had made a favorable enough impression so that he could disclose his intentions to his parents and tell them about his meetings with the rabbi. Summoning all his courage over cocktails one evening, he told his parents everything. Surprisingly, Gloria had shown tolerance almost to the point of congratulating her son on having found so wonderful a prospective spouse. She had even been intrigued when Jimmy described the rabbi's perspective on the gospels' treatment of Pilate and the Jews. However, as with all things, she withheld the full extent of her enthusiasm until Jimmy had an opportunity to sound out her husband. Vance was anything but pleased. Rather than mollify his father, Jimmy's attempts to discuss what he learned from the rabbi, served only to antagonize the elder Wilkins.

"Son, you're a damned war hero with an incredible future in this community. Not only can I help you with my connections. In addition, Blaine Stewart is now a general. In addition to being my best friend, he is revered in this community and loves you like a son. His connections could take you even further than mine. Pam is a nice person. But this is a Christian community and whatever your rabbi has to say, the view of God-fearing Christians around here isn't going to change. Are you really going to squander your future and everything else that awaits you here by marrying a Jew?"

Jimmy had rehearsed their meeting and had been prepared for a range of reactions. But his father's acerbic tone and undisguised hostility had unsettled him. But he nevertheless tried to respond with reason. "Dad, I love Pam. Why should her religion or mine for that matter be an issue if I want to share my life with her? After all, mom was Catholic, and you married her."

Vance didn't even bother to look at his wife as he responded. "Don't try to create a distraction, particularly when the difference between mom and me is obvious. Mom didn't ask me to convert to Catholicism. Just the opposite, as you are aware. In addition, if you take the Pope out of the picture, the difference between the Episcopalians and Catholics isn't all that much. To

put it bluntly, we both know how to worship God and we both know who was responsible for his death.”

“That’s a pretty harsh reaction considering that the Alabama legislature with you among the leaders voted nearly unanimously to support the creation in Palestine of a homeland for the Jewish refugees of Europe.”

“You’re confusing good Christian charity with falling into league with a people who have been reviled for almost two thousand years. They haven’t been despised for lack of good reason. How far do you think you would get at the club if you were to marry Pam and, in particular, if you became a Jew.”

“I guess I’ve never seen any Jews at the club.”

“For good reason. True, they make good doctors and lawyers. But that doesn’t make up for everything else. You’d be the laughingstock of Birmingham society and any chance of your making it in this town would be lost.”

“What if that didn’t bother me?”

“I don’t think you appreciate what it would be like to be a social outcast in your own city. But I do and I don’t relish the idea of people talking behind your back. Look, I’ll be cordial to Pam for as long as she is our guest. But, while you’re here, I want you to think through matters and I’d like to talk to you again.” Dejectedly, Jimmy left the room wondering whether there was any way of altering his father’s views. However, the next day, help came from a very unexpected source.

Vance and Blaine Stewart had been best friends since grade school. Wherever Blaine had been stationed, he had always made a point of calling Vance to wish him a happy new year. The war years had interfered, but now Blaine was looking forward to reviving the tradition as he picked up the phone to call his friend. Vance had taken the call after one ring and excitedly heard his friend’s voice on the other end of the receiver. His excitement only gathered steam as Blaine told him he had been reassigned to the Third Army’s headquarters and that, as a result of the unexpected retirement of the two-star general who was in charge of middle east operations, Blaine was being groomed for the position with a promotion in the offing.

When it was time for Vance to speak, he couldn’t help himself and immediately blurted out his fears that Jimmy would ostracize himself from Birmingham society and ruin a promising career by marrying Pam. He didn’t expect his friend’s response.

“Do you remember when we were thinking about college and you thought I was crazy to pass up Vanderbilt in favor of the Citadel.”

“Yes, but it doesn’t seem to have hurt your career.”

“That’s the interesting part. I thought the Citadel prepared me for a military career second to none. Yet, when I entered the service, all I encountered was ridicule from my peers who had gone to West Point. Their resistance to me was not based on anything I did, but rather my pedigree. From that point on, I vowed to fight back whenever I encountered intolerance of any kind.”

“Old friend, I would have expected nothing less.”

“Thank you. But what you’ve just described to me is pure, unadulterated intolerance. I haven’t heard you say anything bad about Pam. Instead, what I hear is you kowtowing to a social order that may be important to you, but may have little claim on how Jimmy sees the world.”

“I understand, but Jimmy’s got so much going for him. I hate to see him lose it.”

“Let me tell you something in case you didn’t already know. That son of yours is one strong son of a gun. When I heard the story of how he placed himself in harm’s way to protect a German medic who was in danger of being shot by one of Jimmy’s wounded and delirious comrades, I almost cried. Not only that, but I also regularly checked in on Jimmy after he was brought back to base for surgery. The surgeons told me his wounds were badly infected requiring three long and painful debridement procedures. Throughout that process, the doctors told me he never uttered a peep. I tell you if Jimmy could deal with all of that, not to speak of his lengthy convalescence back in the States, he can deal with the club and its aversion to Jews.”

As Vance listened to Blaine, his admiration for his son began to take center stage in his thinking. “Even this old dog can learn new tricks. But Jimmy converting to Judaism! I just don’t know!”

Blaine was pleased that he was getting his message across. But he also knew that, for his friend’s sake, he had to confront the issue of religion. “I’m not the best guy to talk about religion as I rarely set foot in church these days, save for an occasional base wedding in an army chapel. Even so, I’ve learned a thing or two about religion over the years. I especially want to tell you about the medic who saved Jimmy, a guy named Jonathan Sternbloom.”

“Yes, Jimmy mentioned the name.”

“I got a chance to chat a bit with Sternbloom as a result of something he did after he brought Jimmy in.”

“You’ve got my attention.”

“Good. The night Sternbloom rescued Jimmy was miserably cold. Anybody with any sense would have sought shelter from the cold. However, once Jimmy was secure, Sternbloom did just the opposite. Instead of going to sleep, he slipped back into the dark of night and headed back to the place where he had rescued Jimmy. There, in an act of uncommon humanity, he single-handedly brought back the German medic who had tended to Jimmy’s wounds before being wounded by Jimmy’s delirious comrade in arms.

After he returned to base with the wounded German medic, Sternbloom was brought to me because he had misled our sentries when he went back into that frigid and forbidding night. I knew I had to reprimand him. But then I thanked him for his selflessness and asked him to tell me a little about himself. What I found out was the kid was a real patriot. Not only had he volunteered to become an everyday medic despite having completed more than two years of medical school, in addition he had volunteered for dangerous field work when he could have spent his time in the much safer environment of a field hospital.”

“Pretty amazing kid.”

“Not only that, his father, Anton Sternbloom, had served with the British forces in North Africa during the Western Desert campaign. Anton had had a remarkable career as both a professor of anthropology and as a key figure in the code breaking activities at Bletchley Park. When he lost his wife in the explosion of a live bomb that had not previously detonated, he sought a change from London and agreed to a military position. He was commissioned a major with British intelligence in Libya. There, he was captured by an old nemesis in the German high command just before the second battle of El Alamein. Knowing, he might break under unrelenting interrogation, Anton took his own life rather than put his fellow soldiers at risk. Out of respect for his sacrifice, his body was flown back to England where he was accorded full military honors.”

“I’m quite in awe.”

“You should be. I mention father and son because they were both Jewish. But neither gave a thought to the religion of the people they were helping when it came time for them to fulfill their duties as soldiers and human beings. It’s a valuable lesson for those of us who have not had that much familiarity with persons of the Jewish faith and its one you might want to think about as you try to resolve matters with Jimmy.”

Jimmy and Pam had been out doing errands. However, when they returned, they were greeted by something they hadn’t expected—hugs from Vance. After the embrace, Vance described his call with Blaine Stewart. “He’s probably the only guy in the world who could read me the riot act the way he did and actually knock some sense into me. I’m happy to say he succeeded. I can’t say that what the two of you have in mind is what I expected of Jimmy. But I can say, thanks to Blaine, it’s not my decision to make. Just as important, it now gives me a chance to open to Pam instead of building walls.”

Trying to take it all in, Pam at first smiled modestly. But quickly, her face broke into a broad grin. “Jimmy and I still have a couple of days here before we go back to school. I just hope I live up to expectations.”

“I’m sure you will. If it’s okay with the two of you, my wife and I would like to make a few changes from our traditional New Year’s celebration. Instead of going to the club, we’d like to invite a few close friends to help us toast our future daughter in law.”

Jimmy could hardly believe what he was hearing. “That would be amazing, dad. I don’t know what to say.”

“You needn’t say anything. But, out of curiosity, where and when are you expecting to get married?”

Pam and Jimmy looked at one another, amusement and happiness showing in their eyes. Jimmy spoke first. “I guess that’s a twostep process. First, I want to talk to mom about a family ring she said she was saving for me and then I’ll get Rita, Babs, and her to join us. Then, if Pam’s going to be introduced as my fiancée, she should receive a proper proposal. After that, I’ll let Pam talk about the wedding. But I’m guessing we’ll all be going to New Orleans after graduation.”

Chapter 28

Germany: In the *Föhrenwald* Displaced Persons Camp April 1945-June 1945

György Frankel sat on his bunk at the *Föhrenwald* displaced persons camp and rubbed his eyes in the semi-darkness of early morning. As he did, he was overcome by the same feeling of sadness he had experienced every morning for the past two months following his liberation from Buchenwald. His arm had been feeling better since being treated at Buchenwald by the American doctor, Stanley Rothman and his medic, Jonathan Sternbloom. His impaired leg still hurt from the brutal forced march from Auschwitz to Buchenwald, but Dr. Rothman had assured him the limp would eventually go away. Even the overall assault on his once robust two-hundred-pound frame, now up to one hundred and twenty-five pounds from the one hundred and five pounds he weighed at Buchenwald, failed to give him pause. Rather, it was the sense of hopelessness as he looked around at the rows of still sleeping inmates in his barracks.

As with many of the displaced persons camps that had been built hurriedly following the defeat of the Reich, *Föhrenwald* was a converted slave labor facility. However, unlike many of the other DP camps, the facility had been built solidly. So, it was not the physical accommodations that were driving György's despair. Rather, as he looked around the barracks and observed his bunk mates who were beginning to stir in the dim morning light, it was the sunken look on their faces that distressed him. They had endured such unspeakable hardships during the war that the camp should have been a welcome place of refuge. It did provide shelter from the physical elements, but there was little relief from the hostile world they had known. For, in addition to Frankel and his fellow Jews, the camp also housed many ethnic Poles, Yugoslavs and Hungarians. Sadly, many viewed the camp's Jewish population with open contempt as if the Jews had been perpetrators rather than victims.

In the months to come, a commission created by President Truman would result in *Föhrenwald* becoming an all-Jewish displaced persons camp. But for the present its makeup did little to allay the fears of its Jewish inmates whose minding-numbing experiences during the Nazi years had left them with both indelible scars and ineradicable fears. These Jewish survivors of the most barbaric assault ever devised by the mind of man went about their daily business warily, not knowing what to expect of their fellow gentile inmates.

There was of course talk of Palestine. After all, as far back as the 1917 Balfour declaration, England had expressed support for the creation of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. In addition, it had controlled Palestine under the mandatory authority given to it by the League of Nations in 1921. But it was now 1945 and everyone knew that England was incarcerating in Cyprus those Jewish refugees who attempted to run the British blockade of the Holy Land. Other options were spare. For György, returning to his native Hungary, where ninety percent of the Jewish population had been sent to the death camps, was not an option. Even if Hungary were to welcome back Jewish survivors such as Frankel, the smell of death was everywhere as was the stench of Hungarian complicity in the deaths of so many of its former Jewish residents.

So, as he had done for so many mornings since arriving at *Föhrenwald*, György sat forlornly on the edge of his bed wondering why his life had been spared if only to wake up repeatedly to what was little more than a newly devised form of detention. Unbeknownst to him, however, this day would not end the way that so many other days had.

György had a friend at *Föhrenwald*, a man named Eleazar Abramowicz, who was in his early thirties. Abramowicz had been caught in Czechoslovakia as he tried to escape from his hometown of Kielce. He had wound up at Auschwitz. Like György, he had endured the death march to Buchenwald. He had been so malnourished when the Allies found him that it had taken weeks of constant vigilance to nurse his tubercular body to the point where he could engage in physical activity. He had gained weight. But for the hacking cough that still wracked his body, he even gave the appearance of reasonable health. However, unlike György, Abramowicz's health prospects were marginal, and he knew it.

Abramowicz was from Poland. The same calculus that made returning to Hungary anathema to Frankel had until then applied with equal conviction to Abramowicz. Four hundred and fifty thousand Hungarian Jews had perished at the hands of the Nazis and a sickening number of their Hungarian conspirators. However, in Poland, the seat of European Jewry, the numbers were far worse. Fully, three million Polish Jews had been murdered during the war. Ethnic Poles had also suffered greatly. However, as their Jewish countrymen were herded into box cars on their way to the gas chambers, the country's Catholic population had displayed few visible qualms. If such qualms did exist, it didn't prevent these same ethnic Poles from capitalizing on the misery of the Jews as they hurriedly moved into the homes taken from the Jews.

However, on this morning, just a month after Germany's unconditional surrender to the Allies on May 8, something had changed Abramowicz's attitude about returning to Poland. In his hand, he held a letter from his cousin, Jochanan. Jochanan had managed to escape from the Kielce Ghetto before its inhabitants were sent to the Treblinka death camp, and had found shelter in the nearby village of Zagórze. After three years of hiding, he had returned to his hometown. Jochanan was an apothecary by training. His skills had found him employment, if not appreciation, as all but one of the town's apothecaries had perished during the war. Jochanan had been advised that the Catholic family who had appropriated Eleazar's family farm a few kilometers outside of Kielce had abandoned it after two years of poor harvests. Jochanan further reported that no one had asserted a right to the property due to its apparent unproductiveness and wanted to know if Eleazar might be interested in returning to Kielce.

At first Eleazar had hesitated. Aside from the expected animosity toward a returning Jew, he wondered how he could manage a farm in his weakened condition. But, then it dawned on him that he might not have to undertake such an effort by himself. He knew how desperate his friend György was to leave the camp and decided he would approach him during breakfast to determine his interest in getting out of the camp and heading for Poland. If he recalled correctly, György had once told him he had studied both agriculture and engineering at the university in Budapest. With such a background, it was just possible György might be up to the challenge, especially if it meant a ticket out of *Föhrenwald*. In addition, György spoke several languages, including German, which would be a great advantage in any effort to make their way back to Poland.

As Eleazar approached the dining hall early the next morning, he observed a number of the religious residents of the camp gathering for morning prayers. Memories of his childhood consumed him as reflected on how he had assisted his elderly grandfather, crippled with arthritis, as he walked to synagogue for morning prayers.

Despite having just opened, the dining hall was already teeming with men and women who were rediscovering what it was like to eat heartily after years of deprivation. In one corner of the

room, Eleazer saw György sitting in his customary seat as he consumed a bowl of porridge and read from an old newspaper.

Eleazer greeted his friend. “György, how goes it this morning?”

At the sound of Eleazer’s voice, György looked up hesitantly, a line creasing his brow. “It goes!”

“I know what you mean. Listen, I have something for you to think about.”

György, who was about to return to his newspaper, looked halfheartedly at Eleazer, more out of curiosity than interest. “What do you have in mind?”

“A way for you to leave this place.”

György’s interest had now been piqued. “Alright, you’ve got my interest. But, when last I inquired, Shangri-La was not taking reservations.”

“What I have in mind is anything but Shangri-La. But are you willing to listen?”

“Yes. Sorry for being so negative, but I’ve heard lots of schemes around here with little to show for them.”

Eleazer then proceeded to tell György about his family’s farm in Poland, where the Abramowicz’s had grown rye and potatoes before the war. “It was not a sumptuous living, but we always had food on the table. I don’t know what happened to it when the gentiles took over but, with your help, I think I can bring the farm back to life.”

As if to emphasize the point he was about to make, Eleazer had to halt his speaking as he was beset with a wave of raw sounding coughs. György looked on concernedly as his friend’s coughing continued. When it stopped, Eleazer continued. “The truth is I can’t do it alone because of my health. Further I don’t know how long I’m going to last, but all of a sudden I have this need to return home. However, if you were to come with me, I could teach you everything you need to know. Then, if something happened to me, the farm would be yours. I know you’ve studied agriculture. This could be a good opportunity for you, but more importantly a way of getting out of here. What do you say?”

Despite the negativity that continually hovered over him like a cloud, György all of a sudden found himself intrigued. “Let’s say I’m interested. How would we get there?”

“My cousin Jochanon has been fortunate to find work in Kielce as an apothecary. He said he had already sent some money to help me get home. However, it will be a challenge with no assurance that we’ll even have enough money for both of us to complete the trip. Even so, your command of German should be a big help as it might aid us in finding work along the way.”

“If I could endure a forced march from Auschwitz to Buchenwald, I suppose I can endure a little discomfort in order to get out of here. When do we leave?”

“As soon as I receive the money from Jochanon.”

Two weeks later, with little but the clothes on their backs and two sacks full of food they had been squirreling away, the two friends set out on foot for the six hundred kilometer walk from Föhrenwald to Kielce. Within Germany, the devastation the Nazi's had inflicted upon the country was everywhere, as was the universal effort to rebuild. But so many men had been lost during the fighting that the rebuilding effort had bogged down in many places. As a result, György and Eleazer had been able to find work in the rebuilding effort as they trudged from town to town. They did not reveal they were Jewish and no one asked. Often the pay was a meager day's food rations with a place to sleep at night. However, it allowed them to preserve the small amount Jochanon had sent to obtain train tickets for the last leg of their journey.

Finally, two weeks after they began, they warily got off the train at Kielce. The city had been bombed by the *Luftwaffe* during the Nazi invasion of 1939 and many neighborhoods had not yet been rebuilt. The city's Jewish population before the war had numbered twenty-four thousand residents. However, the Jewish Ghetto built after the Nazi invasion of Poland had not seen any of these residents since August 1942 when its remaining Jewish remnants had been deported to the death camp at Treblinka. The Ghetto's high walls and barbed wire had been removed, leaving little indication of the hell earlier experienced by its occupants. Otherwise, the city looked very much the same as when Eleazer had fled the city.

Eleazer and György's first stop was at the Jewish Committee building located in the middle of the city on Planty street. The building was run by the Kielce *Voivodeship*, a local administrative arm of the Polish government created after the Nazi defeat. Of those pre-war tens of thousands Jewish residents of Kielce, only about two hundred downtrodden Jews had returned to the city by the summer of 1946. Of these, only about forty, like Jochanon, had been able to reclaim the property and residences they had lost. The remaining one hundred and sixty homeless returning Jews resided in the Jewish Committee Building, which also housed the various institutions serving the city's Jews.

After meeting with the occupants of the Jewish Committee Building and receiving the latest news, Eleazer directed György to the apothecary where Jochanon worked. At the site of his cousin, Jochanon could not contain himself and dissolved into tears as he hugged his cousin. His tears were soon joined by those of Eleazer. Their cathartic embrace was soon interrupted by one of Eleazer's coughing spells. When he recovered, Jochanon took some medicine out of the cabinets and gave it to his cousin. The medicine seemed to have the desired effect and without any coughing to get in the way, Eleazer was able to focus on György and introduce him to Jochanon. "This is my friend from Föhrenwald. He knows about agriculture and his health is better than mine."

The two cousins and György spent the remaining part of the day reminiscing and going over the details of reacquiring title to the farm and the supplies that would be needed. Helpfully, Jochanon had already been to the land office and had found out there would be little difficulty getting title to the farm transferred back to Eleazer as no one had claimed the property after the gentile family had left. Jochanon had also visited the farm and believed the required implements and supplies needed for farming were still there and housed in a small, but secure, shed. Since initially contacting his cousin, Jochanon had been able to save more of his earnings and offered the funds to Eleazer for food and clothing. Gratefully, Eleazer accepted the zlotys that were pressed into his hand and solemnly promised to pay back his cousin when the opportunity arose.

That night, György and Eleazer stayed with Jochanon in his spartan residential quarters. The following morning, after visiting the land office and purchasing food, the two, their newly

acquired rucksacks stuffed with provisions, headed on foot to the farm. Their journey of more than six kilometers would take them past a number of other farms, some of whose residents looked at them with curiosity, others with disdain. As they got closer to the Abramowicz farm, Eleazer did not recognize the occupants of the neighboring farms, all of which had been owned by Jewish farmers before the war.

The farm closest to the Abromowicz farm had been owned by their close friends, the Jakubowski family. Curiosity got the best of Eleazer. Even though he was tired from their long walk, he couldn't help but stray onto the Jakubowski property to see who was there and what they were doing. His curiosity had proven providential, for as they approached the farm's newly tilled rows of potatoes, they heard moans. Quickly, they approached the source of the groaning and found a middle-aged woman, perhaps in her fifties. She had evidently fallen from the horse and farm rig that stood nearby and had damaged her ankle so badly she could not pull herself up onto the rig.

Immediately, György and Eleazer gave the woman water and helped her up. It was clear she was in too much pain to drive herself home. Surprisingly, the woman spoke Polish and German, enabling both men to carry on a conversation with her. After she had recovered somewhat, the two men were able to lift her onto the farm cart. They then agreed that György would drive her back to the farmhouse while Eleazer headed on to the Abromowicz farm.

The woman's name was Elzbieta Kowalewski. She was a widow whose husband had died long ago. Though her husband and she had not farmed, she had come from a family of farmers. Until the war, she had lived with her daughter, Daria, and Daria's husband, Alexander. However, Alexander had been killed during the Nazi invasion and Elzbieta and Daria had fallen on hard times. So, when the Jakubowski farm became available, Daria and she had settled the property.

All had gone fairly well except for the previous growing season when Elzbieta had fallen ill. Daria was not a natural farmer like her mother and soon their income began to dry up. Daria had resorted to what countless women in need had done over the centuries. She gave her body for pay, but not to just anyone. The only takers who seemed to have cash were the occupying Nazi soldiers. So, with revulsion and overwhelming guilt she had made regular visits to the nearby Nazi encampment.

Her visits had not gone unnoticed and soon she was reviled by her fellow townspeople. The few zlotys Daria had managed to earn were enough to buy food and medicine until her mother recovered from her illness. But her nocturnal visits brought on by necessity and endured with self-loathing had also left Daria with a lasting reminder of her nights at the encampment. She was now well into her second trimester of pregnancy, and she was not doing well.

Soon, György arrived with the injured Elzbieta. As he helped her into the Kowalewski farmhouse, the cries coming from the next room were audible. Then, Daria appeared. There were dark spots on her housecoat that György guessed were blood stains. It was clear the pregnant woman was seriously ill.

Chapter 29

France: The Work Begins June 1944-August 1945

In his quarters in London, General Charles de Gaulle waited expectantly for reports from the Normandy landing. When word arrived of the great Allied beachhead that had been established on the French shoreline, De Gaulle could hardly contain himself. Eight days later, on June 14, he eagerly left for France and pronounced Bayeux, a city seven kilometers inland from the English Channel and about thirty kilometers northwest of Caen, as the capital of Free France.

Despite having led the French government in exile in London, De Gaulle was not everyone's choice to serve as leader of France. During the war years, both the communists and the resistance had risen in prominence, and each would have liked to play a greater role in France's reemergence. De Gaulle's renown as a military leader was unquestioned. In normal times that achievement, though estimable, might not have been enough to confer on him the mantle of leadership. However, with so many members of France's political discredited due to their involvement in the Vichy government or, even worse, their collaboration with the country's German occupiers, de Gaulle, who had strenuously opposed the Nazis, could claim to be the most untarnished choice to govern the country.

On August 26, following the liberation of Paris, de Gaulle laid claim to the mantle of leadership. Even before the Normandy landing, he had prevailed on the Allied leaders to ensure that Paris would be quickly liberated and that French forces would be the first to enter the French capital. Now, as he marched through the Arc de Triomphe and strode down the Champs-Élysées, his request had paid off. Wherever he looked, crowds of adoring citizens proclaimed his arrival. Euphoric with the flush of victory after so many years of warfare, the crowds cheered and cheered. Their cheering rose to a fever pitch as elements of the French 2nd Armored Division followed de Gaulle through the great arch and motored up the Champs-Élysées behind the returning general and his retinue of loyal followers.

Suddenly, as de Gaulle and his entourage approached the Cathedral of Notre Dame, shots rang out as disgruntled members of the Vichy militia took aim at the six foot five de Gaulle. Foreshadowing the resolve needed for the tasks ahead, de Gaulle raised himself to his full height and marched ramrod tall through the gunfire into the Cathedral.

In the months to come, de Gaulle would need every ounce of the resolve he had shown at Notre Dame as the problems confronting Paris, in particular, and France, in general, were enormous. Despite the decision of General Dietrich von Choltitz, the commander of the Nazi garrison in Paris, to ignore Hitler's orders to destroy the city before surrendering it to the Allies, as much as twenty-five percent of the city lay in ruins. Routine services such as the provision of electricity, traffic control and waste removal were either nonexistent or severely compromised. Food was seemingly available from the farms in the countryside, but, practically, there was no means of getting it to large urban areas such as Paris. In addition to the destruction of the country's railroad tracks and the confiscation by the Nazis of much of its rolling stock, bridges had been blown up at critical points along the supply chain. In the Paris region alone, all of the bridges over the waterways between the city and the coast had been destroyed.

In addition to infrastructure concerns, politics remained a thorny issue as de Gaulle navigated his way through the various factions comprising the new provisional government in Paris. Communism continued to be on the ascendancy, as it positioned itself to one day move toward political dominance. The communists both frightened de Gaulle and emboldened him to resist their demands to take over important cabinet posts.

Internment centers still existed within the country as did detention centers for prisoners of war, among them, an estimated fifteen thousand Italian soldiers who had been captured following the North Africa campaign and later transported to France. The desire to uncover and punish collaborators found expression everywhere. Summary executions were not uncommon as pent-up retribution spilled over. Over one hundred and fifty thousand suspected collaborators were detained in Paris, though most were later released.

Everywhere, inflation was acute, and food and commodities were heartbreakingly scarce, so much so that the authorities found it necessary to institute the most severe nationalization of French industry the country had ever seen. Under their dirigiste nationalization policies, whole sectors of the economy came under the authority of the new provisional government and its more permanent political successor, the French Fourth Republic. Few industries were spared as the finance, aircraft, merchant marine and automobile industries all fell within the realm of the government's interventionist policies.

Growth would soon come to France, but when Angelo Donati arrived in Paris during the wintry beginning of 1945, the city was still reeling with poverty, hunger and the depressing unsightliness of destroyed buildings everywhere. The purpose of Donati's return to Paris, where he had lived and worked prior to the Nazi invasion, would not have been a surprise to anyone who knew him and knew of his work while in exile in Switzerland.

After his narrow escape from France into Switzerland, the Krauss families and he had all found their way safely to the Swiss city of Lausanne. On the shore of Lake Léman, Lausanne sparkled with beauty from its shoreline location facing the French town of Évian-les-Bains Lausanne. For its residents, the city was a place where life was able to go on normally, if amorally, even as the countries around it bowed under the yoke of Nazi brutality.

For Jews who had been fortunate enough to find refuge in places like Switzerland, life was not easy, but it was also not arduous. For those few like Donati who arrived with both connections and resources, Lausanne might have offered a relatively carefree refuge from the war. However, that had not been true of the restless and determined Donati.

From the moment he arrived in Lausanne, Donati had redoubled his efforts on behalf of Europe's increasingly desperate Jewish deportees wherever they existed. Capitalizing on his many connections, Donati had continued to be in regular contact with a network of sympathetic public figures in Rome. With their encouragement, he had been active in the Lausanne chapter of the *Colonia Libera Italiana*, an Italian fraternal society. Though not limited to the issue of Jewish deportees, the society had supported Donati's efforts to identify and liberate Italy's Jewish deportees, wherever they might be found. In the summer of 1944, Donati had even started a postcard campaign hoping to identify the whereabouts of as many Jewish deportees as possible. Armed with a diplomatic passport, he had tirelessly traveled across Europe in search of deportees. His travels had taken him to countries as diverse as Russia, Belgium, Netherlands and Germany.

With the end of the war in June 1945, Donati traveled to Rome. By then, his renown as a tireless fighter on behalf of Jewish deportees as well as other Italian causes had earned him not only respect but also an appointment. He was soon named General Secretary of the Italian Red Cross. He would now return to Paris as an Italian official. Along with the Apostolic Nuncio Angelo Roncalli and the diplomat Giuseppe Saragat, he was one of the first Italians to enter Paris in an official capacity.

In Paris, Donati spent endless hours ascertaining the fate of Jewish Italian deportees. In addition, on behalf of the Italian government, he was lead negotiator for the liberation of Italian prisoners who were still being interned by the French. All of this, he did in addition to rebuilding his banking business.

While Donati was in Paris, the two Krauss families returned to Nice. As Bernard and Colette walked along the city's once beautiful promenade, they were saddened by what they saw. The beautiful beaches of Nice had been pockmarked with German mines and now constituted a no man's land. Wherever the eye could see along the coastline, there were ugly and forbidding expanses of barbed wire. The interior part of the city was no different. Major buildings everywhere had been ransacked by the Nazis for their metal and iron, and then converted to barricades or Nazi administrative offices or distribution centers.

As with most places occupied by the Germans, the memory of Nazi atrocities still hung in the air, in particular, the public execution of twenty-three young French resisters during the preceding summer of 1944. The executions had triggered an uprising that had eventually resulted in guerilla forces opposing the Nazis all over the city. Night after night, the resisters had mounted all manner of hit and run counter attacks, stretching both the Nazi defenses and the resolve of its commanders. The end came when Allied forces encamped on the other side of the River Var while waiting for the right opportunity to strike, launched an all-out attack. The overmatched Nazis were routed but not before blowing up large weapons installations in their wake.

The apartments owned by the Krauss families, though vandalized and left in bad condition, had not suffered structurally. It had taken time, luck and money for Bernard and Colette to find the materials needed to make their old apartment overlooking the Mediterranean habitable, even if it offered nowhere near the level of comfort they had known prior to the war.

Since arriving in Nice, Bernard and Colette had had several long telephone calls with Julien. On each occasion, Julien assured them he was fine and had been well treated during his long stay in Belgium. Unfortunately, it did not appear that Bernard and Colette would be able to visit Julien in England before his unit was disbanded and flown back to Canada. However, they knew they would see him soon and the relief of knowing he was well was just the balm they needed.

Bernard and Colette also had the added consolation of knowing their daughter, Gabrielle, and their nephew, Leon, would soon be matriculating to the University of Aix-Marseille University. The two young people had had to bide their time for almost two years and now they were beside themselves with anticipation. The thought of being on their own was exhilarating, while knowing they would not be too far away was reassuring. Even on the war-torn roads along the Mediterranean, it would take little more than two and a half hours for both families to visit their children in Marseille.

Another young person had entered Bernard and Colette's life. Colette's sister, Paulette Mandel, her husband, Alain, and their son, Lucien, had been living in Paris when the Germans stormed into the city. Lucien had been a graduate student in political science at the University of Paris' venerable Sorbonne Faculty of Arts and Humanities. His political leanings had drawn him to the resistance, where his activities had come to the attention of the German authorities. In August 1942, during a renewed wave of hostilities against the Parisian Jews, the Nazis had come looking for Lucien along with a number of other suspected agitators linked to the university.

When the Nazis discovered that Lucien had been tipped off and left the city, they looked to Paulette and Alain to provide them with information on their son's whereabouts. The questioning had been very rough. Their interrogators had refused to accept Paulette and Alain's protestations that they had no knowledge of where Lucien had gone. For three days, both physically broken and exhausted parents were subjected to gruesome interrogation methods. When it was over, the two had been sent to Darcy for deportation. They had never been heard from again.

Guilt ridden and now a highly sought-after fugitive, Lucien had somehow managed to melt into the underground and had spent the remainder of the war in the French resistance. At war's end, he had sought out Bernard and Colette who had been happy to take him in. They were impressed with their nephew's earnestness and sympathetic to the psychological wounds he had suffered as a result of the death of his parents. They wanted more than anything to help him.

Lucien, in turn, was determined not to make himself a burden. He tried to make himself helpful in scavenging for building materials to restore the apartment, but his every thought was devoted to returning to his studies at the Sorbonne. He was of course penniless. So, his immediate prospects were not looking good. His uncle and aunt offered to help, but Lucien was reluctant to accept their generosity.

Bernard had delayed visiting Grasse afraid of what he might find there. However, the pressures of rebuilding his life in Nice, not to speak of dealing with Lucien's issues, were getting to him and he needed a release. With great hesitancy, Bernard had borrowed a truck and made the drive to Grasse, hoping that the town's lack of strategic value had insulated it from the Nazi occupation.

What he found when he arrived encouraged him. The flower fields, including his own, had endured the war without substantial mishap. Of equal importance, Emil was well. He had not been idle during the Nazi occupation and had spent the time perfecting his perfume formula. Now, he was ready to bring it to production, but there were few flower growers who were able to support his efforts. By contrast, Bernard's Canadian mine interests had flourished during the last two years and he was able to provide Emil with the needed capital. Now, Emil's dream, suppressed during the occupation, began to take shape. As Bernard and he shared a light meal of wine, brioche and fresh cheeses, they toasted one another in celebration of their new partnership that would combine Bernard's flowers and financial resources and Emil's perfume creation to bring a remarkable new scent to salons and retailers all over Europe.

Bernard had not forgotten Donati. If anything, their escape to Switzerland and their time spent in close proximity in Lucerne had brought them closer together. When telephone service was good, they now talked regularly. Lately, Donati had been complaining that his many activities had caught up with him and that he had concluded he needed an aide. The complaint had resonated with Bernard who both wanted to help and was also concerned about Donati's health. The obvious solution was to be found in the person of Lucien. With little effort, Bernard persuaded

Donati to provide Lucien with living accommodations and support for his studies at the University of Paris. In return, the proud Lucien would have no reason to reject Donati's offer, knowing he would be supplying Donati with something invaluable—the assistance of a trusted aide.

Chapter 30

Kielce, Poland: Farmer and Caregiver July 1945-October 1945

The day after their arrival, György decided to return to the Kowalewski farm. Ostensibly, his purpose was to check in on Elzbieta and to find out from her what she knew about the reasons why the previous occupants of Eleazer's farm had not succeeded in bringing it to life. However, György's real reason was to get a better look at Daria so that Eleazer and he could report back to Jochanon to see what if anything could be done to assist the stricken pregnant woman.

When he arrived at the Kowalewski farm, he was pleased to see that Elzbieta was able to come to the door. She was on her feet, though limping slightly and using a kitchen broom with the straw end rapped in a towel as a precarious-looking crutch. Elzbieta observed that György was looking around and guessed he was watching out for Daria. "She's sleeping again. She does a lot of that these days. But it will make me sad to talk about her, particularly since I want to express my appreciation for your help yesterday and for coming by today. May I make you a cup of tea?"

"I'd enjoy that very much." While the teapot was heating up on the stove, György decided it was a good time to ask Elzbieta what she knew about the family who had occupied Eleazer's farm. Showing her farming background, Elzbieta got right to the point.

"I'll tell you this. They weren't farmers. They arrived shortly before we did last year at the beginning of the spring planting season. One day, I went over there to introduce myself and be neighborly. They had three small children who required all the attention the beleaguered mother could provide. The father was outside making a half-hearted effort to plow some of the ground for growing. Anyone knows that potatoes will grow in practically anything, but they don't like rocky soil. I could see a rock free clearing in the distance that must have been used by Eliezer's family for planting before the war. However, my neighbor must have thought it was too far to go. Instead, he was using a hand plow to remove rocks in an area closer to the farmhouse and he wasn't getting very much out of his efforts. Finally, he came into the house looking quite exhausted. He did manage to say hello to me, but quickly proceeded to pour a stiff drink of vodka and, for the rest of the time I was there, spent his time drinking his troubles away."

"That's a shame, particularly during planting season."

"It was. During those few minutes when he showed any attention to me, we talked about potato farming, and I tried to explain to him the potato growing practices I had learned as a young girl on a farm. In addition to avoiding rocky soil, I asked him what he had used as seed potatoes the preceding year. He replied that he merely cut up a few potatoes and threw them into large holes in the ground. Even though I was dismayed at his seemingly indifferent attitude, I continued to inquire. I asked him if he only used potato segments that had already begun to sprout so that the eyes of the potato would serve as the pathway for the sprouts to emerge. I also told him that too many eyes on a seed potato were not a good thing as they would likely create a crowded plant that needed more than its share of water and other nutrients. His replied that he had heard of such practices. With a seeming lack of concern, he said he had been too busy to pay attention as he had kept his old job as a wood cutter and didn't have the time to watch eyes grow on potatoes."

György appreciated Elzbieta's frustration. "As anyone who has grown potatoes knows, the eyes are the source for the growth of the new crop and that the seed potatoes should be culled to provide just the right number of eyes. I take it, his first crop was not a success."

"It was not, and he complained bitterly about being bested by a stupid crop of potatoes."

"What did he say about the spacing of the seed potatoes and how much watering he intended to do for the new crop?"

"I asked him these questions, noting that overwatering was not a good practice. As with his prior answers, his responses sounded more like those of a bored child than a farmer. I told him my family's experience had been that the best approach to planting the seed potatoes was to lay them eyes down in about six inches of soil spaced about twelve inches apart. I also noted that our local farm store which you may have passed on your way here recommended that the planted potatoes be fertilized with a small sprinkling of low nitrogen and high phosphate fertilizer before the seed potatoes were covered with soil. He responded that he didn't have the money for fertilizer. I then tried to shift gears by asking him about watering. Well, at least he had gotten that right with his prior crop probably more by luck and laziness than because of any intentional plan. The farm pump, as you may have noticed, is on the side of the house opposite the planting area. Serendipitously, his laziness meant that he made the trek from pump to field only about once a week which was probably just about right. In any event, I gave up after that."

As György marveled at Elzbieta's description of the ineptitude of the family who had occupied Eleazer's farm, Daria appeared from the room where she had been sleeping. Her face looked waxen and bloated, but György could see she had a basic attractiveness that sadly had been worn away by her nights of desperation and her immediate pregnancy. For Elzbieta, Daria's once attractive features offered little consolation. One look at her daughter and Elzbieta broke into tears.

Daria did not have the strength to offer any kind of reassurance to her mother, although it was clear any effort would have been unavailing. Wave after wave of tears spilled from Elzbieta's eyes. Not wanting to upset her mother any further, Daria returned to her room.

Elzbieta wiped her tears away, and, in a voice cracking with emotion, turned to György. "She's been shunned by the people of Kielce and no midwife will be available when the time comes. When I was young, I watched my mother assist many midwives deliver babies. But I don't have real experience. In addition, her condition is so fragile. Even if she survives the ordeal, I don't know whether she'll be able to feed the baby and no wet nurse will come to the aid of an ostracized woman who has been cast off by her neighbors."

György had only known these two women for a day, but he had experienced unspeakable hardship while at Buchenwald and his heart went out to them just as it had gone out to others during his time of confinement in the camp. He knew he had to act. So, he asked Elzbieta whether he could borrow her horse and wagon to make a trip into town where he could confer with Jochanon on what could be done to aid Daria during her pregnancy. Eagerly, Elzbieta agreed and shortly after dawn the next day, György mounted the wagon and gently coaxed the overworked farm horse to trot toward the city and Jochanon's apothecary.

Jochanon had had his back turned to the door of the apothecary. When he looked up in response to the ring of the door opening, he was delighted to see György. However, his mood

quickly turned serious as György described Daria's circumstances. "Daria's mother, Elzbieta, believes her daughter is nearing the end of the second trimester. She also thinks that most of the blood spots I observed on Daria's housecoat occurred during her first three months. However, she suspects, sadly, that some may have been from more recent spotting. I obviously don't have a practiced eye for such matters, but little is required to see that the girl is in distress. Even worse, no one will come to her aid because she's a pariah in the community for having consorted with German soldiers, even though she acted out of desperation. I suppose these things shouldn't be my concern, but I've seen too much to ignore others who've been beaten down by a war that left them helpless victims."

Before responding, Jochanon took a minute to place a sign on the front door of the apothecary indicating the shop was closed. Then he sat down next to György. "We were once more than twenty thousand Jews in this city. Now, we are two hundred. Helping others must be our motto. Otherwise, what is our purpose? As far as the girl is concerned, I'm not qualified to tend to her needs. However, I do know from working with doctors in the past that some women do bleed, particularly in the first trimester. Much more worrisome is the possibility that the stains you observed on her housecoat may be more recent. I recall from my earlier discussions with doctors that later term blood stains may indicate a problem with the placenta, particularly the possibility that the placenta has detached from the uterus. With such a condition, hemorrhaging during birth is always an issue and could be fatal. But, without the guidance of a doctor, I'm not sure there is anything I can do to alleviate her condition."

Jochanon could see that his words were eating away at György, whose look and slumped shoulders revealed the sadness he was experiencing. It was time for a shift in the conversation. "Don't lose hope. She may well survive the ordeal. The women around here are notoriously strong. In the meantime, I can provide you with medication that will help ease her pain and won't harm her pregnancy. During the war, the rules for dispensing drugs were largely ignored and the Soviets haven't had time to establish regulations for apothecaries. So, I have a relatively free hand to make the girl as comfortable as possible."

At this, György perked up. But then another thought occurred to him. "I may be overanalyzing matters. However, what if the worst happens and Daria doesn't survive while giving birth. How are we going to feed the baby, particularly since we can't count on any wet nurses being available?"

György's question assumed the direst of circumstances. But it did give Jochanon an opportunity to offer something more than just palliative pain medication. "You know you're getting ahead of yourself, but I recognize your concerns are legitimate. I won't be able to set your mind at ease, but I can help should the worst occur. In this part of the world, the death of a mother during childbirth occurs all too frequently. In years gone by, the baby may have been given cow's milk if a wet nurse wasn't available. However, just about everyone now knows that raw milk can produce disease. Fortunately, we can now give babies evaporated milk, that is milk heated to a high temperature to remove much of its water content and then preserved with a sugar additive. Around here, a lot of people make their own evaporated milk because canned evaporated milk is expensive. However, I have a fair supply of the canned product that I can put aside for Daria."

After thanking Jochanon, György headed back to the farm rig for the return trip to the Kowalewski farm. He didn't know whether to feel relief or anguish. But he did have the pain medication in hand and, for the time being, that was all the solace he needed as he gently guided his struggling horse away from the city.

From the time of his visit with Jochanon, it was clear to both György and Eleazer that Elzbieta would need to devote all her attention to her ailing daughter whose continued sickly appearance did not augur well for what lay ahead. However, it was time to harvest Elzbieta's crop of potatoes and the revenue from the crop might well be the difference between survival and disaster at the Kowalewski farm. So, in return for a share of the proceeds from the sale of the potatoes, György, Eleazer and Elzbieta agreed that György would take over the harvesting chores on the farm. In the meantime, Eleazer, who was feeling better now that he was breathing the clean country air, would begin preparations for the late summer planting season on his own farm.

The arrangement enabled Elzbieta to do all she could for her daughter. Additionally, each day it provided her with a small respite when she brought György a midday meal as he worked in the field. As the days marched toward the time that Daria would give birth, Elzbieta began to linger for longer periods of time after György had eaten his food. At first their conversations were merely a means for Elzbieta to release some of the tension she was feeling. However, soon their conversations touched on György's time at Buchenwald and the wrenching loss of his wife and small child, a dark haired baby girl named Lili who had barely begun to walk.

Inevitably, the day arrived when Daria began having contractions. Fortunately, Jochanon had already provided Elzbieta and György with whatever birthing supplies he thought they might need as well as a large supply of evaporated milk, with instructions on feeding the newborn by teaspoon if necessary. From the outset, it was clear that Daria was having a difficult time. György had heard his share of screaming while in the camp. But the piteous wailing sounds coming from the small room where Daria was giving birth were more than he could bear. Flashes of the night at the railhead when he was separated from his wife and baby girl rushed through his thoughts as he sat motionless while Elzbieta tried to comfort her distraught daughter.

Through some miracle of time and space, Daria finally gave birth with one determined soul-wrenching scream. Outside Daria's room, György and Eliezer smiled in relief as they heard the baby's first cries and then waited patiently for Elzbieta to clean the child and wrap it in a warm blanket.

Elzbieta had been so focused on cleaning the baby that she had not noticed the color begin to drain from her daughter's face. When she turned around to give the child to Daria, her face fell in a look of abject horror. What she saw terrified her for Daria's lifeless eyes were now fixed in a glassy stare. Under her, a large pool of blood had begun to spread where she lay.

The next day, György and Eliezer dug a grave for Daria as her inconsolable mother looked on. As the last shovels full of dirt covered Daria's remains, the baby girl who had been sleeping suddenly awoke and demanded to be fed. The effect of her cries was both sobering and rejuvenating. There was new life to be nurtured, even as the mother had been laid to rest.

As the days passed, György began spending more time at the Kowalewski farm. There was more work to do now that Elzbieta was devoting most of her energy to caring for the newborn child. But, in addition, the little girl had taken so strong a hold on the emotions of the concentration camp survivor, he couldn't bear to be far away.

The growing bond between György and the baby was of course not lost on Elzbieta. She did not know where it would lead but she sensed that her own energy level was waning, and she appreciated György's involvement.

That Daria had died in childbirth while still shunned had continued to hold a vice-like grip on Elzbieta's frame of mind. She knew that no representative of the church would ever be available to consecrate the baby and give it a name. The thought had so traumatized Elzbieta that she had delayed naming the baby. Then, one day, as she watched György lovingly cradle the child in his arms, an inspiration came to her. She walked over to where György was sitting and smiled for a moment before addressing him. As he looked up, she placed her hand under his chin and raised it gently so that she could look into his eyes. "I'd like to name her Lili after your lost baby."

Chapter 31

Denmark and England: A Wedding and Window to the Future May 1945-July 1946

May 4, 1945 was an auspicious day for all Danes. On that day, the Nazis in the Netherlands, northwest Germany and Denmark surrendered to the Allies. The next day, Allied troops entered Copenhagen. The dark clouds that had hung over the country for almost two years were no more as the last of the Nazi occupiers were forced to leave the country forever. All over, celebrations erupted. A week later, the great British general, Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery, arrived in Copenhagen where he was treated to a victory procession that wound its way through crowds of appreciative Danes who lined the parade route.

Of those who watched as Montgomery drove by, none clapped more enthusiastically than Hans Hedtoft. As chairman of the Danish Social Democratic Party, Hedtoft knew there would be difficult days ahead as the country regrouped politically and economically. Denmark had been spared the heavy bombing experienced by Norway and the Netherlands. Nevertheless, both the Nazis and the invading Soviets had launched a number of bombings that had left some areas devastated, none more so than the Island of Bornholm. Relatively unscathed for most of the war, it had experienced widespread bombardment near the end of the hostilities as the Soviets sought to remove the island's entrenched German garrison.

To have escaped the blood bath experienced by much of Europe was one thing. Patching up the economy was quite another. Totally dependent on imported fuel, Denmark had been prudent in stockpiling coal and oil prior to the war. Its actions had helped soften the economic headwinds as the price of these commodities skyrocketed during the fighting. However, as a result of the Nazi blockade during the war, Denmark had been deprived of its main trading partner, England. Trade with Germany had been far less desirable. The Nazis had been primarily interested in feeding their soldiers. For Denmark, the result was a forced emphasis on a highly unprofitable agrarian way of life and the mothballing of many more productive industries.

All of these matters weighed on Hedtoft as he cheered Montgomery. However, on this day, he refused to allow any of it to dampen his mood. For, with the arrival of the Allies, it would only be a matter of days before his beloved daughter, Hilde, returned from her long stay in Sweden.

From across the Øresund strait, the narrow body of water separating Denmark's Zealand coastline from the Swedish port of Skåne, Hilde Hedtoft was at that moment experiencing a different set of emotions. She had been living in southern Sweden since the night in August 1943 when she had been wounded on the Zealand coast while aiding Sarah Kreisler and her family flee to Sweden. Working with Sarah in support of the Jewish refugee community had opened Hilde's eyes to a world she had not previously known.

After Sarah and she had met at the University of Copenhagen, Hilde had embraced her new friend. However, the issue of religion had rarely come up. If it did, it was in the context of Sarah's immediate family and did not extend to anything like the Jewish community of which Sarah was a part.

For an engaging university student such as Hilde, there would have been little opportunity to look beyond Denmark's Christian society and into the distinctive Jewish community. No matter how well integrated it had become, it was still fundamentally different.

Denmark had earned the appreciation of Jews everywhere for the way it had protected its own Jews from the Nazis. However, no matter the good intentions of its leaders, its ministers continued to preach a theology that was hardly flattering to its Jewish population. The anti-Semitic pronouncements of the *Reich Bevöllmächtigter* and *Wermacht*, the German plenipotentiary and armed forces responsible for protecting the *Reich's* interests in Denmark, only served to reinforce the religious gulf that separated the country's Jewish Danes from citizens such as Hilde who functioned comfortably in spite of the Nazis hateful messaging.

Now, after almost two years working with the Jewish refugee community in Sweden, Hilde could not imagine how she had previously known so little about the Jewish world. In ways large and small, she had come to respect both the resilience of the people and their willingness, often under extreme hardship, to support one another. Her overall impression was that the work she did with Sarah benefitted not just a community, but rather an extended family. Everywhere she looked, there were Jews helping other Jews. Even more moving was the volunteerism that bore no relationship to any form of social position. Irrespective of the varied walks of life from which the refugees sprang, Sarah marveled at the fact that class structure played little role in how the the Jewish refugees aided one another.

In her many volunteer outings with Sarah, Hilde had met so many different varieties of Jews, from the religious to the secular to the irreverent, that she couldn't help but ask questions. In this manner, she had not only come to admire the people Sarah and she assisted, but, in addition, began to learn about Jewish ritual, culture and religious practice. She was being drawn into this community about which she had once known nothing and the experience pleased her. Then, word spread all over Sweden that the Nazis in Denmark had surrendered to the Allies.

Now, instead, of moving ahead with her newfound religious and cultural attraction, she found herself encountering something entirely different, something that would douse any flame that may have remained regarding her staying in Sweden. With the imminent collapse of the Nazi empire, Sarah's German father, Lorenz Kreisler, had already begun talking about returning to Germany with Sarah's Jewish mother, Agatha, to help rebuild the war torn country. However, they both knew how difficult it would be for their university-age Jewish children to start over in Germany. So, Agatha was already making arrangements for Sarah and her brother, Werner, to move to England where they could stay with Agatha's sister, Sandra Brody, and her husband, Giles, until the two Kreisler children had a chance to complete their schooling and find their own footing.

When Sarah disclosed her parents' plans to Hilde, the sense of loss that Hilde immediately felt overwhelmed all of her other thoughts. As she prepared for the short sail across the Øresund to the waiting arms of her own parents, she made time for the unhappy task of saying goodbye to the people who had effectively served as her other family during her time in Sweden. Taking Sarah aside, Hilde assured her that little time would pass before they would again see one another. Then Hilde boarded the small sailboat that would return her to her family and the completion of her own studies at the University of Copenhagen.

Hilde's last year at the university went by faster than she could have imagined. However, always lingering in the background was the feeling of incompleteness and the sense that something was lacking in her spiritual life. One hot Copenhagen afternoon in June when the clouds hung low and trapped the humid air, Hilde was awakened from the nap that was giving her the only available refuge from the day's heat. The sound that had stirred her from her sleep was her mother's excited voice.

Two letters had just arrived for Hilde. One was from the University of Paris' Sorbonne Faculty of Arts and Humanities. The other was from Sarah Kreisler. Eagerly, Hilde tore open the letter from the Sorbonne. When she finished reading, she jumped up and hugged her expectant mother. Hilde had been accepted to the Faculty's graduate department in political science starting in the fall. The exhilaration she was feeling was of the kind that only those about to embark upon one of life's great journeys are privileged to experience.

The letter from Sarah was, in its own right, no less exciting. The two friends had been corresponding since Sarah headed for England to stay with the Brodys and Hilde returned to Denmark. So, Sarah knew of Hilde's uneasiness in having separated from the Jewish refugee community in Sweden. For her part, Hilde knew that Sarah's brother, Werner, had been dating Gwen Braxton, the daughter of family friend and MI6 Deputy Director, Alex Braxton. Hilde was also aware that Gwen's father had told Gwen of her Jewish roots, and that, as a result, she had chosen to study Judaism under the attentive instruction of another family friend, Rabbi Stanley Marcus.

Now, Sarah explained in her letter, Gwen had completed her studies just in time. For, during a trip to the Lake District the preceding week, her infatuated brother had proposed to Gwen and she had accepted. Not only that, Gwen and Werner had decided that a honeymoon in Palestine would be a fitting end to Gwen's studies. They were hoping that Jonathan Sternbloom, who had worked on a *kibbutz* in Palestine as a teenager and who was a close friend of the Brodys' son, Charlie, would be able to attend the wedding. The prospect of Jonathan's attendance looked promising as he was completing his tour of duty as an army medic at the Stelenberg Displaced Persons camp near Munich.

Sarah had closed the letter with a fervent plea that Hilde come to the wedding. Though Hilde did not know the bride, Sarah reminded Hilde that she was practically a member of the Kreisler family. In addition, Sarah assured her that Gwen was very approachable and, equally importantly, eager to talk to Hilde about her Jewish journey.

As Hilde thought about attending Werner's wedding and seeing Sarah, she experienced a moment of panic as she wondered how she would find the funds needed for the journey. Hearing the excitement, her father had entered the room and was surprised to see Hilde's creased brow. When Hilde explained the source of her concern, the elder Hedtoft kissed his daughter tenderly and told her not to worry. "You know that Lorenz Kreisler and I became good friends while you were in the care of the Kreisler family in Sweden. I would never want my daughter to offend him or his family. Declining an invitation to go to his son's wedding would certainly fall into that category. So, whatever it takes, we'll find the means for you go to London."

Two weeks later, Hilde arrived at the Brody household in Golders Green, the suburb favored by many Jewish families from London's middle class. Hilde's arrival could not have been timelier. An issue had arisen with regard to Gwen's wedding dress and none of the women were

able to fix it. Luckily, Hilde had once worked in a milliner's shop and was a reasonably accomplished seamstress. Sarah introduced Hilde to Gwen and, quickly, Hilde had Gwen standing on a pedestal as she pinned and stitched. The chaos of the moment might not have been the most perfect setting for the two to become acquainted. However, what the moment lacked in intimacy, it made up for in comradery. As Hilde worked her magic as a seamstress, the two not only discovered common interests but, in addition, quickly realized they liked one another.

At last, the time came for the celebrants to leave the house for Golders Hill Park where a wedding chuppah awaited the bride and groom. Having fulfilled her responsibilities as the newly anointed house seamstress, Hilde sought out Sarah. However, she quickly realized her friend and the American serviceman, Jonathan Sternbloom, were inseparable. Happy for Sarah, but feeling a little left out, Hilde took her place among the assembled guests and listened to Rabbi Stanley Marcus. Prior to performing the rights as wedding officiant, the rabbi praised Gwen for her dedication to the study of Judaism.

The wedding was a delight in every respect. However, with Sarah totally besotted with Jonathan, Hilde wondered what she would be doing following the ceremony. She didn't have to wonder long as the new bride was heading in her direction with Rabbi Marcus in tow. Happily, Gwen introduced the rabbi to Hilde and then left to return to her other guests.

Hilde would have time to talk to Gwen later in the day. However, for the present, she found herself entranced by the scholarly, but charismatic, rabbi to whom she communicated her interest in Judaism. When they had finished talking, Hilde wished she had had the opportunity to study with Rabbi Marcus, just as Gwen had done. However, as a second best, she was delighted when the rabbi offered to write a letter of recommendation to one of his rabbinic colleagues who was also on the faculty of the University of Paris.

At the reception, Hilde was agape with astonishment as Gwen told her about Werner and her plans for their honeymoon in Palestine. Since Werner's mother was English, Werner had had no difficulty in being designated a British subject. That and the fact that Gwen's father, Alex Braxton, was so highly positioned in the English security establishment had guaranteed them entry to Palestine even as countless refugees were being denied entrance. Even more jaw dropping was the confidence Gwen shared with Hilde that Werner and she might remain in Palestine after their honeymoon.

Gwen's revelation to Hilde, astonishing as it may have been, would not prove to be the big surprise of her visit. One day after Gwen and Werner waived goodbye and headed for the ship that would take them across the Mediterranean, Sarah took Hilde aside. After apologizing for spending so little time with her friend, she confided that she had been in love with Jonathan Sternbloom since her adolescence and now her childhood love and she would be marrying that very week before Jonathan's unit returned to the United States for decommissioning. Then, as soon as Jonathan was settled in medical school in Boston, Sarah would follow and become an American.

Chapter 32

Nuremberg, Germany: A New Assignment September 1945-November 1945

Lester Abelstein's contributions to the War Refugee Board had not gone unnoticed. He had received recognition from virtually every member of the Treasury Department's office of general counsel. Many of his colleagues were planning to show their appreciation at an office party that would generally recognize the conclusion of the Board's work on September 15, 1945 but would specifically honor Lester and two other key staff members.

Lester had continued working with Josiah DuBois, Jr., and their relationship had expanded from the professional to the personal. DuBois had noticed the bounce in Lester's manner after he had started seeing Marcy and had even jokingly observed that, more than intellect, survival in the inscrutable world of the tax law required the confidence provided by a good-looking woman. Surprisingly, the offhand remark, silly as it might have been, made an impression of Lester who began to confide in DuBois. So, it was that DuBois found out how distressed Marcy had been at the news of Elliot being killed in battle.

For several months after Marcy learned of Elliot's death, her distress seemed to increase even as Lester tried every technique he could think of to allay her feelings of guilt. She could not get over her sense of wrongdoing at having begun a relationship with Lester while Elliot was fighting in the war that would ultimately result in his death. In his conversations with DuBois, Lester confided that his efforts were not bearing fruit and that Marcy appeared to be descending deeper into a morass of guilt and self-recrimination.

One day, Lester reported to DuBois that Marcy's father had contacted him. The elder Goldfarb had become so concerned about his daughter's depression that he had decided to pick up stakes and take her back to Atlanta where she would be separated from the people and events that had led to her emotional decline. DuBois could easily see that Lester was badly shaken and that something dramatic was required to avoid Lester falling into his own depressed state. With the termination of the War Refugee Board and the celebration planned for the end of the week, DuBois had an idea.

Though only an assistant general counsel, DuBois' report on the intransigence of the State Department in coming to the aid of European Jewry had earned Morgenthau's appreciation. It had also engendered a request that DuBois not hesitate to ask if Morgenthau could ever be of service. DuBois now intended to test the earnestness of that request. He intended to do so by asking Morgenthau if he could help Lester secure a new position that would both advance his career and be interesting and engaging enough to aid him in taking his mind of Marcy.

Morgenthau had eagerly agreed to help. Soon, he let DuBois know that he had a job in mind for Lester and was working on the details. His efforts proved successful.

Later that week, at the party for the general counsel's office, Morgenthau made a surprise appearance. After a few minutes of praise for all those who had worked on the Wartime Refugee Board, he approached Lester.

With the conclusion of the war in Europe, the Allied victors lost little time in creating the structure and rules for trying those persons responsible for the most notorious actions of the Nazis during the war. The result of their deliberations was the creation of the International Military Tribunal. The Tribunal would be empowered to prosecute five categories of high-ranking offenders for their involvement in crimes against peace, crimes against humanity, war crimes and the waging of aggressive war.

The first set of trials was scheduled to begin in November 1945 and would consider indictments against twenty-one major figures in the Nazi establishment. Five jurists of international renown, headed by Roman Andrejovych Rudenko, Procurator-General of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, would lead the prosecution. The United States prosecutorial delegation would be headed by Associate Supreme Court Justice, Robert H. Jackson. Jackson, in turn would be assisted by lawyers Telford Taylor, William S. Kaplan and Thomas J. Dodd.

Competition for the team of young lawyers who would support Taylor, Kaplan and Todd was predictably intense and the three lawyers had become accustomed to receiving recommendations from highly placed public officials. In turn, they had each been appreciative of the high caliber of young lawyer who would be aiding them when the trial began a few months later in the Bavarian city of Nuremberg. But the sheer volume of resumes and the need for polite responses to the applicants' sponsors was becoming burdensome.

Only William S. Kaplan seemed happy to climb through the small mountain of resumes from highly qualified candidates that had piled up on his desk. Now a partner in a respected Chicago law firm, Kaplan, who was born in the Ukrainian city of Odessa, had come to the United States as a child. Unlike Justice Jackson who had never obtained an undergraduate degree before studying at Albany Law School, Kaplan had both undergraduate and law degrees from the University of Michigan. During the war, he had served as a lieutenant commander in the Navy and had been a trial attorney in US military courts in Greenland.

Three days before the office party Lester would be attending, Morgenthau was focused on his own set of legal resumes, those of the three senior lawyers who would be assisting Justice Jackson in Nuremberg. Morgenthau wished to convey two messages to the right lawyer among the three. First, he wanted to communicate his belief that Germany had to be denied the industrial levers to again wage war even if it meant relegating the country to an agrarian and pastoral way of life. Secondly, he wanted to ensure that Julien Krauss, the accomplished young Jewish lawyer, of whom DuBois had spoken so glowingly would be given a coveted spot on the Nuremberg prosecutorial team.

For what Morgenthau had in mind, the obvious choice was William S. Kaplan whose family's Jewish roots and escape from the anti-Semitism of early twentieth century Ukraine made him the perfect candidate. Kaplan, in turn, was flattered to hear from the man whose name was so closely linked to the accomplishments of the New Deal. A telephone call was scheduled. By the time the two had finished talking, Kaplan had received from Morgenthau a healthy dose of the latter's views on the need for deindustrialization of a potential future German war machine and de-Nazification of the German political establishment. Equally importantly, Morgenthau had persuaded Kaplan that Julien Krauss' tireless efforts on of the War Refugee Board made him an exceptional candidate for Kaplan's staff, despite Julien's lack of prosecutorial experience.

As Morgenthau walked toward Lester at the office party, he could hardly contain his smile. Finally, after a few pleasantries, Morgenthau got down to business. His instincts told him that

Lester would be delighted with what he had to say. However, he could not have anticipated the boundless smile that spread across Lester face as he took in the news that he would be heading to Nuremberg as a member of William S. Kaplan's staff.

For the three months prior to the commencement of the Nuremberg trials, Lester had reason to question whether the assignment of a lifetime he had been so excited to accept was more lifetime than assignment. Holed up in a windowless office, he had been spending twelve hours a day reviewing an endless stream of documents, video clips, photos, depositions, and written testimony. The cascade of evidentiary materials, which included over twenty-five thousand feet of concentration camp film not to speak of millions of documents translated into four languages, filled every available space in Lester's small office. Even if he had had the time and inclination to go outside, the devastation was so pervasive that there was hardly anything of note to see. Although located in the relatively non-industrialized southern part of the country, Nuremberg had been heavily targeted for both strategic and symbolic reasons. In addition to being a central economic and financial center, the city had also served as the hub of Nazi propaganda and identification.

Nuremberg had also been the site of the large annual rallies that celebrated the Nazi party and its claimed achievements. Due to the extensive filming of the annual Nuremberg Rallies and their widespread circulation, the city had served as the hub of Nazi propaganda and identification.

What might once have offered a pleasant escape to the city's nearby Old Town region was no longer an option due to a massive British bombing campaign. In the beginning of 1945, the charming Old Town had been leveled as British bombers unleashed more than six thousand bombs on the undefended city. The bombing raid had left much of the city in ruins, had resulted in more than eight thousand deaths and had displaced more than one hundred thousand of the city's residents.

However, amidst the wreckage, one large complex stood relatively unscathed. Built in the early part of the twentieth century, the Palace of Justice, the *Justizpalast*, stood majestically amidst the ruins of the city. With its many courtrooms and its extensive network of easily defended holding cells, the six story neo-Renaissance structure was a practical choice for the heavily covered war crimes trials that would take place over a period of almost of a year. Moreover, if the Palace's four hundred offices and extensive network of holding cells made the building a suitable locale for the hundreds of officials, lawyers, judges, representatives of the press and defendants who would occupy the facility, Courtroom Six Hundred on the top floor of the building was an excellent choice for the trial itself.

Recently renovated to accommodate the trial, Courtroom Six Hundred could accommodate two hundred and thirty-five members of the press as well as well over one hundred spectators, not to speak of providing space for the judges, lawyers, and defendants. As a member of the United States legal team, a place necessarily existed for Lester. After doing everything humanly possible to help prepare Justice Jackson and his team for the array of cases that lay ahead of them, the day finally arrived in late November for Julien to pass through the ornate alabaster-framed doorway leading to the courtroom.

Once inside, Lester found himself in a magnificently wood-paneled room with an equally ornate ceiling that supported two tremendous chandeliers. As he looked around, he could barely believe the mass of humanity that had been squeezed into every corner of available space.

Chapter 33

Kielce, Poland: The Child and the Riot October 1945-July 1946

Months had gone by since Lili's birth and, against all odds, she had flourished. Quickly, the child's prodigious appetite meant that feeding her by teaspoon was no longer practical. Under such circumstances, many of Elzbieta's neighbors would have used a cow's horn with a chamois covering at the end to feed the child. However, Jochanon had enabled Elzbeita and György to improve upon that traditional technique. He had learned about the feasibility of using a bottle with an artificial nipple and had arranged to receive several from an apothecary in a neighboring community. The new feeding arrangement had proved so efficacious that the child was soon putting on prodigious amounts of weight. Soon she was eating more solid food and interacting engagingly with both her environment and her caregivers.

As Lili progressed from one phase of development to another, Elzbieta was called upon to devote more of her energy to the child's needs. She did so willingly, but György, who was now spending an increasing amount of time at the Kowalewski farm, could see that the effort was taking a toll on Elzbieta who was complaining of shortness of breath. Pretty soon, the need to help Elzbieta became so compelling that György moved into the farmhouse with Elzbieta and the child. The arrangement proved to be therapeutic for both Elzbieta and György, who was regaining the weight he had lost in the camp and whose daily routine was now focused on the bubbly young child. Each morning, before leaving for the field, he fed and played with Lili. While doing his chores, he could not wait for the day to end so he could take over caring for her and attending to her needs. Even getting up during the middle of the night to clean or feed Lily had become a labor of love which György approached uncomplainingly.

On a beautiful early July day when Lili was ten months old, György was watching her navigate around the room, sometimes crawling and sometimes taking a hesitating step or two. Outside, there was a refreshing breeze coming in from the north and György was feeling a sense of calm as he observed the child flirt with the early stages of walking. György had stayed home from the field as Eliezer was coming over for the noonday meal and György wanted to help Elzbieta with the preparation. Soon Eliezer arrived. Looking quite fit, he announced that he had not had a coughing spell for some weeks and wanted to use the lunch to celebrate the return of his health. Happily, all three adults rejoiced in the moment as Lili toddled her way around the room, using each of them as a hand hold.

Suddenly, they all heard yelling from someone who was approaching the farmhouse. György looked out the window and could see that the source of the yelling was coming from Jochanon who was waiving agitatedly as alarming sounds emanated loudly from his mouth. Soon, covered with sweat and breathless, Jochanon swung open the farmhouse door and collapsed onto one of the chairs in the kitchen.

Obviously, something was very wrong. But before Jochanon could speak, György insisted that he catch his breath and drink from a large pitcher of water. Jochanon gulped down the water and then began to gesticulate wildly as fear spread over his face. "The Jewish Community building! It's become a killing field."

Stunned, it took György and Eliezer a moment to react. Walking over to Jochanon, György placed his hands on the distressed man's shoulders and shook him gently. "You're not making sense. Please try to get hold of yourself and explain what's happened."

The feel of György's hands had a salutary effect on Jochanon who immediately calmed down. After composing himself, he began to relate what had happened in as dispassionate a manner as he could, but the effort soon broke down as, sobbingly, he related the occurrences at the Jewish Community building. György again placed his hands on the shoulders of the quaking man and rubbed as soothingly as he could. Finally, Jochanon was able to talk without dissolving into tears.

"There's a family in Kielce named Blaszczyk."

At this, Elzbieta perked up. "Yes, I know of them. They have a little boy of about nine or ten named Henryk."

"Exactly. Well, apparently, Henryk went missing earlier this week. When he returned two days later, he claimed to have been abducted. So, his parents escorted him to the local police station. On the way, they walked by the Jewish Community building. Nearby, a man was walking. Henryk identified him as the person who had taken him and claimed that the man had held him in the basement of the Jewish Community building. We Jews heard many blood libel accusations such as this one before the war and, apparently, the belief systems that gave rise to such canards remained even after most of the Jews in area had been exterminated. In any event, believing that other children were being held in the Jewish Community building, the police were quick to jump to conclusions. Quickly, they put out an alarm, and then organized a large armed contingent to go to the Jewish Community building."

"Surely, they found nothing suspicious there," exclaimed Eliezer, hoping he was right."

"You are correct. Upon their arrival, the police found no abducted children. Equally importantly, they realized that Henryk's story of being held in the basement against his will could not have been true because the building had no basement. Even so, they demanded that the Jewish occupants of the building relinquish their firearms. First, hesitancy and then confusion reigned in the tense atmosphere. Suddenly a fire broke out with the horrible result that several of the occupants of the building were shot to death."

Aghast with what he was hearing, György sighed involuntarily. "No wonder you're so upset. What an awful thing to have taken place."

Jochanon seemed to lose focus as he stared at György for a moment. Then, somehow, he caught himself. "Awful would be the correct way to describe what happened if it had stopped there. But it didn't. The shots inside the building continued and its occupants began fleeing into the street. One of them was able to hide during what came next and then escaped to my shop where, eyes wide with horror, he told me what had happened."

By now, looks of dread were etched on the faces of Jochanon's listeners. Summoning his resolve, Jochanon continued.

As the Jewish occupants fled from the shots being fired inside the building, they encountered a large crowd who had been attracted by the sound of the shooting and the

widespread circulation of Henryk's fictitious accusations. As the helpless occupants of the building tried to escape from the carnage inside the building, the townspeople closed in on them. Angered by what they had heard, the crowd, now lusting for revenge, threw themselves onto the fleeing Jews. As Jew after Jew was beaten to death, the police stood by or actively abetted the murderers. Several priests tried to stop what was taking place, but the police prevented them from doing anything as if Henryk's story had deprived the helpless priests of their religious authority. After it was over, a number of those who had survived the mayhem came to my shop for shelter. They reported that forty-two members of the Jewish Committee building had been killed in the rioting. Worse, they said that some members of the crowd were still roaming the city looking for places where other Jews lived. When I heard this, I left several of the escapees in charge of my shop, hoping it would still be there when I returned, and came here as fast as I could.

For the next two days, György, Eliezer and Jochanon stayed together, not knowing what to expect and wondering whether the carnage was over. On the third day, an official looking black car, bearing the insignia of the Kielce *Voivodeship*, pulled up at the farmhouse. György, Eliezer and Jochanon looked out the window warily as two stern-faced *Voivodeship* officials emerged from the vehicle and made their way to the front door. Relieved that neither man was carrying a weapon, György opened the door and invited the two men to come in.

The men displayed their credentials. They then advised that twelve persons had been arrested in connection with the massacre at the Jewish Community building and that they would be tried in two days. Because Jochanon had spoken with many of the persons who had fled from the scene of the massacre, the officials wanted to know whether he would appear as a corroborating witness. If he was willing, they would give him and one of the other two men a ride back to Jochanon's apothecary which, they assured him, had survived the violence.

At first Jochanon hesitated. But then he remembered being told how the crowd, some swinging iron rods and clubs, had eagerly killed women and children as they swept through the fleeing Jews in an uncontrolled rampage. "Yes. I'll do it." He then turned to György and Eliezer. "Which of the two of you would like to come with me?"

At another time and place, György would have responded unhesitatingly. But then he heard Lili awakening from her nap in the next room and knew he would have to remain behind. "My place is here with Elzbieta and the child. Eliezer, if you are willing, you should be the one to accompany Jochanon." Immediately, Eliezer nodded his assent and, after running over to his farm to assemble a few things to wear, joined Jochanon in the black vehicle.

Jochanon spent the next day at *Voivodeship* headquarters being prepared for the trial. Other witnesses, both Jewish and gentile, had also been assembled in the building and were being questioned in the building's large, open waiting room. As a result, there was little being discussed that was private. As Jochanon listened to the surrounding conversations, he began to realize that much of the talk pertained to whether the attacks had been instigated by outside forces or represented the unvarnished act of Jew haters who lived in the community. As he listened further, he began to wonder whether the prosecutors were planning to recast the riots as something political. Indeed, as they questioned the witnesses, some of the prosecutors were expressing the view that the riots might have been precipitated by members of the anti-Soviet government in exile for the purpose of discrediting the *Voivodeship*. The veins on Jochanon's neck now stood out in anger. Could it be that the *Voivodeship* was trying to sanitize what had happened to deflect the blame from those otherwise ordinary citizens whose age-old hatred of the Jews had turned them

into monsters? He wondered whether justice would really be served and whether he was merely being used as a pawn in a show trial intended to accomplish some political objective.

In the end, Jochanon need not have worried. His testimony and the testimony of the other witnesses was accepted at face value and, after two days of hearings, nine of the twelve men who had been put on trial were sentenced to death, with the other three being given long prison sentences. After the trial, Eliezer joined Jochanon and the two reflected on what had happened.

As they were leaving the courtroom, they were approached by a young man who had attended the trial. He was wearing the vestments of the church and was clearly a man of the cloth. Jochanon immediately recognized the priest as he had recently been to Jochanon's shop to ask for advice about a digestive problem he had been having.

Jochanon greeted the priest who returned the favor with a welcoming smile and an ingratiating greeting. "Aha! Here's the man who helped cure my stomach problem."

"I'm glad you're feeling better."

"Physically, yes. Spiritually, no. I want you to know that I was sickened by what happened at the Jewish Community building. Two of my fellow priests and I were there. We tried to help, but there was nothing we could do to stop the crowd. I have since thought about ways I might be able to make amends."

Now both Eliezer and Jochanon stood at total attention, wondering what the priest had to say.

"Perhaps carrying out the sentences meted out today will do something to assuage the fears of those who, like you, escaped the riots. But I doubt it. Indeed, we have already heard talk within the Jewish community that there is no longer any reason to remain in Kielce and that the time has come to say goodbye to Poland."

Jochanon was not sure where the conversation was going and made an effort to speak. However, the young priest beckoned him to listen.

"Frankly, I wouldn't blame you or any other Jew in the community for leaving. The problem is that some of the perpetrators who killed your people are still at large and I have heard that as many as thirty Jews have been pulled off the trains and murdered as they tried to leave the country. I just want to say that, if you are thinking of leaving, I would be honored to ride with you on the train as far as Krakow and offer you the protection of my calling. It's about a two-hour train ride and should be far enough from here to keep you out of harm's way. I know my cassock didn't get me very far during the riots. However, if you wish to leave, I am prepared to do whatever it takes to get you out of the country safely. I don't believe these people, thugs though they may be, will be willing to harm you if I place myself in their path. Think it over. If you think I would be of help, please get in touch with me at the Church of the Holy Mother."

Chapter 34

New Orleans, Louisiana and Washington, DC: Nuptials and Law School May 1945—August 1946

Late May was uncommonly dry in New Orleans that year. It was the perfect weather for eighteen holes of golf and Vance was enjoying himself immensely as Pam's father, Horace, explained the idiosyncrasies of the more challenging greens at the Touro Golf Club. The club had been founded by Jewish merchants in the 1920's who had found themselves unwelcome at the gentile venues. It was named in honor of Judah Touro, a Jewish businessman who had arrived in New Orleans from Rhode Island in 1801. Capitalizing on his contacts in the northeast, Touro had built a substantial business as a broker of goods made in New England and Europe. He was not an active member of the then fledgling New Orleans Jewish community, but, on his death in 1854, he had left a large part of his estate to Jewish causes within the city.

Jews had not always encountered hostility in New Orleans. During the latter part of the Eighteenth Century when the territory was controlled by the Spaniards, the few Jews who had earlier made their way to Louisiana were expelled. However, once France regained control of Louisiana from the Spaniards in the latter part of the Eighteenth Century, attitudes changed.

Following the Louisiana Purchase in 1815, New Orleans experienced a period of explosive growth. Among those who arrived in the city were a number of Jewish merchants, many of whom had arrived from the northeast. They experienced little resistance from the city's largely Catholic inhabitants who, in their own right, had experienced discrimination from the country's Protestant establishment and who were more interested in promoting growth than worrying about the city's new Jewish residents. Soon, the more successful of these early Jewish merchants had transformed their modest store fronts into large department stores. They had also looked out for the less affluent within their community.

By the beginning of the Civil War, more than two hundred and fifty thousand immigrants had entered the port of New Orleans, among these more than two thousand Jews. Often these early Jewish immigrants became itinerant peddlers who carried their merchandise on their backs as they sold their wares to the underserved rural countryside. Armed with credit from their more successful Jewish counterparts, the peddlers acquired wagons and buggies that enabled them to expand their offerings and increase their profits. Soon, a number had leapfrogged from poverty to success as they expanded their businesses. Over time, Jews could be found in the city's cotton exchanges and in some of its most exclusive clubs. There had even been a Jewish United States Senator from New Orleans in the person of Judah P. Benjamin, an immigrant from the West Indies, who had also served as a cabinet member in the Confederacy.

However, toward the end of the 19th century, an influx of more religious Jews who were less inclined toward assimilation had started arriving from eastern Europe. Their German Jewish predecessors had been as interested in building civic institutions within the city as they were in building Jewish institutions. However, the newer Jews were more interested in establishing places of worship and a Jewish environment. In addition, their arrival also coincided with the social upheaval following the Civil War.

Whether due to a dislike of the newcomers or the anti-Semitism that had suddenly become ascendant in the decades following the war, New Orleans society cut itself off from its Jewish population. In response, the Jewish community created new Jewish social institutions such as the

celebrated Harmony Club that served the needs of the city's Jewish elite. The Turo Golf Club was another such example. The clubhouse had been modeled after the famous Quaker Ridge Golf Club, the Jewish club in Scarsdale, New York, where Jewish luminaries such as Louis Gimbel, Samuel Bloomingdale, Alfred Knopf and George Gershwin were members and could swing a golf club without having to worry about acceptance from their judgmental gentile counterparts. As with the Quaker Ridge Golf Club, the clubhouse at Turo was Tudor in design with a brick façade and a multi-colored slate roof. It boasted two dining rooms, two bars, four fireplaces and a sumptuous pool and cabana area. Also, like the Quaker Ridge course, Turo's greens were long and posed many challenges.

Despite not playing at his best, Vance enjoyed himself immensely as Ira regaled him with stories about both Jewish and political life in the city. Ira's law career had brought him in touch with many of the city's most colorful political figures and he enjoyed talking about his exploits. Inevitably, the conversation got around to Pam and Jimmy whose wedding would take place at the club in two days.

After a particularly satisfying hole, Vance turned to Ira. "Jimmy tells me you've offered him a job once he completes law school."

"Jimmy would do wonders for my firm, and, in turn, it would provide him with a solid steppingstone for anything he might want to do in New Orleans. However, I'm not sure he's interested. I tried to persuade him to attend Tulane Law School in the fall. It's a natural for people who want to practice Louisiana law which is based more on French civil law than English common law. But, as you know, Jimmy has opted for Georgetown where he can be closer to national politics. I'm still hoping he might show up at my doorstep next summer after his first year of school. At the moment, however, the only thing in which he's expressed interest is an internship with a Senate committee."

"That might be a little hard to come by, even for a decorated veteran like Jimmy."

"You're right. However, as much as I hate to lose him, I've already put some machinery in motion with Senator Allen Ellender's office that might help him with his goal."

Vance could not help but be surprised that his son's future father-in-law might have connections with a United States senator. "Ellender! How does he enter the picture?"

"Try not to get too impressed because it's not that big a deal. Earlier in his career, before he became speaker of the Louisiana House of Representatives, I helped Ellender out of a legal jam. Of course, his career took off after the death of Huey Long. Now, as a veteran United States Senator, he holds senior positions on both the Senate Agriculture and Senate Appropriations Committee. I can't say we're close friends or anything like that, and I'm not happy with his uncompromising position on segregation, but I'm in touch with his Senate office through my involvement with the Democratic Party. I'm hoping I can call in a few chits and, with Ellender's influence, get Jimmy a Senate internship after his first year of law school."

Jimmy couldn't wait for his wedding night. He had completed his conversion lessons just before graduation and was feeling good about his new religion. He was particularly happy that Rabbi Amsterdam, with Pam's enthusiastic approval, had agreed to come to New Orleans to officiate at the wedding. Two days later, after the ceremony, Pam and Jimmy sat in their hotel

room, drinks in hand. They had consummated their marriage lustily and satisfyingly and they were now in the mood to reflect on the night's events.

Pam nuzzled up to Jimmy and kissed the corner of his mouth. "Do you think it went well? Do you think your family was happy?"

"From my point of view, it was the greatest night of my life, even though I was so busy accepting congratulations I hardly had a chance to eat. I think my parents enjoyed it as well, largely due to the wonderful job done by Rabbi Amsterdam. It was a great touch on his part to ask to meet with them before the ceremony and explain what they might expect. I also thought he hit just the right notes, minimizing the Jewish aspects of my conversion in favor of telling everyone how happy he had been to get to know both of us during my religious journey. What do you think?"

"I couldn't agree more, although I did have to hold my breath as our friends lifted your mother in her chair during the *Horah*. I don't think I've ever heard anyone scream so much. But, in the end she seemed to love it. It was also wonderful having Rita as my maid of honor and I think your parents really appreciated the gesture."

"I'm with you a hundred percent. I don't think I've ever seen my sister so happy. What about your parents?"

"Are you kidding. They loved it and I think they're really happy with you joining the family. I know dad's very excited that he might be able to help you get a Senate internship next summer."

The internship had indeed come through. After a successful first year at Georgetown Law, Jimmy had won praise from his teachers. Their letters of recommendation had helped cement Senator Ellender's endorsement, with the result that Jimmy had won a coveted summer position on the newly constituted Senate Armed Services Committee. It had not been all work, as Pam and he had easily become part of the young Washington social scene and had spent many a humid DC night in the company of numerous new friends. As the end of the summer approached, Jimmy was called into the office of the Committee's staff director and commended for his work. He was also asked whether he would like to continue as a part time staffer during the academic year.

Under the streamlined committee system envisioned by the pending Legislative Reorganization Act, the Armed Services Committee would soon have greater responsibilities and an enlarged staff with which to implement its enhanced oversight authority. With an eye on the Committee's expanded jurisdiction and greater budget, not to speak of the need to address the emerging threat from the Soviet Union, Jimmy could not believe his good fortune and, of course, had said yes.

Chapter 35

Kielce, Poland and Nice, France: The Path Taken July 1946-December 1947

After their brief encounter with the young priest, Eliezer and Jochanon returned to the apothecary to take stock of the trial and where they stood. For a short while, neither was willing to speak for fear of stating the obvious. But, then Jochanon spoke. “That which we witnessed today was a sham trial. There were no words of conciliation or assurance directed to the Jewish community—just a transparent effort by the *Voivodeship* to look good by acting sternly toward some of the perpetrators.”

“Agreed.

Jochanon nodded dolefully as he continued. “Not only that, but we also know from the priest that there are marauding elements who are still bent on wreaking havoc on the Jewish community. To me, it means the end of our short experiment in returning to the country that witnessed the slaughter of more than three million of our fellow Jews. There is no place for us here and the sooner we all make plans to leave, the better.”

“But where would we go,” intoned Eliezer. America is closed off due to restrictive immigration laws and the British are still preventing refugees from entering Palestine.”

“America is too far away. However, I’m putting my money on Palestine. England can’t hold on forever and probably doesn’t want to do so in the face of the massive amount of effort required to rebuild its home territory. Already, there are signs that the days of the British Raj are numbered.”

“Reluctantly, I agree. I know how committed you have been to reestablishing roots in Poland. Now, all of that is a pipedream. There are places in Europe where Jews might feel secure. But there are too many bad memories here. I’m prepared to make a fresh start and head for Palestine.

Eliezer left the apothecary deep in thought. As he made the long trek back to the Kowalewski farm, he wondered what György would say. He didn’t have long to wait as György greeted him eagerly as soon as stepped through the door. Painstakingly, Eliezer took him through each step of the trial and how there had been no statements of remorse conveyed to the Jewish community. He then described Jochanon’s and his short conversation with the young priest and what they had discussed afterward at Jochanon’s apothecary.

György sat quietly and motionless during Eliezer’s entire presentation. When his friend finished his report, György gloomily asked only one question. “Are Jochanon and you sure you want to go to Palestine?”

“After the rioting, I’m not sure of anything. But yes. We intend to take up the priest on his offer and leave for Greece as soon as possible. From there, we hope to find work on a ship heading for Haifa and then abandon the ship on land while the crew is unloading the ship’s cargo. What about you. Coming with us would be the smart thing to do.”

György's mind was now flooded with competing and irreconcilable thoughts. "I don't know. What you say makes sense."

"Then, you agree?" inquired Eliezer hesitatingly, as he guessed what was going on in György's head.

György knew he could not hold back his innermost thoughts any longer. "The two of you should do as you plan. However, look at Elzbieta. I've seen hollow-eyed looks such as hers in the camp. She's not doing well and worsening by the day. Someone has to stay with the baby and I'm that person. I just can't leave her."

Half awake, half asleep, Elzbieta had been listening to the conversation. Now she spoke. "György, you're obviously right. I'm not doing well. But I don't draw the same conclusion from my circumstances as you do."

"What do you mean?"

"Simply this. As my health has declined, you've been spending increasing amounts of time with Lili. We both know I wouldn't stand a chance taking care of her on my own. By the same token, I don't want to deprive you of leaving this hateful city if that's what you want. So, what I propose is that you leave and take Lili with you. The authorities won't mind as you will be removing the illegitimate offspring of an illicit union. You should go as quickly as possible. I have some money saved up which you've earned. You can use it for train passage with Lili."

György couldn't collect his thoughts fast enough. He had not dared raising the issue of taking Lili with him and now Elzbieta was encouraging him to leave with the girl. "But, what of you? You can't stay here by yourself!"

"I don't intend to. I've been in touch with my cousin in Warsaw. She lives alone and has an extra room she would like me to use. I could help her pay the rent and she could look after me if I need attention."

Emotion overtook György as he swept Elzbieta into his arms. "I promise you I'll protect the child as I would have with my own dear Lili."

"I know you will. Will you be joining Eliezer and Jochanon as they head toward Palestine?"

György hadn't thought through the question, but as he observed Eliezer's inquiring gaze, the answer suddenly came to him.

"The child is too young. I can't subject her to the uncertainty of a trip so fraught with peril."

"But where would you go instead? So much of the continent bears the imprint of the Nazis or there many collaborators."

"In the DP camp, we often speculated on where we might go. Of all the untidy options, France seemed to be the best place."

"But, where in France?"

“Frankly, I have no good ideas. However, I was thinking that a nice Mediterranean locale might be nice. I remember hearing that the Jews of Nice fared reasonably well, at least while the area was occupied by the Italians. So, I think that’s where I’ll head.”

Two days later, György, Eliezer and Jochanon met the priest at the train station. The young cleric looked quizzically at Lili but decided to hold his counsel. As promised, he rode with the foursome to Krakow. Aside from a few curious stares, the trip was uneventful. At the train station in Krakow, everyone thanked the priest, as he wished them Godspeed. Then, teary eyed, the three adults embraced one another wordlessly. Soon, Eliezer and Jochanon were heading for the train to Budapest where they would make a connection to Athens. As they did so, György, laden with baby clothes, food, and supplies, picked up Lili and headed for the train to Genoa where they would connect with the train for Nice and the final leg of their uncertain journey.

According to the train schedule, the trip from Krakow to Nice would take a little over a day. For much of that time, the train would be traveling through the German speaking regions of Czechoslovakia and Austria before veering southwest through Italy and then on to the French Mediterranean coastline. On the longer stops in the Germanic speaking areas, György was able to obtain food for Lili and himself without having to deal with a language barrier. However, shortly after Genoa, the train reached its terminus at the Italian town of Ventimiglia on the Bay of Genoa, requiring that György make arrangements for the last leg of the journey. Unfortunately, the German speakers at the train station had left for their noon day meal, leaving György to fend for himself. The process had taken so long that György had not had time to purchase provisions for Lili.

Now on the train bound for Nice, György would have liked to look out the window and sightsee. However, his attention was turned toward Lili. The child had been content through most of the trip. But she was now showing signs of hunger and began to act cranky. One of the passengers who had gotten on the train at Ventimiglia was a middle- aged nurse. She was across the aisle from György and Lili where she could see that Lili’s cries were becoming more persistent. She decided to offer her assistance and inquired whether the child might need food. Understandably, she asked in French. When György failed to acknowledge her question, she asked in Italian and German, at which point György’s face lit up.

György acknowledged that Lili was probably hungry, and the nurse obliged by dipping into her lunch basket and pulling out several pieces of fruit and cheese which she proceeded to cut into small pieces. As soon as Lili’s belly was full, she calmed down immediately and fell asleep in György’s arms. Both György and the nurse, whose name was Beatrice, used the quiet as an opportunity to strike up a conversation. Beatrice, who had seen much hardship during the war, listened attentively and sympathetically as György told her about the riots in Kielce and his plan to find refuge within the Jewish community in Nice.

When Beatrice asked if György had relatives or friends in Nice, he suddenly felt overcome by the reality of his situation and was forced to admit that he knew no one. Beatrice had encountered many refugees and wasn’t about to let György down. “I’m actually heading for Saint-Tropez, which is a few stops beyond Nice. However, the trains run frequently between Nice and Saint-Tropez, and, if you’ll allow me, I’ll get off at Nice so I can be of assistance. There, I can speak French and help you make a connection with the Jewish community of Nice.

True to her word, Beatrice only needed a few minutes with the officials at the Nice visitors center to arrange for György to connect with the city’s Jewish leaders. One half hour later, a car pulled up to the front entrance of the visitors’ center and its occupants began walking toward

György and Lili. As Bernard and Colette Krauss approached, the staunch survivor of Buchenwald, Föhrenwald, and Kielce, suddenly fell into Bernard's arms and cried piteously.

Now that Gabrielle was at school, her room and a spare room were both unoccupied. To help György make the transition into his new life, Bernard and Colette invited Lily and him to stay with them until he was able to find a place of his own. The arrangement proved salutary for all parties concerned as Colette took an immediate liking to the golden-haired child who had newly arrived in her life and György benefitted from being in an environment where French was spoken.

Despite his severely limited vocabulary, György was able to find work as an engineer almost immediately, as those buildings and roads in the city requiring reconstruction offered an almost endless array of opportunities. Further, with Colette spending so much time with Lili, György was spared the worry and inconvenience of finding a care giver for the child.

In his off hours, György delighted in walking along the sunbaked shores of the Mediterranean, taking Lili with him wherever he went. In time, both of their complexions turned a golden brown and György continued to add weight to his six-foot two frame. The transformation was not lost on the Krausses who marveled at how much György, whose native good looks were now quite obvious, had improved in appearance since arriving in the city with nothing but a small child in his arms. They, of course, had wondered about György's relationship to Lili. But so much had taken place during the war, they had chosen not to pry until the right opportunity presented itself. Instead, they had accepted György's explanation that Lili's mother had died, without asking more about György's relationship to the mother.

György had heard about Gabrielle and Leon and their university studies. In turn, Bernard and Colette had told their daughter about their new borders over the phone and then had told her more about György and Lili when they visited Gabrielle in early fall.

It was important that Leon remain at school without interruption to obtain the maximum benefit from the special program for the deaf in which he was enrolled. For the first semester, Gabrielle didn't want to leave him alone. So, she had not returned to Nice until December when both Leon and she were on break.

Excitedly, she couldn't wait to meet her parents two boarders, especially the high-spirited Lili. From her parents, she knew the child's lively manner was exceeded in enthusiasm only by her preternatural talent for picking up new words and babbling them endlessly. Now, as her father opened the door to the apartment, she had her first taste of the vivacious young girl as Lili ran toward Bernard and launched herself into his arms. After a few minutes of snuggling and hugging, Bernard asked Gabrielle if she would like to hold the eighteen-month-old. Eagerly, Gabrielle agreed. As Gabrielle held the child, their eyes locked in an affectionate appraisal of one another. Observing the bonding that was taking place, Bernard marveled at how quickly Gabriele and Lili had connected.

Bernard was not alone in his observation. Unnoticed, György had been sitting in the corner of the room when Gabrielle arrived. Now, György watched with curious fascination as Gabrielle and Lili rubbed noses so effortlessly that they might have known one another forever. It was not the only thing György noticed. The Krausses had not said very much about their daughter other than describing her unselfish devotion to Leon. So, György had not had cause to create an image of her in his mind. Now, as he looked at the lean, hazel-eyed twenty-year old who was holding Lili,

he wondered why Bernard and Colette had been so taciturn when it came to their daughter. She was in a word, lovely.

After a short time, Leon returned to school so as not to interrupt the continuity his teachers regarded as essential. However, Gabrielle no longer believed that Leon required her constant companionship to progress and decided to remain with her family until her classes resumed the following month. Lili had now moved in with György so that Gabrielle could have her room while she was home. But that was the only separation that existed between Gabrielle and the child. During the day while György was at work, Gabrielle spent countless hours with the loquacious and sparkly young child, teaching her new words, reading her stories, and taking her for walks.

György now knew enough French to communicate with Gabrielle, albeit in an elementary fashion, when he was not at work. Together, they spent weekend afternoons taking Lili for walks and trips to the local playground. If anything, György's first impression of Gabrielle had been reinforced many times over. Eagerly, he observed the carefree way she swung her arms as they walked and delighted in the way her face brightened as she interacted with Lili.

Gabrielle could not have been more pleasant. From time to time, György even detected her stealing an admiring glance or two at him, smiling appreciatively as she did. However, György sensed she was holding back. When it came to intimacy, Gabrielle only appeared to have eyes for the baby.

Too soon, Gabrielle's winter break was over. Before she left, Gabrielle insisted that György agree to write often so he could keep her posted on Lili's progress and even send a picture now and then from the new camera he had purchased.

True to his word, György had begun corresponding with Gabrielle almost from the moment she left. At first, their letters had focused almost entirely on Lili, as Gabrielle had requested. Then, whether inadvertently or otherwise, something happened, and they began writing about themselves and asking one another personal questions. Politely, Gabrielle soon began inquiring about Lili's background. To his surprise, György felt comfortable in taking a chance and writing about the circumstances of Daria's pregnancy and how she had died while giving birth to Lili. He then waited for Gabrielle's response, wondering how she would react to his disclosure.

In fact, György's disclosure had touched Gabrielle deeply. Surprisingly, it had also felt liberating. The fact that Lili was an orphan and not György's daughter by another woman suddenly opened a floodgate and pent-up thoughts came rushing through—thoughts that led to György. Soon, she wrote her reply.

Receiving a letter from Gabrielle had now become a major event in his life. Eagerly, he opened the letter and began to read. Most of the letter was inconsequential, but György could not stop himself from reading over and over the few lines that applied to Lily:

I'm so glad you told me about Lili. No child deserves to come into the world the way she did. I love Lili and I'll do anything I can to make her happy. You are such a wonderful person to have rescued her the way you did. The way you relate to her—it couldn't be more loving.

When György finally willed himself to stop reading the passage, he decided to do something he thought he would never again be capable of doing—he would tell Gabrielle about his time at Auschwitz and the loss of his wife and the baby girl after whom Lili had been named. It took a few

moments to calm himself and steady his trembling hand. But soon he was pouring out thoughts that he had held at bay since that awful day in June of 1944:

I was very touched by your reaction to my revelation about Lili. Your instincts were closer than you may have realized. As you know, I'm Hungarian. I had married in the fall of 1942 and one year later, my wife, Rozalie, gave birth to a baby girl whom I adored. But my joy was tempered by the fact that we were living in perilous times. While the Nazis held their own, our leaders remained loyal allies of the Reich. But then as word of a possible Allied landing in France began to leak out, these same leaders decided they had had enough and tried to change their allegiance. Unfortunately, Hitler found out about the negotiations and invaded Hungary in late March of 1944.

We Hungarian Jews had been lucky until then. But only a month after the Nazis occupied the country, the deportations began. On a grim day in May 1944 that will forever be etched in my mind, the Nazis came for my family. They were remorseless as they took us to the railroad yard and then stuffed my wife, Rosalie, our baby girl and me into a boxcar overcrowded with other unfortunate Jews. When we arrived at Auschwitz, stone-faced armed guards let us out of the fetid boxcar. There had been so little air in the boxcar that our baby girl was already having difficulty breathing. Under the glare of blinding lights, they marched us to a staging area. There, I saw my wife and child for the last time as the Nazi monsters separated Rosalie and me and tore my beloved child from my arms. I managed to survive because my size made me useful as a slave laborer. My wife and daughter perished. My baby's name was Lili.

Lili's grandmother—that is, the child you know as Lili—is a woman named Elzbieta. She cared for the baby but was too ill to give her the care she required. So, I took over most of the baby's chores. I also told Elzbieta what had happened to my own child at Auschwitz. When she saw how much I cared for her granddaughter, she asked if it would be okay to name her Lili in honor of my own child. I agreed.

Gabrielle felt she had been hit by a brick when she read György's description of what had taken place at Auschwitz. However, it only served to reinforce her feelings of affection for Lili and her growing admiration of György. More importantly, the revelation of György's innermost thoughts had now made it easier for her to reveal some of the her own intimate musings.

Remember our many walks with Lili? You may have thought I spent the time walking with you so I could be near Lili. That, however, would not be the truth. Of course, I loved being with Lili. But it was you I really wanted to be near. I think you sensed my feelings as you continually caught me looking at you. The problem is I didn't know what to do.

I have spent most of my growing up years helping my deaf cousin Leon. I don't regret it. But it meant that I never had a chance to interact with boys other than with a libidinous young guard on the Swiss border whose sexual cravings, and my response, were the reason we were able to enter Switzerland where we were refugees for almost two years. The Swiss are nice. But they are also very inbred, and we were strangers. So socializing was out of the question. As a result, when it

comes to boys, I have had difficulty expressing my feelings. However, right from the start, I've known how I feel about you. Now that you've shared so much about yourself, I want to do the same and tell you I'm counting the days until I return home for the summer so I can be with you.

Soon the semester ended, and Gabrielle was back in Nice. She lost no time in affirming everything she had written in her letter. Her walks with Lili and György were now a time to hold hands, kiss, and dream. With each lingering kiss, Gabrielle's and György's affection for one another continued to grow. One evening around twilight as they were walking along an unpopulated part of the beach, Gabrielle turned to György and brought his face to hers. As they kissed, György's hands roamed exploringly until they rested on Gabrielle's breasts. Gabrielle's excitement was unmistakable. With each stroke of György's hands, Gabrielle became alive with desire. The hardening sensation of György pressing against her thighs increased her need. Moaning in a way she had never experienced, Gabrielle placed her hands on those of her lover, encouraging him to explore further. As he felt her wetness, György tenderly lowered Gabrielle to the sand. Relaxed but electric with excitement, Gabrielle urged György on. Ignited by his own need, György required no encouragement. When it was over, the two lovers remained entwined on the sand not wanting anything to interfere with what they had just experienced. Though they would repeat their love making many times that summer, neither would ever forget that night on the beach.

Bernard and Colette had no difficulty in observing what was taking place between their daughter and György. They had grown to admire and respect György and they had no reservations about the budding romance. However, as the new school year approached, they worried that Gabrielle's need to be with György might interfere with her schooling. So, one August day while György was at work, they asked their daughter about her plans to return to school.

Gabrielle had been thinking about the inevitability of their questions and she was prepared. "I don't want to return."

Bernard and Colette looked at one another with concern. "If you're worried about not seeing György, we can make our car available to him on weekends so he can visit you."

"It's true that I don't want to be away from György. But that's not the real reason."

Surprised, the faces of Gabrielle's parents projected the befuddlement they were feeling. "Then, what is it?"

"Didn't you tell me that seventy-five thousand of our fellow Frenchmen were deported to the camps where they were slaughtered?"

Bernard hesitated to respond, not knowing where the conversation was going. So, he decided to temporize. "That's true. But many honorable Frenchmen in the underground helped save countless numbers of their fellow Jews."

"I agree. But didn't you also tell me that the Vichy government, without any compulsion from the Nazis, enacted a series of oppressive laws that deprived Jews of positions in the French civil service and the professions."

“I’m afraid so. For every Frenchman who supported the Jews, there probably were a much greater number who supported and enabled the oppressive tactics of the Vichy government. But what does all of this have to do with your returning to school?”

“With everything that has happened to us Jews both here and in other countries in Europe, I thought Leon and I would receive a sympathetic response from our fellow students. But instead, we experienced undisguised stares and denigrating aspersions. At first, I thought we were being snubbed because of Leon’s disability. Then, I thought it might be because so many people think that we Jews are communists.”

“Trying to ease his daughter’s mind, Bernard interjected: “There is a lot of communist hysteria around the country. Even before he resigned last year, de Gaulle, who did not like Communists, found it necessary to appoint Communists to five out of twenty-two ministry positions in his administration.”

“I know about that. I also know that Leon Blum, who was Jewish and served as Prime Minister of France on three separate occasions, was a socialist and had, as a young man, joined the French Section of the Workers' International. But then something else happened that made me believe the real reason for the contempt and ridicule I was experiencing was simply because I was Jewish.”

Now, Bernard was alarmed and motioned for his daughter to continue.

“I’m sure you know about Maurice Papon’s excesses during the war!”

“A despicable man. As secretary general of the Vichy police, he was single-handedly responsible for the deportation of almost sixteen hundred Jews to the camps. How de Gaulle could have named a man with such blood on his hands as one of his ministers, I’ll never know.”

“Correct. Well, as it turns out, Papon has a niece named Léonie who was one of my classmates. Léonie and I were competitive, but still I thought we were friends. Then, one day, we got test results back from biology class. Léonie had gotten a C and was grumbling about her grade. I had gotten an A, but I had no intention of showing off because I knew she was disappointed. Even so, she grabbed my test paper and saw that I had received an A. I expected her to congratulate me. But instead, I saw hatred in her eyes and, suddenly, she flew into a rage. When I tried to calm her, her only response was, “I wish my uncle hadn’t stopped at sixteen hundred.”

The conversation had left Bernard and Colette shocked and had taken all the steam out of their plan to insist that Gabrielle return to the university. In addition, Bernard was happy to have a trusted helper to assist him with his perfume business and his overseas interests.

For Gabrielle, the passing months were a time of indescribable joy as György, Lili and she spent every spare moment together. Finally, in early November, György asked Bernard for Gabrielle’s hand in marriage. Happily, the elder Krauss gave his enthusiastic consent.

Neither György nor Gabrielle wanted to wait to get married. It was still warm in southern France and the engaged couple decided to have an outdoor wedding at a nearby lake. The location was convenient and beautiful. In addition, they had told the presiding rabbi they planned to adopt Lili and wanted her to be converted to Judaism as part of the wedding ceremony. Because there were no mikvahs available in Nice for the necessary ablution, the rabbi had said an immersion in

a lake would suffice. György and Gabrielle were apprehensive when it came time for Lily to be immersed in the lake's cool waters, even though Gabrielle would be holding the child at all times. Their fears were for naught. As future mother and daughter came up shivering from the cold water, they both started laughing and giggling uncontrollably.

With the end of the war, England struggled with the future of Palestine and its population of one million two hundred thousand Arabs and six hundred thousand Jews. Under the auspices of a newly convened Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry, the British labored to provide a workable solution for the competing claims of the two population groups. One of the Committee's first efforts was a federalization proposal. Denominated the Morrison-Grady Plan, the plan had been named after its creators, the British Deputy Prime Minister Herbert Morrison and his counterpart, the US diplomat Henry F. Grady. Under the terms of the plan, the Jewish and Arab areas would exercise a degree of self-rule over the areas they occupied, but under British oversight. By contrast, Jerusalem and the Negev would remain under direct British control. The Arab parties, who believed that any provisional authority granted to the Jews, would ultimately lead to partition, rejected the proposal. At a meeting of the World Jewish Congress in Basle during December 1946, the representatives also rejected the Morrison-Grady Plan's provisions for limited provisional autonomy. Further, despite the plan's endorsement by the United States' designated representative, it was ultimately rejected by President Harry S. Truman.

Following the demise of the Morrison-Grady Plan, British Prime Minister Clement Atlee, at the request of various Arab interests, convened a conference to further evaluate the future of Palestine and prepare for the end of the British Mandate. The ensuing conference, known as the London Conference, consisted of two sessions that took place between September 1946 and February 1947. The Conference again produced a trusteeship with expanded, though still limited, autonomy for the parties. And, as with the proposed Morrison-Grady Plan, the London Conference proposal was ultimately rejected by both Arabs and Jews. On February 14, 1947, the British foreign secretary announced that England was unable to resolve the competing claims to Palestine. In consequence, it would refer resolution of the impasse to the United Nations. The United Nations accepted responsibility and, on May 15, 1947, convened a new deliberative committee—the Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP).

As both the Arab and Jewish worlds waited impatiently, UNSCOP strove to arrive at a solution that would balance the Jewish world's yearning for a place of refuge in its historic homeland with the Arab world's unalterable opposition to any recognized Jewish presence in Palestine. On September 3, 1947, UNSCOP issued its report recommending an end to the British Mandate and the partition of Palestine. Two weeks later, England announced it would terminate its Mandatory Authority over Palestine on May 14, 1948. All that remained was for the United Nations to take up the recommendation of UNSCOP and vote on the partition recommendation.

Originally, the partition vote was scheduled to take place around the time György and Gabrielle had planned to exchange their wedding vows at the lake. However, the vote was delayed out of concern it might not pass. Then, following a furious diplomatic campaign spearheaded by the United States and after the newlyweds had returned to Nice from the lake area, the partition resolution was scheduled for a vote on November 29.

The vote was broadcast throughout the world by radio. Among the anxious listeners on that historic day were the Krauss family. When the final tally of thirty-three votes in favor of partition,

thirteen opposed and ten abstentions, including England, was finally announced, Bernard, Collette, György and Gabrielle leapt from their chairs and screamed in a wild display of exultation.

For Bernard and Collette, their jubilation would soon turn bittersweet. One month after the vote on partition, Gabrielle, still wounded from the anti-Semitic hatred she had experienced at the university, announced to her parents that György, Lili and she would soon be leaving for Palestine.

Chapter 36

Nuremberg, Germany: An Unexpected Adversary November 1945-September 1947

As Lester observed the Judges bench, the many members of the press and the spectator area that was buzzing with excitement, his eyes finally focused on the twenty-three defendants who had been identified as the most heinous architects, administrators and perpetrators of the worst war the world had ever known. But, as the text of the three indictments showed, it was not merely their involvement in the war that was of interest to the judges, it was also their roles as masterminds and administrators of crimes against humanity. After years of the worst campaign of barbarity ever inflicted by one people against another, the twenty-three defendants who now sat in the courtroom would finally be held accountable for the crimes they had committed against Jews whose only offense was to be born into families defined by the *Reich* as Jewish.

Hitler and two of his foremost aides, Heinrich Himmler and Joseph Goebbels, had each committed suicide so they could not be brought to trial. However, among the defendants sitting in the courtroom were many of Hitler's most loyal associates--monstrous human beings who had mercilessly sent millions to hideous deaths. These included Hermann Göring, second in command to Hitler, Hans Frank, the official in charge of occupied Poland, Rudolf Hess, the number two official in the Nazi Party, Joachim von Ribbentrop, Hitler's foreign minister, Alfred Rosenberg, the governor of the occupied eastern territories, and Fritz Sauckel, the head of the Nazi forced labor program.

Because of his inexperience, Lester would continue to play a supportive role during the trial, although as time went on he was entrusted with increasingly more important tasks such as interviewing witnesses, taking depositions and preparing questions for William S. Kaplan to use during his interrogations. Once out of his airless cubicle and sitting among some of the greatest luminaries of his profession, Lester's excitement and fascination was almost boundless. In the end, the Tribunal would hand down death sentences against twelve of the defendants (including Martin Bormann who was tried in absentia), life imprisonment against three of the defendants and lengthy prison terms against four others.

However, what captured Lester's attention was the masterful defense employed by the lawyers who represented the three defendants who were acquitted. Under the terms of the indictment, all of the defendants were charged with three offenses. The first was crimes against peace and included the planning, preparation, initiation and waging of a war of aggression. The second set of offense focused on violations of the laws or customs of war, such as the murder, ill-treatment or deportation of civilian populations not justified by military necessity. The third was crimes against humanity and included any inhumane acts committed against any civilian population.

Most of the defense lawyers had argued that the indictments created war crimes after the fact and should not be applied retroactively. However, the lawyers for the three defendants who were ultimately acquitted had argued that the terms of the indictments did not apply to their clients. Of the lawyers for those defendants, Lester was most fascinated with Herbert Kraus and Rudolph Dix, the two attorneys who represented defendant Hjalmar Schacht.

Schact was quite accomplished as a financier and economist. His lawyers acknowledged he wasn't beyond criticism for having served in a succession of German positions. But they also argued that, neither by act or intention, was Schact's actions so despicable as to fit within the terms of the indictment. Fascinated, Lester watched with fascination as attorney Krauss took the judges through each phase of Schact's professional life to demonstrate that the indictments against him were misplaced.

"Herr Schact, would you please tell us the date of your birth."

"I was born in German-speaking southern Denmark, in the town of Tinglev, on January 22, 1877."

"What is your training?"

"I received advanced degrees in economics and finance."

"Did you have any formal role, military or otherwise, in the Great War?"

"I did not."

"What about after the war. Did you serve within the Weimar Republic?"

"As a result of the Treaty of Versailles, Germany was responsible for war reparations in the amount of one hundred and thirty-two billion gold marks, a humiliating sum that had brought the country to its knees. Even worse, the reparations had to be paid in gold or valuable commodities. So, marks had to be traded for gold at increasingly steep rates. There simply was not enough money to go around. So, the country resorted to printing more marks to satisfy its reparation obligations and to pay for other services. Inevitably, the result was that the mark sank precipitously in value and hyperinflation set in. All over Germany, people had to pay staggering amounts of marks to purchase basic commodities as the mark continued to spiral downward."

"What happened?"

"When the country missed a reparations payment in 1922, France and Belgium retaliated by occupying our industrial heartland in the Ruhr. The humiliation was immense. In response, the authorities ordered a work slowdown which itself was disastrous as necessary output declined. In addition, the workers had to be paid and the country just started printing more money to keep the workers afloat."

"What did you do?"

"I was called in during the administration of Chancellor Gustav Stresemann. It was a short administration, but, even after he left, he remained influential in his role as foreign minister. Together, we fought the hyperinflation that was suffocating the country by first calling off the work slowdown in the Ruhr and then introducing a new limited issue currency, the *Rentenmark*, that helped stabilize prices. Then, we set in motion a mechanism for renegotiating the amount due as reparations, making it more likely the country would be able to pay. With these measures in place, France and Belgium were persuaded that our intention to pay reparations was sincere. In return, they agreed to leave the Ruhr, which they did in 1925."

“You received a lot of credit for your part in helping save the economy.”

“I would say so. However, I wasn’t universally loved for my efforts. As a result of limiting the amount of *Rentenmarks* in circulation, it was necessary to dismiss seven hundred thousand people from their government jobs.”

“Did you subsequently become president of the *Reichsbank*, the country’s central bank?”

“I did. I served from 1929 to 1930 and then again starting in 1933. I continued to serve as president during my tenure as economics minister from 1934 to 1937.”

“Those were the years of Hitler’s rise to power. Why did you see fit to join him and why did you leave?”

“Your first question requires a complicated response. But, reduced to its essence, I thought Hitler had the best chance of helping the country recover from its losses during the Great War and from the crushing burden of reparations. In my role as economics minister, I was in charge of the party’s program for reemploying the unemployed. I found the work both essential and satisfying.”

“But weren’t you also responsible for the country’s rearmament program?”

“Nominally, I was and I’ll admit I saw a limited role for rearmament.”

“What do you mean by nominally?”

“Well, despite my best efforts at managing the economic affairs of the country, Hermann Göring had the economy in a hammerlock and had the ultimate say in how funds were spent, especially those designated for rearmament.”

“Did you try to resist Herr Göring?”

“By then, the leadership of the country had become Hitler’s private domain and Göring was his unquestioned right hand man. I disagreed with Göring’s plan to aggressively rearm the country as strenuously as I could. But, by 1937, I knew there was little role left for me. So, I resigned from my position as economics minister. But I still felt a sense of responsibility for helping to maintain the country’s finances. As a result, I stayed on until 1939 as president of the *Reichsbank*.”

“In your capacity as president of the *Reichsbank*, did you have any role in wartime policy?”

“No. The country was reeling from the depression that had engulfed the world, not to speak of the costly rearmament ordered by Hitler. My only policy role was to do what was necessary to keep the German ship afloat.”

“Apparently, that wasn’t enough for the Nazi regime.”

“No, it was not. My opposition to the staggering amounts the country was expending on rearming finally caught up with me and I was relieved of the presidency of the bank in 1939.”

“Did you have any further contact with the Nazi party during the war years?”

“Only in a very adversarial sense. I was imprisoned by the regime for my participation in the attempt to assassinate Hitler on July 20, 1944, and remained in prison until the Allies captured me.”

The prosecution for the Allies did its best to pick apart Schact’s testimony, but to little avail. At the end of the prosecution’s interrogation, it was time for the defense to summarize its position. Lester continued to be transfixed by Krauss’ legal artistry. Finally, Krauss turned to the judges and made one simple argument. “Here we have a man who unfailingly acted in the best interests of the people of his country. He may be open to criticism for continuing his work even during the tenure of the Social Democrats. But he never engaged in any indictable policy or administrative act. Indeed, after 1939, his only association with the Nazis was his participation in the 1944 plot to kill Hitler. For his efforts, he wound up in a Nazi prison. You may choose to criticize him, even condemn him in a philosophical sense. But you may not indict him because he is innocent of any of the acts claimed in the indictment.

Krauss’ argument resonated with the judges. Not only was Schact found not guilty under the indictments. In addition, he was never tried again by any tribunal, a result his two acquitted co-defendants did not share, as both were later convicted by German tribunals.

As the first round of trials were coming to an end, Lester was working late one night to prepare Kaplan for the questioning of the next day’s witnesses. Suddenly, Kaplan appeared at Lester’s doorstep. “How’s the preparation going?”

“Very well. I think you’ll be able to elicit some valuable testimony tomorrow.”

“I hope so, except it won’t be I who will be doing the questioning.”

Lester’s brow tightened as he initially failed to comprehend the meaning of Kaplan’s response. Then, it dawned on him. “Do you want me to do it?”

“Why not. You know tomorrow’s witnesses better than anyone and, after a year of preparing me and watching me in action, you probably know the prosecutorial role as well as anyone on my team.”

That night Lester slept fitfully. However, his squandered night’s sleep was totally unnecessary. The next day, despite feeling bleary eyed, his witness questioning won plaudits not only from Kaplan, but also from Jackson. Lester’s performance would, however, have an unexpected consequence.

Following the end of the war, the Allied Control Council, consisting of the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, the United States and France, was the governing body of the Allied Occupation Zones in Germany and Austria. As the major war criminals trial of the initial twenty-three defendants was getting underway in Nuremberg in late 1945, the Control Council established a legal basis, grounded on the initial indictments presented at the International Military Tribunal, for pursuing second-tier war criminals following the conclusion of the first round of trials. The second round of trials became known as the Subsequent Nuremberg Proceedings, with one hundred and eighty three persons indicted in a series of twelve additional trials.

The Subsequent Nuremberg Proceedings trials were conducted in series, with the fourth series being referred to as the Pohl Case. The case focused on eighteen defendants, all of whom had been members of the *Wirtschaft und Verwaltungshauptamt*, the Reich's Economic and Administrative Main Office, or WVHA. As with the Major War Crimes Trials, the indictments handed down against the eighteen WHVA defendants on January 13, 1947, asserted that they had participated in a common conspiracy to commit war crimes, crimes against humanity and crimes against civilians of German occupied territories. Among those ensnared by the indictment was Lorenz Kreisler's long-time friend and civil engineering colleague Arno Bernthe.

Lester's exemplary performance during the late rounds of the Major War Crimes trials had earned him second chair status in the trial of the WVHA defendants. The trials began in April 1947, and, by the middle of the summer, Lester had had major roles in the prosecution of four of the Pohl defendants, all of whom looked like they would be found guilty. So, it did not come as a great surprise when Kaplan advised Lester that he would have the lead chair in the prosecution of Arno Bernthe, the next defendant on the list.

With the precision he had employed in assisting with the four previous trials in which he had been involved, Lester set out to learn as much as he could about Bernthe and the witnesses who would speak for and against him. However, due to Bernthe's widely known and acknowledged involvement in obtaining Swedish steel for the German war effort, the staff persons responsible for preparing his prosecution file may have taken too much for granted, believing the indictment was an open and shut matter. So, when Lester began to study the dossier that had been prepared, he had little to work on other than Bernthe's well publicized activities, and a short list of prosecution witnesses who would confirm these activities. In addition, there was a brief description of one witness for the defense, a man named Lorenz Kreisler, who appeared to be harmless as a result of being a fellow German and a friend of the defendant with a presumed self-serving agenda.

Lester had stayed up late into the night preparing for the trial and he was feeling weary, but upbeat, as he entered the courtroom. However, his jaw and his spirits plummeted momentarily when he observed that Bernthe was being defended by none other than Herbert Kraus, the lawyer who had so impressed Lester during the Major War Crimes trial of Hjalmar Schacht. Lester's spirits quickly picked up as Kraus was unable to shake apart any of the direct testimony Lester had elicited from the prosecution's key witnesses. Each testified without mishap despite Kraus' searing cross examination, with each series of questions only serving to highlight Bernthe's numerous trips to Sweden and Denmark to purchase the Swedish steel that was essential to the German war effort.

In addition, when it came time for Kraus to put on Lorenz Kreisler, his sole defense witness, it appeared that Kreisler was only being asked to testify as a character witness. In and of itself, Lester didn't see any problems with Kraus' line of questioning as long as it didn't alter the nature of the Bernthe's wartime activities. In addition, Kraus' questioning in which both Bernthe and he spoke in German using a translator, seemed almost embarrassingly short.

As Lester walked toward the witness stand, he cautioned himself against being too cocky but, nevertheless, believed he might be able to summarily defuse Kreisler's testimony with some very basic cross examination. As it turned out, his confidence was misplaced with unexpected and disastrous consequences.

Lester's first surprise came as Kreisler, employing fluent English, dismissed the translator who was standing ready to assist Lester by translating Kreisler's presumed testimony from German into English. Thrown off guard, Lester did his best to resummon his composure and not reveal too obviously his surprise.

"Herr Kreisler, I see you speak English. Where did you acquire your facility with the language?"

"That's easy. My wife is English."

Lester should have seen an alarming thread in Kreisler's simple response, but, instead, let the matter drop and proceeded to ask his prepared questions.

"Would you mind repeating your testimony with regard to how you got to know the defendant, Arno Bernthe?"

"Not at all. As I mentioned in my direct testimony, before the war, we were colleagues in the Reich Ministry of Road Building. Bernthe was my superior, but we were both civil engineers by training. Even then, he had an important role in procuring steel to help rebuild the wreckage from the Great War. In addition to other civil engineering matters, he often came to me for advice on the type of steel needed for essential infrastructure projects such as bridges and overpasses."

Lester's stratagem had been to highlight Bernthe and Kreisler's known friendship, thereby relegating Kreisler's remarks to what the judges would recognize as self-serving testimony on behalf of a friend. "Thank you. That's very helpful. Would you say that Bernthe and you were friends as well as colleagues?"

"Yes, we were."

Lester continued to allow his planned questions to guide him without giving proper consideration to the direction in which he was taking Kreisler. "Can you give us an example or two of how your friendship played out?"

Suddenly, Lester began to see his error as Kreisler came forth with his second testimonial surprise. "You see, my wife Agatha is not only English, but she is also Jewish. In 1933, after the Nazis came into power, Agatha's sister in England, Sandra Brody, through her husband, Giles, contacted me by mail regarding a certain Hannah Sternbloom, the wife of a friend of theirs named Anton Sternbloom who had recently emigrated to England from Germany. It seems Hannah had boarded a train for a final farewell with her family before intending to rejoin Anton, and their son, Jonathan, both of whom had traveled to England after Anton had determined that his professorship at the University of Hamburg was in jeopardy as a result of his being Jewish. Hannah had not been heard from since her departure. Owing to a letter that Anton received from one of Hannah's fellow passengers on the train to the Polish border, Agatha and her husband, Giles, as well as Anton, suspected foul play at the hands of Eric Rohm's *Sturmabteilung*, the infamous Brownshirts. Since Giles knew I traveled extensively throughout Germany due to my work, his letter asked if I could do anything to determine the circumstances of Hannah's disappearance."

By now, Lester was feeling a little disquieted due to Kreisler's revelations regarding his Jewish connections. However, he also felt reassured since Bernthe's name had not entered into Kreisler's response. So, he decided to go forward, hoping there was no connection of significance. "Since you have not said so, I assume that Bernthe had no role in all of this."

Again, Lester was surprised at Kreisler's response. "Not exactly. You see, I was concerned that anything I wrote back to England would risk the possibility of being opened by the authorities. I told Bernthe about my problem. He confided that he had trustworthy relatives in both Denmark and Sweden where he frequently traveled and that he would arrange for my reply and return correspondence to be sent through one of them. His help made all the difference as I was able to proceed without concern of detection and ultimately confirmed that Hannah had, indeed, been murdered by a Brownshirt lieutenant."

Not wanting Kreisler's unhelpful testimony to linger in the mind of the judges, Lester did his best to defuse the response. "That was a nice gesture, but hardly one that might absolve the defendant of the crimes of which he is accused."

Kreisler's response was controlled but poignant. "In and of itself, perhaps not. But it does address the man's character and shine a light on how he viewed the Reich's emerging hostility toward the Jews. On that score, it soon became clear that my family and I were not safe in Germany, despite my being a decorated war hero and an official with a major German ministry. At first I thought Agatha and my two children would be exempt from the newly enacted citizenship rules known as the Nuremberg laws that unambiguously discriminated against Jews. Then I heard there was a growing sentiment in favor of treating Jews, who, like my wife, were married to Aryans, the same as the treatment accorded to other Jews, so as to deny them all benefits of citizenship. I was fearful for my wife and my children and decided to accept a position with the Ericson company in Denmark. However, even then, getting out of Germany with one's possessions and a Jewish family wasn't so easy. However, once again Arno Bernthe came to my assistance. Through his Danish relatives, he was able to find us acceptable lodging on Gothersgade Street in the vicinity of Copenhagen's Kobenhavn Synagogue. Equally importantly, he was able to arrange for the transfer of our finances from Germany to Denmark so that we had money to live on."

A decided shift of strategy was now in order and Lester decided he had no choice but to pursue it. "It does seem that Bernthe was a good friend to you. But you've heard the testimony against him. He may have been helpful to your Jewish family. However, wouldn't you have to agree that his later wartime activities in procuring Swedish steel was an assault on all Jewry in that his efforts helped the Reich unleash the worst stream of war crimes ever perpetrated by one people against another."

For a moment, as Lester stepped back from where Kreisler sat in the witness box, he was satisfied with the way he had phrased his last question, believing it had left Kreisler with little in the way of response. However, again, he was surprised by the witness.

"There is no question in my mind that Bernthe's efforts on behalf of my family were indicative of a higher purpose that he nurtured. After we were settled in Copenhagen, Bernthe told me that he had become a confidant of Georg Duckwitz, the maritime attaché within the *Bevöllmactigter*, the office of Werner Best, the Reich's Plenipotentiary who supervised civilian affairs within occupied Denmark. Bernthe's disclosure was quite revealing as it was known that Duckwitz had become disenchanted with the National Socialist movement and the party's approach to Denmark and its Jews. So, for Bernthe to throw his lot in with Duckwitz, implied a fair amount of risk as well as an awareness of the actions Duckwitz was planning to take to help the Jews of Denmark."

Lester would have liked to cut off Kreisler's testimony on hearsay grounds. However, he had opened up the line of questioning and Kreisler was his witness on cross examination. So, ashen faced, he merely held his ground and listened along with the judges.

"In September 1943, Best advised Duckwitz of Berlin's intention to round up all of Denmark's Jews and deport them to the death camps in the east. Duckwitz unsuccessfully tried to persuade Berlin to reverse course. Having failed, he then flew to Sweden at great personal risk. There, he successfully pleaded with Prime Minister Per Albin Hansson for Sweden to grant asylum to Denmark's Jews. After returning to Denmark in the days just prior to the planned roundup, Duckwitz compounded the risk to himself by summoning Hans Hedtoft, the leader of Denmark's influential Social Democrats, to his office. His plan was to alert Hedtoft to what was about to happen in the hope that Hedtoft could help mount a massive maritime rescue of the country's Jews across the Øresund Strait to Sweden. By then, Duckwitz was pressed in many directions and needed assistance. So, he had turned to Bernthe to help with the logistics of what was happening, and, before meeting with Hedtoft, asked Bernthe to brief the Danish leader on the details of what was about to take place. Properly briefed, Hedtoft then met with Duckwitz. Following his meetings, Hedtoft headed home to sound the alarm."

Lester could see his case was falling apart and attempted one last stab at undermining or, at least, weakening Kreisler's most recent claims. "Herr Kreisler, what you assert has a ring of appeal, although one might question whether it merely reflects your predisposition toward the defendant. How do we know that what you claim is true rather than a mere tendentious effort to rescue a friend?"

Even before Kreisler replied, Lester could see out of the corner of his eye that a smile was forming on the face of Kreisler's attorney, Herbert Krauss. The smile was followed by Kreisler's parting shot. "Your question is a fair one so I shall explain. You see, I know of the events I have described because my daughter, Sarah, and Hedtoft's daughter, Hilde, were university classmates and best friends. Both Hilde, who was subsequently wounded helping my family make its escape to Sweden, and Sarah were present when Hedtoft returned home after his meetings in Duckwitz's office. It was my own daughter's report of what Bernthe and Duckwitz had told Hedtoft that enabled my family and many other Jewish families to escape to Denmark. As we now know, almost ninety-five percent of Denmark's Jewish population were able to make the crossing to Sweden."

The judges' verdict in the Bernthe case would have to await the trials of all the remaining three Pohl Case defendants. Lester was lead prosecutor in the trial of these defendants. When the trials were over, Lester waited with everyone else to hear from the judges. On September 22, they handed down their decisions. Of the eighteen Pohl Case defendants, fifteen were convicted including all of those in whose trials Lester had participated. Bernthe, however, was not among the convicted. Lester knew Bernthe's acquittal was due to Kreisler's remarkable testimony. The memory of the missteps he had made in eliciting Kreisler's testimony remained in Lester's mind as he prepared for his return to the United States.

For Kreisler, the trial had not merely produced a satisfactory conclusion for his friend. In addition, his testimony had been widely published in the German press giving the erstwhile civil engineer and head of a Jewish family an unexpected public persona somewhere between champion and redeemer.

Chapter 37

Washington, DC: The Committee Post Leads to a Familiar Figure September 1946-May 1948

Notwithstanding the assurances Stalin had given to Roosevelt and Churchill in 1945, while at the Black Sea resort of Yalta, it had become increasingly clear the Soviet dictator had no intention of permitting free elections in the eastern European countries of Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria. Thus, as Jimmy, now a second-year, night-program Georgetown Law student, assumed his new daytime duties on the Armed Services Committee, much of what crossed his desk pertained to Stalin's hegemonic ambitions and the growing adversarial relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union.

The future of Greece was especially troubling to the Truman Administration since England had announced it would no longer provide financial support to Greece which was locked in a civil war with its own Soviet-supported Communists. England's withdrawal of support for Greece provided Truman with the catalyst he needed to step into the breach and provide financial assistance to the beleaguered country. Truman feared that, should he not do so, a Communist victory in the Greek civil war would not only spell disaster for Greece, but in addition would jeopardize Turkey and potentially the entire Middle East. He also believed that, as a democratic world leader, the United States had an obligation to support other democratic societies against the scourge of totalitarian oppression, especially at the hands of the Soviet Union.

Truman's position on meeting Soviet despotism head on became known as the Truman Doctrine. His insistence on confronting the Soviet Union had led to several White House proposals to overhaul the foreign policy and military establishments in the United States government. Spearheading these efforts within the White House was Clark Clifford. A transplanted Kansan, Clifford had built up a successful law practice in Truman's home state of Missouri before the war. He later had been assigned to the White House as an assistant and then principal naval advisor to the president where his prodigious mind prompted Truman to designate his now fellow Missourian as White House legal counsel.

Clifford was nominally a domestic policy advisor. In this regard, he was joined by David Niles, a savvy Jewish Bostonian who also had Truman's ear. However, Truman's confidence in Clifford was such that his portfolio included regular contacts with the Senate Foreign Relations and Armed Services Committees which, together, were working on landmark national security legislation to counter the Soviet threat. The Senate's deliberations would eventually lead to the National Security Act of 1947. As work progressed on the Act, Jimmy was assigned to write position papers on a variety of issues pertaining to the pending legislation. Jimmy's work went smoothly as he had the benefit of an unusually capable source of knowledge.

Blaine Stewart was now a two-star general in army intelligence under authority of the Army's Central Command. With Greece and Turkey part of the Central Command structure, Stewart was regularly called to Washington to brief his superiors at the Pentagon who were acutely aware of Truman's interest in those two countries.

Since persuading Jimmy's father, Vance, to support his son's embrace of Judaism and his marriage to Pam, Stewart had taken Jimmy under his wing. Taking advantage of his frequent trips to the nation's capital where Jimmy was studying and working, Stewart had made a point of keeping an eye on Jimmy and helping him out whenever he could.

Stewart's knowledge of the eastern Mediterranean was invaluable to Jimmy's work on the National Security Act. In addition, when it came to other issues before the Committee such as the creation of the newly proposed Central Intelligence Agency as the country's primary civilian intelligence gathering agency, Stewart's insights, stemming from his knowledge of the World War II Office of Strategic Studies, were beyond anything Jimmy might have arrived at on his own.

Due to the Central Command's involvement in Eastern Mediterranean and Persian Gulf activities, Stewart's responsibilities often involved coordinating with the navy. As a result, his views on the National Security Act's proposals to merge the War Department and the Department of the Navy, along with the newly created air force and the marines, into a single Department headed by a Secretary of Defense, were particularly useful.

Initially Jimmy's contacts with Stewart had been informal and outside of regular channels. However, after seeing how Stewart's analysis had contributed to the quality of Jimmy's work product, the Committee staff director had encouraged the general and Jimmy to operate on a more formal plane. Soon, the staff director asked Jimmy to see if Stewart would testify before the Committee on the proposed security legislation. Stewart had eagerly agreed, after obtaining the necessary clearances. His testimony was instrumental in resolving some of the impasses that had existed among the Committee's senators.

The hearings at which Stewart had testified had been open. In addition to the Senators and members of the press, the Committee had also invited a White House representative to attend. Predictably, Truman had sent Clifford due to his familiarity with the legislation.

Many of those who had testified before the Committee that day had held high positions within the defense and security establishments and were better known to Clifford than Stewart. It was these more senior officials whom Clifford had come to hear. However, as he listened, he found himself most impressed with the relatively unknown two star general.

After the hearings, Stewart made a point of thanking Jimmy for his role in setting up the testimony. With Jimmy at his side, he then engaged in friendly hobnobbing with the Committee's senators.

Clifford had waited patiently while the socializing between Stewart and the Committee members played out. Finally, he took Stewart aside and invited the general to join him for drinks and dinner at the Willard Hotel. Stewart was happy to comply. But, before doing so, he gestured to Jimmy to come over to where he was talking with Clifford and introduced the young man, he now considered his protégé, to the White House counsel. "This is my friend Jimmy Wilkins. He's a war hero from my hometown in Alabama and he's now working on the Committee staff while going to law school at Georgetown. He's a real comer and is going to go places in the defense establishment. If you ever need me for anything, you don't have to go through official channels. Just contact Jimmy."

At the Willard, Clifford and Stewart spent the evening getting to know one another and ironing out legislative issues of interest to the White House. They also discovered they shared

common views regarding the plight of Europe's Jewish refugees and the need for a Jewish homeland. Their relationship would prove indispensable the following year as Truman's sympathy for a Jewish home in Palestine would come under a multi-pronged attack, particularly from his own State Department.

For Jimmy, Stewart's success had also become Jimmy's success. At the end of the school year, the staff director asked him whether he would consider working full time for the Committee and continuing law school at night so he could devote more time to the pressing issues that were taking place in both the Soviet sphere of influence and in the Middle East. Jimmy was flattered but hesitated, not wanting to delay his schooling. However, it was Pam who pointed out how much he loved Committee work and that continuing law school at night would only prolong his studies by one year. The next day, Jimmy accepted the offer and moved his belongings to his new office. Tiny by any standards, his new place of work had two indispensable qualities: it was all his and it was quiet.

Even before taking office, Truman had been moved by the plight of Europe's Jewish refugees and had been a longtime supporter of the goals of the 1917 Balfour Declaration. In light of the Nazi atrocities against the Jews during the war, Truman believed England had a moral obligation to implement the terms of the Balfour Declaration. By extension, he also took the view that, as England's greatest ally during the war and as a central moral force within the post war world, the United States, too, had a duty to aid in such an endeavor. His views were also influenced by two other factors--his knowledge of the bible and the Deuteronomic injunction that God had promised the land now known as Palestine to the Jewish people, and his friendship with his Eddie Jacobson, his Jewish army buddy and Kansas City clothing store business partner.

In 1945, the new president had met with the acclaimed European Zionist leader, Chaim Weizmann. The meeting had solidified Truman's views on the need for a Jewish homeland for the survivors of the war. In the spring of 1946, he had announced his recommendation that England admit one hundred thousand displaced persons into Palestine, and, by the summer of that year, he had authorized the establishment of a special cabinet committee to investigate the future of Palestine. However, there would be no clear sailing for Truman's ship of state when it came to his belief in the need for a Jewish homeland. As the United Nations began deliberations in the fall of 1947 on the future of Palestine, Truman was buffeted on all sides by a powerful set of headwinds representing an array of divergent views on the future of Palestine and the Middle East.

Truman wanted to secure the Jewish vote. Even so, he came to resent what he considered to be the aggressive tactics of the pro-Zionist elements of the American Jewish community. Moreover, Clifford and he both knew that even the president's full-throated support of the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine was not a guarantee of domestic Jewish political support. Indeed, many influential American Jews, including Arthur H. Sulzberger, the publisher of the New York Times, and Eugene Meyer, the publisher of the Washington Post, were opposed to Zionism. In addition, a number of important anti-Zionist Jewish organizations such as the fourteen-thousand-member American Council for Judaism viewed the creation of a Jewish state as a threat to the universal vision of Judaism, while others, such as the American Jewish Committee, were concerned about undermining the advances made by the country's Jews as accepted members of an assimilated American community.

Truman was also aware that the most vehement opposition to the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine came from a powerful assemblage of figures within his own State Department. Just as these careerists had opposed intervention on behalf of European Jewry during the war, once the fighting had ceased, they were equally, if not, more adamantly opposed to an independent Jewish presence in the Middle East. Starting with Truman's Secretary of State, George C. Marshall, whom the president regarded as the greatest living American, the State Department's most visible and luminous minds had lined up against an independent Jewish state in Palestine. Their ranks included such formidable figures as the Department's Undersecretary Robert Lovett, former Undersecretary Dean Acheson, Soviet expert Charles Bohlen, Director of Near Eastern and African Affairs, Loy Henderson, Chief of the Policy Planning Staff, George F. Kennan, and Director of the office of United Nations Affairs, Dean Rusk. Their opposition ranged from concerns that United States support for a Jewish state might jeopardize access to Arab oil and provide the Soviet Union with a potential inroad within the Middle East, to age-old prejudices, to the view that a newly independent Israel, defended by a ragtag group of displaced Jews, would unquestionably be dead on arrival.

As the November 29, 1947, United Nations vote approached, and the United States, at the behest of the president, engaged in high level arm twisting to win enough votes to support partition, these high-level State Department officials continually took an oppositional stance and argued, instead, for a United Nations trusteeship that would govern the two opposing communities within Palestine. But Truman knew such an arrangement would embolden opposition Arab elements to mount pressure against the continuation of such an arrangement with the eventual goal of undoing any kind of recognized Jewish presence in Palestine.

Even more galling to the president than the State Department's expressed opposition to partition was the fact that elements within the Department were actively working at cross purposes to his policies. Furious, he had discovered from Chaim Weizmann that Departmental officials had colluded with the British to reduce by half the size of the land that would be allocated to Israel in any forthcoming partition proposal. Only Truman's last-minute intervention had saved the proposed partition plan that was eventually accepted by the United Nations on November 29. As adopted, the area awarded to the Jewish community included the Negev Desert—the essential land mass that Truman's State Department detractors, along with England, had attempted to remove from the Jewish allocation. Even at that, the area allocated to the Jews of the *Yishuv*, the Jewish Settlement in Palestine, was one eighth of the allocation envisioned by the Balfour Declaration.

Following the successful vote on partition and England's announcement that it would depart from Palestine on May 14, 1948, sporadic fighting had broken out throughout Palestine. The British tried to maintain order or, as likely, looked the other way. Throughout this period, the State Department and its Office of United Nations Affairs actively opposed the partition plan, continuing, instead, to prefer a trusteeship under the auspices of the United Nations. However, Truman was adamant, assuring Chaim Weizmann in early March that the United States opposed the trusteeship approach and continued to support partition.

To his amazement, the day after Truman met with Weizmann, the nation's press reported that Warren Austin, the American Ambassador to the United Nations, had voted in support of a trusteeship. So enraged was Truman by Austin's duplicity that he wrote a private note on his calendar: "The State Dept. pulled the rug from under me today. The first I know about it is what I see in the papers! Isn't that hell? I'm now in the position of a liar and double-crosser. I've never

felt so low in my life. There are people on the third and fourth level of the State Department who have always wanted to cut my throat. They've succeeded in doing it."

Despite being blindsided, Truman chose not to publicly chastise Austin and his United Nations team, knowing that such a public censure could precipitate a crisis with Secretary Marshall whose support Truman required on numerous foreign initiatives, most notably, implementation of the Economic Cooperation Act, the legislation enacted to aid in the restoration of Europe, and which already was being called the "Marshall Act." Instead, as May 14 approached, Truman let the matter rest in its unsettled state, with his United Nations Ambassador endorsing one position while Truman held firm to his own opposing view. However, Truman knew that the time would fast arrive when he would have to have an airing of opposing views with Marshall. That day arrived on May 7, when Truman called Marshall to sound out his position on a Jewish state in Palestine. Predictably, Marshall was opposed. What concerned Truman was the intensity of the Secretary's opposition. Rather than try to resolve matters over the phone, Truman called for a meeting with Marshall and his staff for the following Wednesday, May 12.

As the British pullout on May 14 began to loom large, the Senate Armed Forces Committee was not idle. Palestine was very much on the agenda, with hearings scheduled to take place on Monday, May 10. Aware of the interest of the world community, the Committee had determined that the hearings would again be open. Secretary of Defense James Forrestal, whose opposition to a Jewish state was well known, had been scheduled to testify. However, a last-minute conflict had arisen. Instead, Forrestal had decided to send two senior officers from the Army's Central Command. Aware of Blaine Stewart's successful earlier testimony, Forrestal had chosen Stewart as one of the two officers who would appear before the Senate Armed Forces Committee. The following day, when Clifford opened his briefing book and learned that Stewart would soon be testifying before the Committee, the White House counsel decided to attend the hearing. As he sat down near the front of the room, he spotted Jimmy in the staffer section and cast him a broad grin.

Pleased to see Clifford in the audience, Stewart prepared himself for what he knew would be the delicate line he would have to follow. With Forrestal's adamant opposition to partition, Stewart knew that he could not adopt a policy position that was at odds with the views of the Secretary of Defense. However, he hoped that the Senators would give him some latitude to express his personal views on what might happen in the event of partition. He was not disappointed. His Senate interlocutors had been well briefed, and many key members were sympathetic to the delicacy of Stewart's position. Even so, the first question put to him by a Senate supporter of Forrestal raised the question of Departmental policy on Palestine.

"General Stewart, you are of course aware of Secretary of Defense Forrestal's opposition to a Jewish state in Palestine."

"I am."

"Do you support the Secretary's position?"

"As an officer sworn to uphold the policies of the Department of Defense, I will do everything in my power to follow the directives of the Secretary."

“Thank you general. That’s all I needed to know. I believe my colleague sitting to my left may have a follow-up question or two of a different tenor.” Smugly, the senator then handed over the microphone to a second Committee member whose views in support of a Jewish state were equally well known.

“General Stewart, I understand you cannot take a policy position in conflict with the head of your Department, and I respect that. But let me ask you a question that does not go to policy and instead asks for your opinion. There are six hundred thousand Jews in Palestine and thirty million Arabs in the surrounding countries. As Secretary Forrestal has reminded us repeatedly, such an imbalance does not appear to bode well for the Jews of Palestine in the event the Jewish Agency in Palestine declares statehood following the departure of the British on May 14. Do you believe there is any hope that a Jewish state will survive given such disproportionate numbers?”

Stewart had given much thought to the question and was prepared with his response. Even so, he was nervous, knowing that some in the Department might view his response as stepping out of line. Instinctively, he gazed at Clifford whose look of assurance provided Stewart with the confidence he needed to express his views honestly and persuasively.

“Senator, there is little question that a declaration of statehood will result in the combined forces of Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Saudi Arabi, Lebanon and Jordan, not to speak of local militias, attacking the Jews. Of these, only Jordan’s British-trained Arab Legion is a well-organized fighting force. But, even at that, the better trained Jordanian forces are likely to have the limited strategic objective of securing the West Bank including East Jerusalem. The forces of the other countries are less experienced. While driven by a strong religious imperative, they have operated primarily as domestic security forces and have no experience fighting an external war. So, strong as their religious motivation may be, there is no assurance how it will manifest itself on the battlefield.”

“Very interesting, general. Please continue.”

“Thank you. By contrast, most of the Jews of Palestine, what they call the Yeshuv, have seen the camps or worse. Many have lost relatives, if not entire families. For them, Palestine is their only hope and survival their first and foremost motivation. Many of the Jews in Palestine have already organized themselves into well disciplined, underground fighting forces. They can also count on the support of every Jew within the country as well as the numerous Jewish refugees who will be flooding into the country once the British leave. I’ve seen more of war than I care to recount, and I can tell you there is no stronger motivation to fight than defending one’s way of life. For the Jews of Palestine, their motivation goes even further for they will be fighting not merely for a way of life but for life itself. If I had to put my money on a winning side, I’d choose the Jews of the Yeshuv.”

Clifford could not have been more pleased with Stewart’s testimony. However, he had work to do in preparation for the president’s meeting with Marshall and could not remain to engage in conversation with Stewart or the Committee members. Before he left, he did, however, walk over to where Jimmy was going over his notes.

“Hi Jimmy. Your man did yeoman’s service for the president today. I have to leave now and can’t spend time with the general. But please ask him to remain available. If I need him, I’ll contact you.”

Two days later on May 12, Clifford, David Niles and White House Appointments Secretary, Matthew Connelly, sat next to the president. Opposite them sat Secretary George C. Marshall and his second in command, Undersecretary Robert Lovett. Marshall was unrelenting in his opposition to a Jewish state, going so far as to say that he had informed Moshe Shertok, the Jewish Agency's representative in Washington, that the Jews of Palestine could expect no assistance from the United States if they declared statehood.

Truman listened grim faced to Marshall's stinging attack against the recognition of a Jewish state. When Marshall completed his scathing presentation, Truman asked Clifford to respond. As Clifford described the moral and political reasons for recognition of a Jewish state, Truman's face relaxed, reflecting satisfaction with his counsel's arguments. Clifford, too, could see that he was making a favorable impression on the president whose support for partition had been admirably steady but who was still concerned about Marshall's reactions and their impact on the administration and the forthcoming election. However, suddenly both Truman and Clifford were shaken as Marshall, his face fuming with anger, erupted. "Mr. President, if you follow Clifford's advice and if I were to vote in the election, I would vote against you." At that, Marshall got up to leave.

As Marshall departed, Clifford and Lovett agreed to meet during the next two days to try to iron out matters, but Clifford could see that the president's resolve had been shaken. For Marshall to say he would vote against the president was one thing, but what worried the president is that his Secretary of State might publicly oppose recognition of a Jewish state, throwing his administration into disarray.

As Clifford pondered these matters, he knew he had to strengthen the president's resolve lest Truman waver under the pressure exerted by his Secretary of State. Immediately, Clifford's thoughts turned to Stewart's testimony. Quickly, Clifford picked up the phone and called Jimmy. "Tell Stewart I need him at the White House immediately. I want the president to hear what the general recently told your Committee. I'll inform the president of the purpose of the visit and provide clearance so the general can enter the building unnoticed through the side entrance."

Ninety minutes later, Truman, Clifford and Stewart were sitting in the Oval Office. "General, thank you for coming on short notice. It appears my counsel believes I need to have my backbone stiffened a bit. I understand you testified before the Senate Armed Forces Committee recently and that I might benefit from what you had to say."

"Mr. President, I know you have a lot of things on your mind. I also know from talking to Clifford that you've been deeply moved by the plight of those Jews who survived the war. I'm further aware that, as the president of the world's foremost democracy, you believe the United States has a moral obligation to support the Jewish victims of Nazism who, in the absence of Palestine, have no place else to go."

"Yes, I firmly believe in what you just said. But what if I defy my Secretary of State by recognizing a Jewish state in Palestine and that new state capitulates in a war in which it is vastly outnumbered? I could be risking the future of my entire administration."

"Mr. President, the sign on your desk reads "The Buck Stops Here."

"Yes, it does."

“For the Jews of Palestine, the buck stops in the Holy Land, the land God promised to their forefathers. Having lost so much at the hands of the Nazis, they have no place else to go. If you were to offer me a fighting force that had endured hardships beyond measure and recognized it might be fighting for its last chance at survival, I would lead such a force against Satan himself. The Jews of Palestine are such a force. If you follow your conscience and act on your acknowledged moral duty to recognize a Jewish state, I believe you will not be disappointed. Indeed, I believe you will one day regard your support as being among the most noble achievements of your presidency.”

Two days later, Clifford, under instructions from the president not to relent, met with Undersecretary Robert Lovett who informed the White House Counsel that Marshall would not publicly oppose recognition of a Jewish state. At 6:00 PM that evening, David Ben-Gurion took the stage in the former home of Mayer Dizengoff, the first mayor of Tel Aviv, and announced the creation of the State of Israel. Eleven minutes later, at 6:11 PM, Charlie Ross, the White House Press Secretary, stood in the lobby of the West Wing of the White House and informed the world that the United States had recognized the provisional government of the new Jewish state. Among those seated in the lobby along with the White House press corps were Blaine Stewart and Jimmy Wilkins.

Chapter 38

United States, Israel, and Czechoslovakia: The Search for Armaments May 1948-July 1949

As early as May 1945, the Jewish Agency in Palestine foresaw the importance of arming its Haganah fighters for the inevitable war that was not far off. David Ben-Gurion addressed the need for weapons and funds to purchase them by establishing a vast covert network of fund raisers, arms purchasers, and weapons smugglers. Many were dispatched to Europe where the Haganah had twelve ships laden with weapons ready to set sail for Palestine as soon as the British blockade was lifted.

Fund raisers and arms purchasers were also sent to the United States where many Jewish sympathizers could be found. Most of the donors in the United States were persons of means and respectable members of their communities. However, their philanthropy only went so far. Teddy Kollek, Ben-Gurion's primary lieutenant in the United States and the future first Jewish mayor of Jerusalem, needed more funding than this reliable pool of Jewish donors could provide. In addition, Kollek needed actual weaponry such as artillery pieces, anti-aircraft guns and tanks, and, most importantly, the means to avoid the United States embargo against arms being shipped to the Middle East. For such purposes, Ben-Gurion sent two other trusted aids to the United States with the charge that they leave no stone unturned in their quest for funds, weapons, and the means to outrun the arms embargo.

Ben-Gurion's choices were Yehuda Harazi, a savvy intelligence agent who had worked with the Romanian, Hungarian and Italian underground movements during the war, and Reuven Dafni, a veteran of the Jewish Brigade that had fought for the British during the war. Harazi and Dafni had no qualms about seeking support for the Haganah no matter the source. Their permissive attitude led them to several sympathetic and well connected, if unsavory, Jewish underground figures. However, it was the intrepid Dafni who was the more successful of the two.

In Baltimore, Dafni met with the shadowy Murray Greenfield, an escapee from the British internment camp in Cyprus. Greenfield summoned Dafni and some of the leading Jewish underworld figures in Baltimore to his home. There, in his recreation room, Greenfield squeezed each of his associates for funds to support the Haganah. At the meeting's end, Dafni walked away with a shopping bag full of cash in the amount of ninety thousand dollars.

Dafni's forays into the western part of the country were no less productive and intriguing. In Los Angeles, Dafni arranged for another Haganah agent to meet with the former boxer and mobster, Mickey Cohen. Through his ownership of the Flamingo Hotel in Los Vegas, Cohen's underworld connections included mob figures in both Nevada and Southern California. Cohen's interest in arming the Haganah had led to meetings of underworld figures in Las Vegas and Los Angeles. At the meetings, Cohen pledged twenty-five thousand dollars and strongarmed his fellow mobsters into contributing an additional thirty-five thousand dollars. Even more stunningly, in Nevada, Dafni was able to arrange a meeting with the notorious gangster, Bugsy Siegel, shortly before Siegel was assassinated. Siegel had been intrigued by the fact that Jews were defending themselves even after the horrors of the war. His interest had led to Dafni leaving Siegel's office, again with a shopping bag filled with money, this time the sum totaled fifty thousand dollars.

Important as were the funds raised in the United States, whatever their source, a more serious problem existed once those funds were used to purchase weapons intended for the Haganah. The problem was the United States boycott against shipping arms to the Middle East, particularly since it was loosely enforced against ships heading for the Arab States and tightly enforced against ships headed for the Jews of Palestine. Once again, Ben-Gurion's emissaries in the United States replaced principle with pragmatism and reached out to the underworld for help.

In Florida, Dafni met Sam Kay, a leading Jewish member of the Miami mob. Kay, as it turned out, was friends with Enrique Adolfo Jiménez, the president of Panama. After a few calls, Kay was able to reach agreement with Jiménez that all ships transporting arms from the United States to the Jews of Palestine would be registered in Panama and fly under a Panamanian flag. The agreement was enormously helpful but did not solve the principal problem of ending the boycott. Here again, Dafni had no compunction about seeking help from the underworld, this time, in the person of the New York mobster, Meyer Lansky.

Lansky's receptivity led to calls to fellow underworld figures, Albert Anastasia and Joe Adonis, who, together, controlled the longshoremen's union in New York as well as the Port of New York, through which almost all of the Haganah bound arms would have to pass. The result of Meyer's intervention was that the longshoremen helped Israeli arms purchasers conceal weapons from the eyes of the United States agents who were enforcing the embargo.

Soon György would find himself playing a central role in Ben-Gurion's quest for arms acquisitions. Gabrielle and Lili and he had settled in a small Jewish enclave outside of Tel Aviv. György had managed to regain his weight in a healthy manner so that his two hundred pounds sat comfortably on his six-foot two-inch frame. Owing to his size, György, had been assigned as a future infantryman to one of the nine nominal brigades organized by the Haganah immediately following the November 1947 United Nations vote on partition. However, when György's brigade commander realized György had an engineering background and spoke German, Hungarian and passable Slavic, he envisioned a more expansive role for the tall Hungarian. György's talents were quickly brought to the attention of Ben-Gurion as a possible candidate for weapons procurement in the German speaking and Slavic regions of Eastern Europe.

György did not know whether he was happy or disappointed when the white-tufted leader of the new nation told him he was being assigned to the most important weapons procurement mission of the forthcoming war. György was not keen about leaving his wife and daughter for an indeterminate time for a mission that was not without risk. But Gabrielle, who was doing her part reassembling discarded British weapons, reminded him that nothing was more important than winning the inevitable war that was soon to come and that an overseas assignment might bring him home more safely than his infantry position on the front lines.

Soon György found himself in Czechoslovakia. Hitler had marched into the *Sudentenland*, the German-speaking part of Czechoslovakia, following the green light given him by the leaders of England, France and Italy during the infamous September 29, 1938, Munich Agreement. Following his military takeover of the *Sudentenland*, it did not take long before Hitler controlled the entire country. The German-speaking regions of the country became the Reich Protectorate of Bohemia-Moravia, and the remaining part of the country was spun off as the puppet state of Slovakia.

At the end of the war, with the return of previously exiled Czechoslovakia president, Edvard Beneš, the country was reunited. However, as a result of a number of decrees enacted by the Beneš government, more than ninety percent of the ethnic Germans were forced to leave the country, creating chaos and widespread resentment. Meanwhile, owing to the iron-fisted retaliatory tactics of the Beneš government as well as the deteriorating state of the country's economy, the Communists continued to ascend in prominence. In the 1946 parliamentary elections, the Communists emerged as winners in the Czech areas of the country, while the anti-Communist Democratic party won in Slovakia. This unstable condition continued into 1947, though rumblings of a Communist takeover could be heard throughout the country.

It was this state of affairs that greeted György upon his arrival in Prague in December of 1947. There, he was introduced to Jozef Vargova, a deputy to Vladimír Clementis, who had spent the war in London broadcasting speeches against the Nazis and who had returned to Prague after the war where he was serving as Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs. Whether Clementis held personal sympathies toward the Jews of Palestine was an unknown. However, it was known that Clementis was aware of the potential of obtaining foreign currency from the Haganah agents who had been sent to his country in search of arms. In consequence, he had directed Vargova to obtain as much foreign currency as possible through the sale of surplus weapons to the Jews.

Through a strange set of coincidences, György and the Slovak-speaking Vargova discovered that György's relatives on his mother's side had come from the same section of Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia, where Vargova's family lived. The knowledge had not led to easy bargaining, but it had broken the ice. By the following month, György and his colleagues had been able to purchase four hundred tons of weapons from the Czech government. The purchased armaments included aerial bombs, ammunition, explosives, combat vehicles, flame throwers, machine guns, rifles, and tanks.

György and his fellow agents were not through. However, they were almost sidetracked by political events in Czechoslovakia where the Communist party had executed a coup the month after they arrived and succeeded in taking over the government. There followed a reign of terror replete with political executions, censorship and the forced collectivization of the country's farms. For a week after the takeover, György sat in his hotel room focusing on the turmoil overtaking the country and waiting for a call from Vargova that would tell him whether negotiations would continue or whether he would have to go home with no more than what he had already obtained. Finally, the call came, with Vargova reporting that Stalin had approved further sales.

György treated Stalin's authorization as both a validation of his work in Czechoslovakia and an auspicious omen of things to come. He was not disappointed. By the following month, he had negotiated for the purchase of twenty-three Czech made fighter planes and an agreement for the Czechs to train the pro-Jewish pilots who would be flying the aircraft.

Dubbed the Avia S-199, the fighter planes were a variation of the German Messerschmitt and were not well regarded by the pilots who had flown them. However, they would constitute the beginning of a Jewish air force and György was pleased with the purchase. Among the first volunteer pilots to arrive for training was a former RAF fighter pilot named Gordon Levett. Though a gentile, Levett was committed to the idea of a Jewish state in Palestine. Under his guidance, trainees from both the United States and various corners of the British Empire learned to fly the unruly aircraft. By May, the planes, now known by their Hebrew name, the *Sakinim*, had been disassembled and shipped to the new State of Israel.

In Israel, following Ben-Gurion's declaration of a Jewish state, the Arab armies had advanced on five different fronts. As a result of secret negotiations between the Jewish Agency and King Abdullah, it had been hoped that Jordan's Arab Legion would stay out of the war. However, on the day that Ben-Gurion declared Israel's independence, the Arab Legion had headed for Jerusalem, first barreling through the crucial settlements in the Etzion Bloc near the eastern part of the city. Employing armored cars, artillery and mortars, the Legion then surrounded the weakly defended ancient Jewish Quarter, isolating its residents and placing them in danger of starvation unless a supply line could be forged through the hostile Tel Aviv Jerusalem Road and past the Arab-held fortress at Latrun. Fortunately, after days of fighting, the Legion had been unsuccessful in overtaking the better defended western part of the city.

In the North, the Lebanese army controlled critical border crossings, while the Syrians advanced toward the Sea of Galilee. In the Jordan Valley and the foothills of Northern Samaria, Iraq's three battalions, consisting of 4,500 fighting men, sought to control Jewish kibbutzim on the Jordan River, where they encountered stiff resistance from the stalwart *Golani* Brigade at *Kibbutz Gesher*.

The most dangerous threat had come from the Egyptians who had marched from the Sinai in two columns. The first column headed for the Jerusalem Hills had been repelled at the southern approach to the city at *Kibbutz Ramat Rachel*. The second group of Egyptian fighters posed the greater danger as its six thousand soldiers marched up the coast toward Tel Aviv.

After encountering stiff resistance at *Kibbutz Yad Mordechai* and then *Kibbutz Negba*, the huge Egyptian fighting machine had Ashdod, to the south of Tel Aviv, in its sights. There, the Egyptians, sought a knockout blow against the greatly outnumbered Jewish defenders.

Meanwhile, at the Ekron Airbase in central Israel, Czech technicians had managed to complete the reassembly of four of the *Sakinim* aircraft. Under orders from the Haganah Chief of Operations, Yigal Yadin, four volunteer pilots, including Ezer Weizman, a future president of Israel, were directed to fly their untested aircraft to support the defenders at Ashdod. Minimally armed with two 150-pound bombs, two 13-millimeter machine guns and two 20-millimeter cannons, the four courageous pilots flew into the heat of battle.

As the Egyptians confidently launched their attack on Ashdod, their fighters suddenly heard a rumbling sound from the sky above them and then ran for cover as they were hit by a fusillade of canon fire from the four fighter planes. More surprised than overpowered by the *Sakinim*, the Egyptians nevertheless lost their will in the face of both Jewish resistance on the ground and the aerial onslaught from the sky, unleashed by a Jewish airborne fighting force they had not even known existed. Forty-five Jews, including South-African, volunteer pilot, Eddie Cohen, would die that day and fifty more Jews would be wounded in the defense of Ashdod, but the dispirited Egyptian forces had been repelled. The balky Czech fighter planes had saved the day and, perhaps, the country.

In Prague, Györgi heard the news of the victory at Ashdod with delight. However, his work was not done as he continued to negotiate more armaments and aircraft. By the early fall of 1948, his colleagues and he had purchased sixty-one additional surplus fighter aircraft and had negotiated for the training of more than two hundred volunteer pilots, mechanics, and paratroopers.

By then, Israel had not only repelled the Egyptian ground attack but had also ended the Arab siege of Jerusalem, though the old city remained in Jordanian hands. During the first of two truces in July, the Haganah had increased its strength to sixty thousand men and women, while its Arab adversaries had only managed to increase their fighting units to forty thousand. Further, oil had been arriving from Romania, and, thanks to Györgi's efforts, guns and ammunition had been pouring in from Czechoslovakia. It was clear that the Israelis had held their own and that any Arab hopes of expelling the Jews from the land had been extinguished. By October, the Israeli force strength had increased to 90,000 men and women, and what had been the central and northern areas of Palestine were in Israeli hands.

In January 1949, Györgi was finally able to return to Israel. He knew it would be an emotional reunion with his wife and daughter. However, when he opened the door to his apartment, he was overcome. Sitting on the couch and playing with Lili was the nurse sister Györgi thought he had lost at Auschwitz.

Györgi dropped his suitcase and then flung himself into her arms. "Miriam, I thought you were dead. How did you survive? How did you find me?"

At this point, Gabrielle strode over to her astonished husband. "First, give Lili and me a hug. Then Miriam will tell you everything she has told me."

Collecting himself, Györgi scooped up his waiting daughter and, with her in his arms, embraced Gabrielle. As they caressed one another, Györgi realized how much he had missed his wife and daughter and could not believe how blessed he was to have them in his arms again, while his sister, raised from the dead, sat before him.

When they had finished hugging, Gabrielle returned the focus to Miriam. "Györgi, in answer to question about how Miriam found us, the answer is that your exploits in Prague have been well publicized in Israel. So, it was easy for Miriam to learn about you and find out how you could be reached. She'll be staying with us for a few days. There will be plenty of time to talk. But, if she's willing, she can tell you what she's already told me. It is a heart wrenching story. So, be prepared."

Miriam and Györgi were now seated as Miriam began her account. "Györgi, you have a fabulous wife. I've never told my story to anyone and may not again. Yet I opened up to her. You're a lucky man with a beautiful family."

"That I am. But how did you rise from the dead. At Auschwitz, I saw the Nazis pull you aside and I thought you had been slated for immediate execution."

Miriam's eyes now began to fill with tears. With determination, she wiped her tears away and looked at her brother. "They did pull me aside along with about two dozen other women, all of whom were about my age. They had plans for us before we died."

Györgi was beginning to understand. "You poor dear sister."

"They took us to a place where we all showered. Then they threw us into a building with several rooms where we awaited our fate. Soon, we understood as several German officers entered the building and began to undress. Night after night they raped us or subjected us to unspeakable humiliation. Many of the girls tried to commit suicide, but the Germans watched us closely. Then,

one night, a young German major entered the room where I lay. He could see that I was crying. Unlike the others, he tried to be kind to me as he went about his business. I could see that he had been wounded and that his wounds hadn't properly healed. I tried to help him by putting my nursing skills to use. Afterward, he told me he was lonesome and that I reminded him of his wife who was also a nurse."

"I'm so sorry," uttered Györgi, more crying than speaking.

"I've made peace with myself. The major continued to come to me each night. On every occasion, he made a point of being as gentle as he could and even brought me food. Soon, he told me that I would be housed in quarters separate from the other girls where I would be better fed and would only have to see him. I was still being used against my will, but I knew I was way better off than the others who sometimes were accosted many times a night. Our arrangement, if I might call it that, went on for many months."

"Then, what happened?" asked her concerned brother.

"One day, the major told me he had been given leave to see his wife in Germany. When he came back, he seemed happy, and his demeanor was reflected in the way he treated me. Soon, he found out that his wife was pregnant and somehow it changed him. He continued to visit me, but mostly to talk. When the death marches began, he arranged for me to be transported by truck rather than walk on foot, and then, when I arrived at one of the camps in Germany, he said goodbye with a mournful look that conveyed regret. Somehow, I survived in the camp and, like you, the displaced persons camp that followed. When the British left, I came to Israel and was able to help during the war of independence."

"Györgi continued to look at his sister, as if in a daze. "I have so many questions. But, first, tell me how things are now that you are settled in Israel."

"Okay, I guess. I've reached a certain level of contentedness here, although it's difficult to forget the camp. I'm part of a nursing unit that specializes in battlefield injuries and, believe it or not, I've been trained as a paratrooper so that I can join the troops who have had to jump into the Negev to deal with the constant Egyptian incursions there. At first, I was frightened, but the adrenaline rush from jumping out of a plane is like nothing I've ever experienced."

Györgi had to participate in a number of briefings and meetings following his return. However, his days were mostly filled with long, lingering walks with Gabrielle and Lili, just as they had done in Nice, and his evenings were consumed with love making and talking about the future. However, Györgi knew their idyll would have to end, as the security demands of the new country awaited him. Following Miriam's lead, he had requested and soon received training as a paratrooper. His training would lead to unanticipated consequences, as the new nation still sought to take the Negev desert in the south, which, thanks to President Truman's last-minute intervention, had been assigned to Israel as part of the original United Nations partition plan.

Chapter 39

Paris, France: Studies, Love and Politics September 1946-April 1949

When Hilde arrived at the Sorbonne in the fall of 1946, she encountered a Paris not appreciably different from the one Angelo Donati had experienced during his time there eighteen months earlier. The inhabitants of the city were still subsisting on wartime rations, with many functioning on as little as 1,650 calories a day.

Politically, the country clung to an unstable future. The Communist party had been a part of every coalition since the liberation of France in 1944. Though only holding a minority position in the parliament, the French Communists could boast more members than any other European Communist party outside of the Soviet Union. However, by 1946, the party had fallen behind the Christian Democrats who seemed to be tightening their grip on the government. Even so, the shadow of communism seemed to be everywhere even though the party kept a low profile. Prudently, the Communist party leader, Maurice Thorez, following orders from Moscow, chose to bide his time and not do anything that might result in a confrontation with the Christian Democrats.

Judicially, the savage purges of German collaborators that had swept through the country during 1945 had given way to more formal court proceedings. Though less vengeful, the court proceedings that followed in 1946 had resulted in more than 6,700 death sentences, of which almost 800 had been carried out by the gruesome guillotine.

Despite the harsh treatment of many former Nazi collaborators, some who might have been punished for their wartime activities were the beneficiaries of a sympathetic judiciary many of whose members had served under the pro-German Vichy regime. Out of more than six million civil servants, only eleven thousand were tried and dismissed because of their pro-Nazi activities. The Vichy influence on the judiciary was not unique. Its sympathizers filled the ranks of government and academia, bringing with them their anti-Jewish sentiments.

Hilde had grown up in politics and had learned from her father the weaknesses, not to speak of, the monstrous excesses of Communism. Though she enjoyed her course of study, she was surprised to discover how many Communist supporters were represented on the faculty. Fortunately, most of her professors with Communist leanings were willing to engage in lively debate, enabling Hilde to express her point of view openly, though she always worried about the possibility of recrimination following a heated discussion.

The same openness was not true of the faculty members who had devotedly served in the Vichy government. Three years of fealty to the Nazis had inculcated in these teachers a dislike for the Jews of France that bordered on fanaticism. For such persons, there was little room for discussion, so great was their anti-Jewish contempt. Hilde tried hard to hold her own counsel when in the presence of such teachers, but the effort was both exhausting and humiliating. Fortunately, she had pursued her Jewish studies with the rabbi recommended by Stanley Marcus and her weekly meetings had provided a reassuring outlet for the pressures she had experienced in class and the questions she would have liked to ask.

As her first academic year neared an end in the early summer of 1947, Hilde felt drained due to the overbearing political positions of her. Fortunately, she needn't have worried as each of

her teachers, irrespective of political persuasion, had recognized her undeniable talent and academic promise. Their assessments of her potential had reached the dean of the political science and economics faculty who advised her that she had won the faculty prize for achievement in economics and would be given a scholarship for her second year of study. As she pondered her prize, she was pleased to hear about a June 5 speech by George C. Marshall to the graduating class of Harvard University in which he described a plan for the reconstruction of Europe financed by aid from America.

Hilde's academic year ended on a second high note as her rabbinic instructor advised that her studies had been completed and she was ready for conversion. The pronouncement filled Hilde with a sense of fulfillment. However, one thing remained before she was prepared to declare herself a Jew—she needed to experience Judaism in its historic cradle, Palestine. She had been communicating with both Sarah Sternbloom and Gwen Kreisler during the school year. When Hilde wrote to tell Gwen of her desire to complete her Jewish journey in Palestine, Gwen could not have been more excited and invited Hilde to stay with Werner and her at *Kibbutz Ramah Gan*. She also noted that her in-laws, Agatha and Lorenz Kreisler, would be visiting the *kibbutz* during the summer and suggested that Hilde time her trip to coincide with the visit of the Kreisler's.

As with Agatha and Lorenz Kreisler, Hilde was not a refugee. In addition, she held Danish citizenship. As a result, Gwen did not think it would be difficult for Hilde to enter the country. A quick visit to the British consulate in Paris confirmed Gwen's impression and, with the money she would no longer need for tuition the following year, Hilde purchased train tickets to Marseilles and booked passage on a ship that would be sailing from Marseilles to Palestine at about the time of the Kreisler's arrival.

As Hilde was contending with the political cross currents of academia, Lester Abelstein was attempting to resolve his own dilemma. Following the end of the war crimes trials in November 1947, Lester had returned to Los Angeles for a long-delayed reunion with his family. Even his father, who had never hesitated to needle his son or question whether he was working hard enough on his studies, was so happy to see Lester that he could only express unqualified admiration for his achievements.

After spending time with his family, Lester sought out his best friend from law school, Charlie Brody. Now married to Dianne Findleweiss and working for her father, Seymour Findleweiss, Charlie had become a respected Southern California transaction lawyer specializing in real estate matters. Along the way, he had found that transactional law and litigation often go hand in hand. As a result, he had long sought a trial lawyer to join the office but had not found one who brought the right combination of skill and compatibility. When Lester, now a skilled litigator, showed up in his office, Charlie believed he had found his man and proposed that Lester join the firm under very favorable terms.

Lester had at first hesitated, knowing he would have to sever his ties with Washington and the work he so much enjoyed in Europe. However, Charlie's offer was very tempting, and, at length, Lester accepted.

Owing to his friendship with Charlie, Lester's entry into the firm had gone smoothly. However, it did not take long for him to question whether law firm life was what he really wanted. Fortunately, Charlie's friendship and camaraderie at the firm enabled Lester to put aside his reservations, if only temporarily. Another comforting factor was that Charlie made a point of not

leaving their friendship behind when the workday was over. Lester had become a frequent guest in the Brody household where Charlie and Dianne, both full of curiosity and admiration, asked unceasing questions about Lester's time in Washington and his experiences during the war crime trials.

One evening, Lester described the trial of the senior Nazi figures in the Pohl Case involving the Reich Economic and Administrative Main Office, and his own emergence as a primary trial lawyer for the prosecution. However, he wanted to paint a full picture. So, amidst the recitation of his successes, he felt compelled to describe the one trial he had lost--the trial of Arno Bernthe--and the critical role of the key witness in the case, a man whose last name was Kreisler. As Charlie listened to Lester's description of Kreisler's testimony, it dawned on him that the person being described by Lester was none other than Charlie's uncle, Lorenz Kreisler.

Suddenly, Charlie blurted out his discovery. As he recited his connection to Kreisler, Lester was agape with surprise. However, his surprise was soon transformed into fascination as Charlie began reciting Lorenz Kreisler's many accomplishments. For Lester, the serendipitous discovery provided him with an entre for communicating with Kreisler, whom he had greatly admired at Arno Bernthe's trial. With guarded excitement, he sent a letter to Lorenz describing his relationship with Charlie Brody and the discovery that Charlie and Lorenz were related. To Lester's delight, his first letter to Lorenz was answered almost immediately and was the start of an informative and fruitful series of letters between the two unlikely correspondents.

Hilde arrived at the *kibbutz* and was received by the waiting arms of Gwen and Werner. After spending so much time with the Kreisler family in Sweden, Werner was practically a brother. Hilde, of course, hadn't occupied the same intimate role in Gwen's life, but, through their correspondence, Gwen had ceased to be merely a role model and had felt more and more like a sister. Delighted at being in the embrace of the younger Kreislers, Hilde was feeling very much at home.

Werner and Gwen couldn't wait to show Gwen around the *kibbutz*. The physical configuration of the grounds hadn't changed significantly since the time of Jonathan Sternbloom's visit more than ten years previously. But the *kibbutz* had clearly grown. Now, instead of three rings of buildings, there were four. A new semi-circular ring of residential structures had been built to accommodate the *kibbutz's* burgeoning population. The community center at the heart of the *kibbutz* had been enlarged and beautified with several varieties of native plantings. It still served as the center of *kibbutz* life where members of the community took their meals and celebrated *Kabbalat Shabbat* when the weather was too cold for holding Friday night services outdoors.

The kitchen and connected bakery, behind which Jonathan and his teenage sweetheart, Kayla Lewis, had stolen many a kiss, had also been enlarged commensurate with the increased population of the *kibbutz* community. Laughingly, Gwen noted that the back of the building still served as a hideaway for young lovers.

After completing their tour of the residential complex, they fanned out and soon came in contact with three *kibbutz* teachers escorting their innocent and fresh-faced young charges to their classrooms. The sight was so peaceful, not to speak of charming, that Hilde thought she had been whisked into a different world, which, indeed, she had.

As they walked past the two rings of living quarters, they encountered another semicircle containing the buildings devoted to farming pursuits. However, unlike the spare, hastily built structures of Jonathan Sternbloom's day, these buildings were sturdily constructed. Some housed the *kibbutz's* growing stock of dairy cows, goats, and horses. Others served as storage facilities for the community's assortment of tractors, plows, and crop-picking equipment. Most of the equipment was now mechanized as compared to the animal-pulled equipment that had existed during Jonathan Sternbloom's visit. Everywhere they went, Hilde observed men and women working diligently with little distinction between the roles played by each.

Soon, they passed several hen houses, a grape press building, an apple processing area, a wine storage area that housed the now-prized vintages produced at the *kibbutz*, an olive press building, a facility for jarring citrus and olive products, and a cold-storage building. But what Hilde especially loved were the greenhouses. Offering numerous varieties of roses, carnations, irises and gladiolas, the greenhouses transported Hilde back to her childhood and more innocent days when her family visited relatives in Holland.

The real prize of the *kibbutz* was its agricultural fields. Surrounding the four semicircles of buildings was the growing area. Since Jonathan Sternbloom's time, the *kibbutz* had purchased many additional acres of what had been inarable desert. Now, the area was watered by an extensive irrigation network, where numerous varieties of crops were grown, depending on the time of the year. Almost as far as the eye could see, Hilde marveled at the variety of citrus and other fruit trees that lined the irrigation ditches. The effect was one of both abundance and independence, something she had not seen of many, if any, other places in the Jewish world.

"Well, what do you think?" asked Werner, as they completed their tour.

"I'm tongue tied. I don't think I've ever seen anyplace more beautiful, both spiritually and physically." After seeing the wreckage of six years of war in Europe, the sight of what has been built here fills me with a kind of hope and optimism I never thought I'd experience.

"That's the answer we were hoping for. We have many people to whom we want to introduce you.

"I can't wait."

"Good. As far as the spirituality you mentioned, you should talk to Rabbi Chaim Goldston who will be the lead officiant at your conversion. But first, you must visit with my parents who are dying to see you."

The visit with Lorenz and Agatha Kreisler, whom Hilde also thought of as family, was as exciting as her meeting with Gwen and Werner. After endless hugs, both Kreisler's wanted to hear about Hilde's studies and her life in Paris. Somehow, time flew by, and soon they heard the call for dinner. However, before heading for the dining hall, Lorenz took Hilde aside. "Pardon me if what I'm about to suggest sounds like an intrusion."

"Go on, you could never intrude!"

"Thanks. That's the reassurance I needed. I've been listening to your description of your studies. You appear to be heading in the direction of international politics. In addition, your concern for the wellbeing of French Jewry, if not all of European Jewry, is both admirable and obvious."

“All true.”

“Well, I have someone I’d like you to meet. His name is Lester Abelstein. He’s a fine looking, young Jewish lawyer who shares your interests.”

“Is he here in the *kibbutz*?”

“No, he’s actually in Los Angeles.” At this, Hilde’s expression changed, and her face tightened in puzzlement.

“Before drawing any conclusions, let me explain. I met Lester during the Nuremberg war crime trials. We were both impressed with one another even though I was a witness for one of the defendants he was prosecuting. Afterward, we had a very amiable conversation, but we never made a real connection. He returned to Los Angeles where he was close friends with Sarah’s cousin Charlie Brody. Through Charlie, Lester eventually found out about my family connection. We’ve been corresponding since, and I think he’s quite special. With your permission, I’d like to encourage him to write to you and I would urge you to reciprocate if you have the opportunity. What do you say?”

“I have to admit, Los Angeles feels like the end of the world. But if you think it’s a good idea, I’m all for it.”

“Great.”

The next day, Gwen met with Rabbi Chaim Goldston and took an instant liking to him. After almost two hours in Goldston’s presence Gwen felt as if they had talked about almost everything under the sun. He was curious about how Gwen’s father had discovered his Jewish roots and Gwen was curious about what had drawn the rabbi to a rural *kibbutz* in Palestine. When they had just about finished their session, Goldston asked Gwen if she had any questions. Gwen nodded that she did.

“In my work, I’ve encountered many Frenchmen who have the greatest sympathy for the Jews of Europe and, in their underground activities, worked tirelessly to protect the country’s Jews during the war. Yet, I get the opposite sense from some of my colleagues who think the Jews brought their own misfortune on themselves. How can that be?”

“My dear, I understand that you know Jonathan Sternbloom.”

“Yes. I don’t know him well, but I met him at Gwen and Werner’s wedding and now he is married to Werner’s sister and my best friend, the former Sarah Kreisler. I also know he spent time here as a teenager.”

“I ask because more than ten years ago, a much younger Jonathan Sternbloom asked me a similar question. That was before the slaughter of so many of Europe’s Jews. Then, as now, I have difficulty answering questions like his and yours. But, let me ask you a question. You must have studied the four gospels as a young girl growing up in Denmark?”

“Yes, I did and, I’ll admit, I did not have a very favorable opinion of the Jews until I met Sarah and then observed how the Jewish refugees in Sweden supported one another. In addition, I learned a lot from the rabbi who has been instructing me at the Sorbonne about how the gospels that have served as the source of so much Jewish oppression were written anonymously and composed by persons who were not likely alive at the time of Jesus’ life and death. That means a lot of what has been relied upon to condemn and punish the Jews over the centuries was based upon what the gospel writers heard from others and not what they saw themselves.”

“Your teacher at the university was certainly correct. Unfortunately, in the case of many, the theological animus toward the Jews—what you, no doubt, learned from the gospels as a young girl—hasn’t changed. This goes a long way to explaining the slaughter of European Jewry. One need only look at the pogroms that have taken place in Poland since the war’s end, where it is estimated that almost one thousand Jews have been murdered, to appreciate how deeply held anti-Jewish views continue to be retained by some. As in the murder last summer of the forty-two Jews in Kielce, Poland, many of these atrocities are based on stubborn canards such as the outrageous blood libel that Jews drink the blood of Christian children. I don’t know where it will end. I can only hope that the Church recognizes that so much of what was inflicted on the Jews during the war would not have taken place were it not spurred on by its own teachings. Only if theological reform comes from within can we hope that the views of Christianity toward the Jews will change.”

Pensively, Hilde nodded her assent.

“But let’s leave this sad topic. Did your rabbi in Paris tell you that you do not have a *mikvah* here at the *kibbutz*? So, you’ll have to have your preparatory ablutions at the nearest *mikvah* which is outside of Tel Aviv. However, after that, you’ll come back here. Two other recognized rabbis and I will serve as your *Bet Din* and I will lead the conversion ceremony. It can be private, but I know the entire *kibbutz* would like to be present and celebrate with you. What do you say?”

“I’m proud of my conversion and want it to be known to the world. That’s why I came to the ancestral home of the Jewish people to become a Jew myself.”

As she had requested, Hilde’s conversion was indeed made public, and her joyous response was so infectious that it spawned an impromptu holiday on the *kibbutz*. After Gwen and Werner introduced her to what seemed like a countless parade of friends, Hilde expressed her appreciation but begged for a respite so she could get some sleep and dream about the day’s events.

When she awoke, Gwen treated her to a sumptuous breakfast and the two spent the remainder of the day talking, at least to the extent Gwen’s baby son, Efraim, would permit. Gwen repeatedly stated how happy she was with Werner’s and her decision to stay in Palestine, but also admitted that *kibbutz* life was difficult. Soberly, she also acknowledged that everyone on the *kibbutz* was on edge at what was going to happen at the end of the British Mandate, whenever that occurred.

Hilde was a realist and listened intently as Gwen recited the uncertainties that lay ahead for the Jews of Palestine. But little of what her friend and mentor had to say seemed to matter. She was besotted with the *kibbutz* and its people and the nation they hoped one day to build in the place where their biblical ancestors had once trod. At the end of her visit, the tears that spilled

from her eyes revealed her innermost thoughts as she said goodbye to Gwen and Werner. Her visit had affected her more than she had imagined and, as she boarded the steamer back to France, she could no longer suppress the thought that she wanted to return to this land of peril and promise.

In the spring of 1948, two events took place that would profoundly affect both Hilde and Lester. The first occurred on April 3, 1948, when the plan for the reconstruction of Europe envisioned by George C. Marshall in his June 1947 speech to the Harvard graduating class became law in the form of the Economic Cooperation Act, the ECA. The second, the May 14 declaration of the state of Israel, filled Hilde and Lester with joy and pride. For Hilde, the announcement also conjured up memories of the sense of loss and regret she had felt when she said goodbye to Werner and Gwen and *Kibbutz Ramah Gan*.

Under the ECA, which quickly became known as the Marshall Plan, in recognition of its originator, five billion dollars, representing about two percent of the gross domestic product of the United States economy, would initially be allocated to the reconstruction effort. Over time, the amount would increase to almost twelve and a half billion dollars for the four years the ECA was in effect.

At its outset, the plan's overarching goals were to stimulate the economies of the participating European states, rejuvenate Western civilization and stem the expansion of the Soviet Union. Because the recipient European countries had exhausted their foreign exchange reserves during the war, they lacked the means to import goods from abroad, especially from the United States. The ECA employed a unique mechanism for enabling such countries to build up their economies without the necessity of dollars or any other foreign currency, while, at the same time, benefitting US exporters of commodities such as food, fuel and industrial components.

The mechanism provided by the ECA was the free delivery of the American goods and services to the participating countries who, without restriction, could sell the American goods and services to local merchants for the local currency equivalent of the dollar value of the commodities being sold. The funds obtained from the local sales would then be deposited into special accounts maintained by the participating countries where they could be used for reconstruction or for the payment of war debts. Also, by selling the goods for local currency, which could then be retained in the special accounts, the participating countries were better able to control inflation by limiting the amount of local currency in circulation.

The ECA was administered by the Economic Cooperation Administration whose first administrator was Paul Grey Hoffman, a graduate of the University of Chicago and the president of Studebaker, the American car maker. ECA representatives, often accomplished businessmen, were assigned to each of the participating European countries: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, England, France, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey and West Germany. Aid had also been offered to the Eastern European countries under the Soviet sphere of influence, but Stalin had rejected the idea.

The United States believed that free trade among the aid recipients was an essential component of the program. In consequence, on April 16, 1948, the participating countries had formed the Organization for European Economic Cooperation, the OEEC, with the goals of abolishing trade restrictions, allocating resources among the member states and establishing a mechanism for member state consultation on matters of common economic interest. The OEEC was headed by Robert Marjolin, its Director General. Marjolin had served in the United States during the war as the representative of the French government in exile and was, at the time of his

OEEC appointment, the director of foreign trade in the French Ministry of Economic Affairs. The inclusion of West Germany in an OEEC headed by a Frenchman represented the view of the State Department that a prosperous German state was essential to the European recovery.

As he followed the progress of the ECA, Lester wondered whether it might offer the possibility of returning to Europe and being closer to Hilde. Discretely, he sent inquiries to his contacts in Washington and requested references from both his former colleagues at Treasury and at the War Crimes Commission. One afternoon, as he was plowing through the next day's depositions, his efforts appeared to have been rewarded. His secretary patched through a call from Washington. When Lester picked up the phone, he found himself speaking to ECA Administrator Paul Grey Hoffman. The Administrator needed an overseas counsel to iron out the many legal issues his European administrators were encountering. He advised that Lester had been highly recommended, but he also acknowledged the job would not be as high profile a position as the one Lester had occupied during the war crimes trials. Even so, he thought it would be interesting and it would certainly be a service to both the United States and Europe.

Lester had accepted on the spot and couldn't wait to write Hilde. But, before announcing his new position, he would have to talk to Charlie. Much to Lester's relief, Charlie was neither surprised nor begrudging about Lester leaving the firm so soon. Putting his hand on his friend's shoulder, Charlie wished him well. "Your work here has been excellent, but I could see that something was missing—something that otherwise would have enabled you to really put your heart into it. Seymour and I will be sorry to lose you. But I know we're no match for the siren call of Washington. So, take care and stay in touch."

By then, Lester and Hilde had been corresponding for more than six months. Their initial communications had been cautious and sporadic. However, it had not taken long for the young woman from Denmark and the young man from Southern California to discover they shared deep-seated convictions that more than compensated for the difference in their backgrounds. Soon, they were corresponding on a weekly basis and exchanging pictures.

As Lester had looked at Hilde's pictures, he had to admit that Lorenz had been correct. Hilde was beautiful both inside and out. For her part, Hilde couldn't take her eyes off the picture of Lester. He was clearly handsome as Lorenz had indicated, but his eyes also shone in such a way as to both draw her in and put her at ease.

The frequency of their correspondence soon increased as did their willingness to trust one another. At first, their disclosures dealt with their wartime experiences and, in particular, the roles each had played in aiding the displaced Jews of Europe. Lester described his work in helping to create the War Refugee Board and happily acknowledged the work was the most important thing he had ever done. Hilde responded by describing her experience in Sweden working with the Jewish refugee community and how it had contributed to her decision to convert to Judaism. Soon, their disclosures became more intimate and personal. There was little question about the direction their relationship was taking. Theirs was a deeply affectionate connection even though they had not met one another, and they began to fantasize about what they would do the day they finally met. So, when Hilde had heard Lester's news that he would be coming to Europe, she was beside herself with excitement and anticipation.

As it turned out, Hilde's own circumstances would also soon lead her to work on the European reconstruction effort. One day as the school year was ending, the dean of her program called her into his office. He had received a call from the administrative chief in the office of OEEC

Director General Robert Marjolin. The Director General was looking for a promising young economist with a political science background and had asked the dean for a recommendation. The dean wanted to recommend Hilde but Hilde hesitated.

“Thank you, sir. But I want to teach at the university level. If I accept the position, I won’t be able to complete my dissertation. Without a doctorate, my chances of teaching at a fine university will vanish.”

“You may be right. But I didn’t recommend you on just the basis of merit. I’ve watched you grow while you’ve been here, and I really want to do right by you.”

“What do you mean.”

“Simply, this. I understand that you recently converted to Judaism.”

Hilde felt put out, but she knew she had to restrain herself in the presence of the dean.

“I have no qualms with your choosing any religion. However, I’m concerned that being Jewish will affect your future in academia. As a woman, it will be difficult enough for you to find a university position in the male dominated field of economics. But, in these harsh times, you’re being a Jew will make it almost impossible. That’s why I’d like to recommend you for the OEEC position. I think it will be an excellent opportunity for you. Please think about what I’ve said and let me know in a day or two.”

After tearfully reflecting on her situation, Hilde recognized that the dean was trying to be both helpful and realistic. Importantly, the prospect of working for the OEEC was made more appealing by the hope she might interact with Lester.

Lester had been advised that his departure for Europe had been delayed due to a backlog of paperwork in Washington. With each letter he received from Hilde, the delay felt unbearable. Finally, he received his orders and airplane tickets to Europe. To his disappointment, however, he was to be based in Brussels rather than Paris. When he conveyed what he considered to be distressing news to Hilde, her reaction showed anything but disappointment. Brussels, she noted, was only a ninety-minute train ride from Paris. They would be able to visit one another as often as they pleased.

As soon as Lester arrived in Brussels, he was beset with a backlog of legal issues. It was clear it would be weeks before he was able to visit Hilde in Paris. However, now Hilde and he were communicating by phone rather than mail and the sound of their voices filled one another with delight and desire.

Finally, the morning arrived when he alighted from the train at Paris’ *Gare du Nord*, its grand neoclassical North Station. No sooner had Lester’s feet hit the train platform than he saw someone running toward him. Hilde had arrived early and had been waiting at the platform for the train from Brussels for more than a half hour. Lester recognized Hilde immediately and, as he caught the smile on her face, he instinctively put down his suitcase. In a flash, they were in one another’s arms. Their kisses expressed all the pent-up desire they had experienced over the many months they had known one another at a distance. Over and over, they kissed until the need to

look at one another prevailed over their passion. Even then, each only took in a fleeting glance of the other before they hugged as tightly as their bodies would permit.

They spent the afternoon talking endlessly and topped off the exhilaration of the day with a fine Parisian meal. By day's end, they knew they were in love. Hilde lived in a spare fifth floor apartment, but it was clean and even had a balcony. Before Lester had arrived, she was unsure of whether she would invite him to stay with her. But after the exhilaration of the day, she couldn't wait.

As soon as the door to the apartment closed behind them, they were in one another's arms. They undressed quickly. The feel of one another's bodies spurred on their desire. Each encouraged the other until, urgently, they brought one another to an excited climax. As they lay in one another's embrace gently stroking each other, they arrived at the same conclusion. Their love making had confirmed what they already knew. They were right for one another, and nothing could possibly get in the way.

Lester and Hilde saw one another every weekend after Lester's first visit to Paris and they both knew it was only a matter of time before they would be married. Unfortunately, the exultation they were feeling in their personal lives was not matched by their experiences in their work lives. For Lester, the work was not only far removed from the limelight but, in addition, it was tiresomely repetitive, with most of the issues crossing his desk having to do with the same worn-out tariff disputes. For Hilde, the work had the potential for being interesting, but, more and more, she noticed that the important assignments were being directed to her male colleagues while she received the most mundane and, often wearisome, assignments.

Unavoidably, Hilde's thoughts turned to her short time on the *kibbutz*, where the men treated the women as valued partners in the great undertakings that were taking place. She began to hunger for such an environment and, after holding her thoughts in check for as long as she could, she decided to tell Lester how she felt. At first, Lester viewed her yearnings as a convenient diversion from the work life he knew she loathed. However, it did not take long for Lester to realize that her need to be back at the *kibbutz* was heartfelt. He had never considered moving to Israel. But his work, too, was anything but stimulating. The more he thought about it, the more such a move seemed like the culmination of all the work he had performed on behalf of the uprooted remnants of world Jewry. Israel was, after all, the place of ingathering for so many of those maligned and benighted souls.

That weekend, as Lester lay next to Hilde satisfied by the vigorous love making that had just taken place, Hilde absentmindedly began to stroke Lester's thigh, first gently, but, as she sensed Lester's need, more rhythmically and vigourously. Lester was surprised at how quickly Hilde could arouse him, despite his having reached a climax so recently. As he laid his head back, he could feel Hilde's lips caressing his excited member. He stiffened excitedly and soon was overcome with a rush so electrifying that he arched his back hard and screamed in delight as he ejaculated.

Almost embarrassed by his graceless climax, Lester rolled over onto an elbow. "I don't know what to say after that display. But it's just another reason why I know no one could ever take your place. This is not a particularly elegant moment for a proposal, but I can't help myself. Will you marry me?"

Hilde replied immediately. "Of course, I will." But Lester could see there was reservation in her tone.

"Hesitation is written all over your face. What's the matter?"

"There's nothing that I want more in life than to marry you. But there's something else: I want to be married in Israel at *Kibbutz Ramah Gan* and I want to stay there." At that, Hilde placed her head in her hands and began crying inconsolably believing she had just ruined what should have been the most important moment in her life. Her crying only stopped when she felt Lester kissing her forehead and gently placing his hands under her chin and wiping away her tears.

"You may not realize it, but I've given the prospect of moving to Israel a lot of thought because I've sensed how badly you want to do it. I don't know what life will be like there, but I'm willing to give it a try and I'm delighted at the idea of getting married in a place that I already think of as home. Now, let's call our parents and give them the good news. We're going to have to visit our families before we leave. Denmark will be easy. But Los Angeles is another matter entirely. We'll probably have to work until the end of the year to save the necessary funds for traveling to both Los Angeles and Tel Aviv. That will probably also be fair to both of our employers who, otherwise, might be left short handed were we to leave more suddenly."

Both of their visits had gone well. However, as the time approached for the two lovers to think about leaving, Hilde's father took ill, and she didn't want to leave until she was confident, he was okay. Happily, the elder Hedtoft made a full recovery. Relieved, they resumed their planning and scheduled the same steamship Hilde had previously taken when she visited Palestine. On a bright spring day, as Gabrielle and Györgi had done before them, Hilde followed Lester as he walked up the ship's gangplank in Marseilles. Soon, the large craft had motored out of the harbor. Lester and Hilde stood on the upper deck watching the receding shoreline. In little time, the ship was steaming across the aqua-blue waters of the Mediterranean on its way to Haifa.

Chapter 40

Israel: Austerity, Reparations and Conflict January 1949-April 1956

Following the 1948 war, the euphoria over Israeli statehood had inevitably given way to the realities of everyday governance, immigration, and the consolidation of its victories. Every week, new groups of immigrants had arrived at the shores of the brand-new nation. In addition, an estimated 850,000 Jews who lived in Arab countries had been placed in grave jeopardy. After the Arab defeat in the 1948 war, many of these Jews had been subjected to retaliatory pogroms or outright expulsion. For most, the new State of Israel, though besieged by all manner of problems, was their only practical destination.

As 1948 gave way to 1949, major events made the headlines of the Israeli press on an almost weekly basis. On January 12, the Egyptian government agreed to talks that would take place on the island of Rhodes in the Mediterranean. The talks resulted in a signed armistice agreement on February 24. Additional armistice agreements with Lebanon, Jordan and Syria would follow in the months ahead. However, there was a gnawing need to do something about the Arab-occupied, southern Negev Desert. The region had been promised to Israel in the November 1947 partition proposal, but its ultimate ownership had been left unaddressed by the signed and pending armistice agreements. During March of 1949, the new Israeli Defense Force, the IDF, acted as it launched Operation Uvda, the capture of the southern Negev and, ultimately, the establishment of a gateway to the Red Sea.

Now back in Israel and a member of the Defense Force's Negev brigade, György found himself part of the operation. On the morning of March 4, an IDF brigade member knocked on his door and told him he was to report the following day to the Negev brigade commander who was stationed in the northern Negev city of Beersheba. There, György was given responsibility for leading a combat platoon. Along with the rest of the brigade, György's platoon soon headed south toward the area of Sde Avraham. There it cleared an area that would serve as an airfield for the arrival of a second brigade, the Golani brigade. Aided by the Golani Brigade, the Negev Brigade then marched further south prepared to do battle with the Arab villages in its path. To György's great relief, neither his brigade nor the Golani brigade encountered resistance of any consequence as they continued to forge a path south.

The Israelis knew that, before they could savor their victories, they would have to confront the entrenched Jordanian garrison at the southern village of Ein Ghamr. The task would fall to the Gilani Brigade. Casualties were expected and the brigade commander did his best to harden his troops to the demands of the battle that lay ahead. However, as dawn broke and his troops advanced toward the expected Jordanian defenses, they began to whoop and holler. Instead, of stern defenses, they discovered the Jordanians had retreated rather than face the advancing Israeli columns. Now, an unobstructed path lay ahead for the southern advance of both the Golani and Negev Brigades. Challenging one another to see which would reach the Red Sea first, the two brigades charged forward toward Umm Rashrash, the eventual site of the Israeli city of Eilat, on the Red Sea.

On the morning of March 11, the Commander of the Negev Brigade with György and the other platoon leaders at his side inspected the abandoned Arab police station at Umm Rashrash. Two hours later the Golani Brigade arrived. The Negev Brigade Commander prepared a telegram to convey the sweetness of the moment and showed it to his platoon commanders before sending

it. As György read the words of the telegram, tears welled in his eyes. His new family and he had come so far and now they were citizens of a new Jewish state that extended from the Lebanese border on the north to the Red Sea on the south. Again, he read the text of the commander's short but joyous message: "On Hagana day, the 11th of Adar, the Palmach Negev brigade and the Golani brigade present the Gulf of Eilat to the State of Israel". And, again, he was overcome with the enormity of what had been accomplished on that day.

As a result of the armistice agreements, Egypt controlled the Gaza Strip and Jordan controlled the land on the west bank of the Jordan River, which it would later annex. However, Israel controlled far more land than had been proposed for it in the United Nations partition agreement of November 1947. Even so, its victories had come at a wrenching cost. More than six thousand three hundred Jews had died during the conflict and another fifteen thousand had been wounded—an enormous number for the country's then six hundred thousand Jewish inhabitants. However, for many, such as György, the cost in blood had meant a new beginning and the hope of excising the scars of the past.

Despite the young country's accomplishments, it could not escape the economic pressures caused by its burgeoning population. *Kibbutzim* were sprouting everywhere. However, outside of self-sustaining *kibbutzim* such as *Kibbutz Ramah Gan*, there were universal shortages of food and other essentials. Austerity was a way of life, with eggplant serving as the staple in many households. Lacking in foreign currency, the state piled up large deficits as the cost of imports far outpaced the value of the country's exports. The resultant inflation and unemployment led to the creation of the Ministry of Rationing and Supply which rationed almost all essentials ranging from food to fuel to furniture to footwear.

Rationing was so severe that the average Israeli consumed no more in calories than had the average Londoner during the *Blitz*. Black markets sprouted throughout the country causing even higher inflation and resulting in the creation of another regulatory agency, the Office for Fighting the Black Market.

In January 1952, the *Knesset* declared Jerusalem as Israel's capital. The following month, Israel and Egypt signed a comprehensive armistice agreement, with the Gaza Strip treated as a neutral zone between the two countries. The same month, Eilat received its first airplanes on its newly opened airfield.

All over Israel, immigration continued to grow. Immigration from Europe and North Africa increased by the hundreds of thousands. In addition, immigrants began arriving from neighboring Middle Eastern countries. Heroic airlifts designated Operation Ezra and Nehemiah--the names of prophets from Israel's biblical period--brought in thousands from Iraq.

In June, the *Knesset* passed the country's Basic Laws, an interim form of a constitution. The following month, the *Knesset* adopted the momentous Law of Return, guaranteeing the right of entry to Jews and their families from all over the world.

Soon, the port of Eilat welcomed the arrival of its first ship, a craft that had left Yemen carrying three *Torah* scrolls from the country's Jewish community. The scrolls were followed by Operation Magic Carpet, the astonishing airlift of fifty thousand Jews from Yemen, virtually its entire Jewish population.

With the arrival of each new immigrant, the pressure on the new government increased as did the austerity measures it was forced to institute to spread the country's limited resources among its fast-growing population. As 1950 merged into 1951 and 1951 marched inexorably toward 1952, the hardships experienced by ordinary Israelis was becoming difficult to bear. For the country, the sense of increasing deprivation was placing a strain on politicians and institutions alike. Something was needed. The prospect of that something began to immerge in the fall of 1951.

It had not taken long for the new Israeli government to recognize the role Lester Abelstein could play in the international arena. Almost from the time of Hilde's and his arrival at *Kibbutz Ramah Gan*, Lester spent as much time with the *Knesset* Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee as he did at the *kibbutz*. Initially, Lester had happily spent almost all his time in helping carry out the Israeli goal of absorbing the remaining elements of Europe's displaced Jewry.

However, starting in September 1951, a new issue had begun to lay claim to Lester's time. In that month, Chancellor Konrad Adenauer delivered an extraordinary speech to the German Parliament in which he stated that "unspeakable crimes have been committed in the name of the German people, calling for moral and material indemnity."

The following month, Nahum Goldmann, co-chairman of the Jewish Agency for Israel and president of the World Jewish Congress, convened a meeting in New York of almost two dozen of the major national and international Jewish organizations to consider Adenauer's proposal. The meeting soon evolved into a claims conference known as the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, with its directors charged with setting the terms for reparations.

In Israel, the *Knesset* Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee found itself at the middle of a national debate on the morality of accepting reparations from the very nation that had so rapaciously drained the lifeblood from European Jewry. It was an issue that taxed Lester's conscience. However, he was aware of the need to jump start the country's economy and feed its many hungry mouths. So, he argued before the Committee that the country's precarious finances had to take precedence over the more righteous, but less practical, contention that anything received from Germany was unacceptable blood money. In this, David Ben-Gurion and his *Mapai* party agreed, and Lester's argument carried the day.

In America, the negotiation team tasked with carrying out the results of the Claims Conference was headed by Nahum Goldman on behalf of the World Jewish Congress. In Israel, the principal negotiator was Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett, with several trusted aids, including Lester, at his side.

For Germany, Konrad Adenauer led the negotiations. He had chosen as one of his key interlocutors a fellow German who knew the mood in Germany as well as in Israel and who had risen in the public's esteem following his performance in the Pohl Trial. To Lester's delight, the man was Lorenz Kreisler, who was committed to a reconstructed Germany, but whose visits to his son Werner had given him a unique perspective on life in Israel. Lorenz's role was to help negotiate a price tag on the amount of assistance Germany would provide to Israel.

With so much at stake, the negotiations unavoidably encountered obstacles, not to speak of continued resentment among those in Israel who still considered German money to be unclean. The negotiators were closing around a figure of three billion German marks that would be paid to Israel over fourteen years, as well as four hundred and fifty million dollars that would be paid to

the World Jewish Committee. However, the agreement required a final nudge to make it acceptable to a still skeptical Israeli public.

Lorenz and Lester had been meeting informally throughout the negotiations. One day, as Lorenz was thinking about what would be required to give the negotiated sums a final push, he decided to call Lester. After a few rings, Lorenz reached Lester and made one simple pitch. “Adenauer is willing to agree to the reparations numbers that are now on the table. I don’t think he can get any more out of the German parliament, especially since the German people, themselves, have not yet come to terms with their responsibility for what happened during the war. For the sake of both Israel’s economic future and the start of German repentance for what it has done to the Jewish people, I beg you to use whatever influence you possess to obtain Israel’s agreement to the proposal.”

Lester did not hesitate and reported his conversation to Moshe Sharett. He would never know whether Lorenz’s call and his subsequent appeal played a role in the conclusion of negotiations. However, in September 1952 a reparations agreement was signed for the proposed sums, and the payments began. The payments were used to purchase German goods, machinery, and equipment. To a large degree, the payments enabled Israel to move forward and escape economic catastrophe, with the purchased equipment helping to spur the construction of hundreds of industrial plants, the development of the country’s water supply, electrical system, railways and ports, and the establishment of its merchant marine fleet. In addition, the funds enabled Israel to purchase tractors and other heavy equipment needed for agriculture, road building and mining.

With development humming throughout the country and the conflict with the Arab world seemingly held in abeyance, the years 1952 through 1955 glided by without mishap. As 1956 dawned, it appeared the young country would be able to continue moving forward with modest prosperity and the absence of bloodshed. However, across the Red Sea, events were taking place in Egypt that would soon upend any sense of political and military calm in the Jewish state.

Chapter 41

Suez: The New Nation is Drawn into the International Arena April 1954-March 1957

Lucien Mandel was feeling heady from his association with Angelo Donati. The elder statesman's position in Paris as General Secretary of the Italian Red Cross had given Lucien access to otherwise inaccessible post-war diplomatic circles. At first, Lucien was so engrossed in navigating these arenas that he found it difficult to focus on his graduate studies in political science at the Sorbonne Faculty of Arts and Humanities. However, Donati had guided him in how to balance his professional life supporting Donati's Jewish refugee work with his academic life, so that he was able to succeed at both.

Lucien had been at the Sorbonne for a year when Hilde Hedtoft arrived. Hilde would have been hard for Lucien to miss as she was one of the few female graduate students in political science. In addition, she had made no attempt to conceal her interest in Judaism and had found her way into Donati's ever-widening circle of admiring young protégés. Lucien, who himself was one of the few Jews in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, and Hilde had become acquainted with one another. The two had quickly become friends based on their shared affinity for Judaism and their wartime experiences evading the Germans.

Hilde's interests had taken her to the economic aspects of political science, while Lucien had been more interested in the interplay between military and diplomatic policy. Like Hilde, Lucien had sensed the anti-Jewish sentiment on the part of those students and faculty members who had never abandoned their philosophical connection to the Vichy administration. He had been repulsed by what he heard, just as Hilde had. However, unlike Hilde, he had found the going easier because of his past wartime activities in the French underground which had earned him credibility with many of the other students who had also fought with the underground.

In addition, rather than being intimidated by what he heard, Lucien had resolved to fight back by focusing his energies on ensuring that a national movement like the German National Socialists would never reemerge. When Israel declared its independence in 1948, his resolve had only intensified. Soon, he began to direct his attention to the military readiness of the young country, while maintaining his overall interest in European military affairs. So, upon graduation, it was natural for Lucien to join the French Ministry of Defense.

He rose quickly within the Ministry and had achieved considerable responsibility within the bureaus responsible for arms sales and the development of France's nuclear arsenal. He also became a key staff member for the Defense Department office that served as liaison with the *Quai D'Orsay*, the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs.

As with England and America, in the late 1940's and early 1950's France had not wanted to offend the Arab world by showing any partiality toward Israel. It had even taken the country almost three months before it recognized the Jewish state in January 1949. The country's standoffish policies toward Israel had dismayed Lucien even as he advanced within the country's military establishment. However, in 1952, France's politics toward the Middle East began to change as it suddenly found its interests aligned with those of Israel.

The change in France's attitude toward Israel could be summarized by one word: Algeria. During the post-war years, France's principal international preoccupation was focused on Algeria, its restive colony in North Africa, where the rebellious National Liberation Front (FLN) had been fighting a brutal war of liberation against French settlers and the French military. Though bloody, the early years of the rebellion in Algeria had not drawn in any other Arab state. However, in 1952 that dynamic began to change as a result of another rebellion in Egypt. There, a group of young officers, known as the Free Officers, led by its charismatic colonel, Gamal Abdul Nasser, toppled the country's pro-western, but profligate king, Farouk I.

Nasser's contempt for the European countries that had colonized North Africa was palpable. Soon, he began stoking nationalistic passions in Algeria through diplomacy, arms sales and the offer of refuge to fleeing FLN guerillas. With its hold on Algeria being threatened by the audacious young colonel, not to speak of the risk Nasser posed to the stability of the entire Middle East, the French government decided that its best interests lay with his elimination.

In this belief, the new French attitude lined up with Israel's concerns regarding Egypt. Since Egypt had signed the armistice agreement with Israel in 1949, it had not desisted in mounting attacks against the Jewish state. Nasser's emergence had only heightened Israel's wariness when it came to Egypt's intentions. As Nasser's anti-Israel messages to the Egyptian public became more strident, the Israeli government worried that a Nasser-provoked Egypt might mount a new war focused on Israel's elimination.

Israel hoped that the coalescence of interests between France and itself might open the door to the purchase of French arms. The hope took shape at the beginning of 1953 as Pierre Gilbert, France's newly arrived ambassador to Israel, began a series of meetings with Shimon Peres, the young Director General of the Israeli Defense Ministry, aimed at reassuring Peres of France's willingness to sell weaponry to Israel.

Peres was a polyglot who was fluent in French. More importantly, though, he was also a Francophile who loved Paris. His infectious manner, his obvious love of all things French and his razor-sharp intellect enabled him to arrange for dozens of visits to Paris to meet with the French military establishment. During one of these meetings, the young Peres had become impressed with an equally young French military staffer, named Lucien Mandel who had been sitting in on many of Peres' meetings at the Defense Department. After one of his meetings, Peres had approached Lucien with a view toward further conversation and possible friendship.

It had not taken Peres long to realize that, in Lucien, he had found an ally and a possible entrée within the French military bureaucracy. His instincts had paid off as one of Lucien's first acts was to introduce Peres to a colleague who served as chief assistant to Bernard Goldschmidt. A fellow Jew, Goldschmidt was one of France's leading nuclear physicists and had been the only Frenchman to work on the Manhattan Project. Most importantly, Goldschmidt was the head of the Chemistry Division at the *Commissariat a l'Enegie Atomique*, the French Atomic Energy Commission, and had been proposed to head the commission's office of external relations and planning. The introduction had led to a long and fruitful relationship between Peres and Goldschmidt, beginning with Goldschmidt's agreement to travel to Israel in 1954 to meet with Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion to discuss possible cooperation with Israel on nuclear issues.

As their friendship grew, Lucien marveled at Peres' facility with the French military establishment. France was by now looking at Israel as a possible counterweight to Nasser's pan-Arab ambitions, and as a bulwark against his destabilizing efforts relating to Algeria. On one occasion, as Lucien looked on with admiration, Perez met with French Defense Minister Marie-

Pierre Koenig. Capitalizing on the new French attitude toward Israel, Peres had been able to persuade the defense minister to promise that Israel would be able to purchase the weapons it needed. After the meeting, Lucien had caught up with Peres as he was leaving the building. There was something on his mind that he wanted to ask the Israeli.

Ushering Peres to a quiet corner, Lucien expressed what was on his mind. “I’ve prepared for the work I’m doing at the Ministry all my academic life and I could only dream of the position I now occupy while I was hiding from Nazi’s and working with the French underground. But now that I’ve seen what kind of work you’re doing here, I’ve been wondering whether my life’s work would be better spent in Israel? I have a former colleague from the Sorbonne who moved to Israel recently after working for one of our ministries. I questioned her decision at the time, but now I’m feeling a bit envious.

Peres hesitated for a moment. “What’s the name of your former colleague?”

“Her maiden name was Hilde Hedtoft. But she married an American named Lester Abelstein and changed her last name to Hilde Abelstein after their marriage. I haven’t been in touch with Lester or Hilde since they moved to Israel.”

Lester was surprised by Peres’ response, particularly since it was accompanied by a decided twinkle in his eye. “You may have lost touch with Lester and Hilde, but I haven’t.”

“What do you mean?”

“You know Israel is a small country and there are very few that have the international experience of Lester Abelstein. In fact, I deemed his expertise in the international arena to be so strong that I made him a senior member of my staff.”

“I’m already surprised, and we’ve hardly begun our conversation!”

“I understand, but let’s talk about this later after you finish work. We’ll have a glass of wine together.”

Later, they met at one of Peres’ favorite cafes where he ordered a bottle of white 1947 Bordeaux from the Sémillon region. Sweet wines were then in fashion, but Peres loved the refreshing dryness of the white vintage. For an entrée, they both ordered pan-fried Bronzino cooked in caper butter.

After a few pleasantries, as they waited for their dinner, Peres came to the point. “I do not expect you to be a fifth columnist, but, if you want to help Israel, your job is here at the Ministry. In addition to your country’s fine wines, I’m sure you’re aware there’s a reason why I spend so much time in France. We’ve tried all diplomatic means to make peace with the Arabs, but to little avail. As a result, we need all the arms we can get. So far, France, encouraged by the support of your Prime Minister, Guy Mollet, is the only country that has shown any interest in selling us armaments. To the extent you can help enhance this growing relationship, you’ll be doing Israel a great service. If the time comes when we no longer have anything to fear from our Arab neighbors, or if you run into any problems here, we’ll welcome you to Israel. Now, I see that our meal is about to arrive. So, let’s enjoy our food and drink to a long and productive relationship between our two countries and between you and me.”

Lucien had seen the wisdom in Peres' words. There would be many more meetings in which he would observe Peres patiently interact with Lucien's superiors in the French Defense Department, as arms purchases methodically worked their way through the French establishment. However, in the summer of 1955, external events precipitated both an increase in the frequency of Peres' meetings and a corresponding increase in the sale of French arms to Israel.

In the spring of 1955, England, Iraq and Turkey entered into a tripartite agreement known as the Baghdad Pact. The pact had been intended as a firewall against a possible Soviet incursion into the Middle East. However, Nasser had seen it in different terms. Already hemmed in by Western European and American efforts to limit arms sales to the Middle East, Nasser saw the pact as another effort to constrain him militarily and politically. In response, he looked to the Soviet Union—the very entity the Pact countries had intended to contain—for the purchase of arms. In September, Nasser had concluded a massive arms deal with the Soviets through its vassal state, the government of Czechoslovakia. The arms agreement not only threatened to give Egypt military superiority over Israel, but also sent a clear message to the western powers of Soviet and Egyptian intentions in the region.

In response, France believed it was more important than ever to reinforce Israel militarily so that it would serve as a counterweight to Nasser and his newly established arsenal. As a result, French arms started to flow to the Israelis at great speed, with Israel receiving French *Mystere* fighter jets, large 155-milimeter guns, AMX tanks and all manner of supporting ammunition and spare parts. In all, with Peres spearheading the effort, Israel would receive over 40,000 tons of military equipment over the course of the following year.

At each of Peres' procurement meetings, Lucien continued to be amazed at Peres' artistry. But the two most fascinating meetings involving Peres and his French counterparts were yet to come.

Egypt was now in the planning stage of a huge public works program in the form of a new dam that would help to regulate the annual cycle of flooding and drought that confounded the lives of the occupants of the Nile's drainage basin. The dam would be built across the river at the town of Aswan and, when completed, would be the world's largest embankment dam. Both England and the United States had promised support for the construction of what was being called the Aswan High Dam. However, in June 1956, the United States had found itself snookered for the second time by a Soviet proposal to Egypt. For, on the heels of the September 1965 Czechoslovakian arms deal, the Russians had now promised to lend Nasser the equivalent of \$1.2 billion dollars at low interest to finance construction of the Aswan High Dam. Egypt had expressed interest in this further arrangement with the Soviets. In response, the United States Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, announced one month later that the United States was withdrawing its support for the dam.

A week after Dulles' July announcement, a defiant Nasser, now emboldened by Soviet assurances, declared that Egypt was nationalizing the Suez Canal, which, until that time, had been operated by the Anglo/French Suez Canal Company. His actions regarding the seizure of the canal represented one of two international power grabs he had initiated. The other was his decision to seal off the Straights of Tehran at the opening to the Gulf of Aqaba, thereby interdicting all ships sailing to the Israeli port of Eilat at the top of the Gulf.

Nasser's actions nationalizing the canal led to predictable fears in both France and England that Nasser would use his control to choke off the flow of oil to the West. Their fears matched the growing hysteria in Israel over both the Egyptian arms deal and its attempt to bring Israel to heel by preventing cargo ships from reaching the port of Eilat. As these reactions were running their course in the capitals of the three countries, Peres was once again in Paris. This time, Lester Abelstein was at his side.

Peres was using the chaotic frenzy that had followed Nasser's nationalization of the Suez Canal to pursue a topic he had discussed many times since Bernard Goldschmidt's first visits to Israel—the purchase of a small nuclear reactor to be located at the southern Israeli community of Demona. As Lucien once again watched with fascination, Peres made his case to the combined assemblage of Prime Minister, Guy Mollet, Minister of Defense, Maurice Bourges-Manoury, and Foreign Minister, Christian Mineau. After Peres' presentation, Mollet was undecided, and Mineau was unmoved, but Bourges-Manoury, who would later become Prime Minister during the waning hours of the French Fourth Republic, was convinced. It was Bourges-Manoury who would help Peres carry the day by agreeing in principle that France would supply Israel with the desired nuclear reactor.

After the meeting, Peres, Lester and Lucien got together at the same café where Lucien had first mentioned his acquaintance with Lester and Hilde Abelstein. They clinked glasses in tribute to Peres' victory that day. But soon Peres' face took on a somber expression. "Matters are now moving very quickly because of Nasser's actions. Our sources advise that France and England are even forming a secret alliance for the purpose of unseating Nasser. As a result, I'm going to have my hands full and if, you, Lucien, need to reach me, I want you to act through Lester. That's why I brought him to dinner, so that the two of you could get reacquainted."

Peres waited a moment while Lester and Lucien exchanged assurances of their desire to act with one another. He then directed his attention to Lucien. "I now have business to take care of, but I'd like Lester and you to establish a back door communication channel. Through that channel, Lester can receive any information of interest from you that will not violate your loyalty to France but may be very helpful to Israel."

After Peres left, Lucien and Lester spent an additional two hours reminiscing and establishing a telephone mechanism for Lucien to reach Lester as events unfolded. It would not be long before Lucien had occasion to call the number with important news.

England and France were, indeed, talking about dislodging Nasser, even by force. Anthony Eden, England's Prime Minister, was of course aware that Selwyn Lloyd, his Foreign Secretary, was leading negotiations at the United Nations regarding freedom of shipping on the Suez Canal. But Eden had little faith that the negotiations would be fruitful.

At Eden's invitation, on October 14, General Maurice Chalet, on behalf of the French Military, and Albert Gazier, on behalf of the French Foreign Ministry, met Eden at Checkers, the prime minister's country home, to discuss the implementation of a military plan to strike Egypt and remove Nasser by force. At the meeting, Chalet suggested that the two countries form an agreement with Israel to attack Egypt's military forces in the Sinai Desert near the Suez Canal, thereby posing an ostensible threat to Egypt's administration of the Canal Zone. Using the Israeli attack as a pretext, Chalet's plan envisioned that France and England would then insist that the

belligerent parties both withdraw from the Canal Zone in the interest of safeguarding shipping on the Canal, as well as providing for its future stability. By agreement, Israel would comply, while Egypt would be expected to resist, thereby precipitating an attack by the combined naval and air forces of both France and England.

Over the objections of the British Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Anthony Nuttig, Eden expressed interest in the plan. His agreement was based on the condition that Israel would have to be seen as acting on its own so that England would have plausible deniability in claiming that it was not colluding with Israel in support of attacking an Arab country. Two days later after the French representatives had returned to Paris, Eden convened a second meeting at 10 Downing Street, his London residence, to again discuss with Nuttig what had become known as the Chalet Scenario. Selwyn Lloyd, Eden's Foreign Secretary, also joined the meeting at midstream. Again, Nuttig declared his opposition to any action that might lead to the enmity of the Arab countries. Eden could see that the foreign affairs ministry under Nuttig would be of little help in implementing an attack on Egypt. Instead, he decided to sidestep Nuttig and direct Selwyn Lloyd, himself a skeptic of the plan, to leave for France immediately to convey Eden's acceptance of the Chalet Scenario. He then called the director and deputy director at MI6, England's secret intelligence service. Alex Braxton, the long-serving Deputy Director at MI6, was a trusted friend and Eden wanted to make sure Braxton knew what was taking place and to enlist his help if needed. In addition, Eden knew that Braxton's daughter, Gwen, lived in Israel, a consideration that gave Braxton a different and, often, more balanced, view of the Middle East than Eden's own foreign affairs ministry.

Once in Paris, Lloyd met with Prime Minister Guy Mollet and Foreign Minister Christian Pineau. He first assured the two that England was under no treaty obligation to defend Egypt if Israel attacked its forces in the Sinai. Further, in the event hostilities played out as expected under the Chalet Scenario, he communicated Eden's assurance that England would join France in attacking Egypt in the event Nasser refused to withdraw from the Canal Zone, once demanded to do so by the two European powers.

Both of these assurances were confirmed by cable from Eden the following day. The French Ministry of Defense was now abuzz with what would come next. For Lucien, the answer was very simple: Israel would have to be involved in future discussions for implementing the Chalet Scenario. Quickly, he picked up the phone and, using the offices of the Israeli Defense Ministry's representative in Paris, arranged to talk to Lester. When he reached Lester, Lucien's message was short and to the point: "Tell Peres that matters are moving quickly between England and France, and that an effort should be made for an Israeli delegation to join imminent talks that will be taking place in Paris."

The next day, Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion proposed to Prime Minister Guy Mollet that a high-level Israeli delegation consisting of himself, Chief of Staff, Moshe Dayan, of the Israel Defense Force, and Peres come to Paris to meet with Mollet and his staff. Mollet agreed and the Israeli delegation arrived in France on October 22. Immediately, they were whisked to the Parisian suburb of Sevres where they and their French counterparts met in a spacious home once owned by loyal supporters of General de Gaulle. It would be Lucienne's good fortune to sit in on the meetings that the two European countries hoped would be pivotal in removing Nasser from power, thereby shaping the future of the Middle East in a manner compatible with European interests.

The meetings lasted for three days during which Ben-Gurion focused on three issues. First, he wanted assurances that France would protect the Israeli coast and its cities in the event of an Arab counterattack. Second, if the Israeli forces were successful in ousting the Egyptian army from their positions in the Sanai desert leading to the canal, he did not want a long period to elapse before the Britain and France acted. Third, following a successful campaign, he wanted Israel to be allowed to remain in the Sanai at Sharm el Sheikh, so as to protect the Straits of Tehran and Israel-bound ships sailing through the Gulf of Aqaba.

Lloyd, ever the skeptic, hemmed and hawed, prompting the French Foreign Minister Christian Pineau to fly to London on Lloyd's return journey to ensure that Eden received a balanced view of the discussions that were taking place. Once again, Eden consulted Braxton who assured Eden that the intelligence community supported him, despite the opposing views of the Arabists in his administration. Armed with this assurance, Eden again sidestepped the Ministry of State for Foreign Affairs and approved the plan.

On the third day of discussions, with Eden's agreement in hand and with France promising to defend Israel against attack by locating air squadrons on Israeli airfields and positioning French warships along the Israeli coast, the Chalet Scenario began to take shape. The plan envisioned that, on October 29, Israel would launch a surprise attack in the Sanai. Once the Israeli incursion into the Sanai was successful with its forces reaching the canal, France and England would issue an ultimatum within twelve hours demanding that both Israel and Egypt remove their forces to a point at least ten miles from the Canal Zone. If Egypt refused, the French and English air forces would go into action within thirty-six hours of the initial Israeli attack.

At Ben-Gurion's insistence, a summary of the plan was hammered out and signed by the parties, after which the English delegation left for London. With the English out of the room, the meeting took on a more relaxed tone, enabling Peres to raise a final proposal. With only a few onlookers present, including Lucien, Peres broached the issue of the nuclear reactor at Dimona that he had discussed during his previous meeting in September. Taking his counterparts aside, he asked for agreement to build the reactor and for a supply of uranium to fuel it. As Peres emerged from the *tete-a-tete*, Lucien could see from the smile on Peres' face that his request had been well received. Indeed, a year later, after Maurice Bourges-Manoury had become Prime Minister, the French delivered a nuclear reactor to Dimona twice the size of the one Peres had requested.

At the meetings in Sevres, Dayan had presented the outline of the attack he planned to implement against the Egyptian forces in the Sanai. Code named, Operation Kadesh, the plan envisioned that Israeli forces would neutralize the Egyptian army by denying it the ability to use the two main transport routes leading from Port Suez into the Sanai. The more important of the two routes was the east-west road spanning the Sanai from coast to coast. On its way to the western shore of the Sanai, the road passed through the narrow walls of the Mitla Pass about 45 miles inland from the Gulf of Suez.

Dayan's plan for capturing this route was both daring and complex. First, a 395-man parachute battalion from Colonel Ariel Sharon's 202 Parachute Brigade would be flown about 156 miles from the Israeli border and dropped behind enemy lines at the Mitla Pass, where the east-west road forked, with one leg going north toward the town of Bir Hasana and the other extending south toward the town of El Nahkl. The battalion, whose overall numbers was governed by the transport capacity of Israel's meager fleet of sixteen C-47 Dakota transport planes, would include

a small medical staff and several female radio operators. Once on the ground, the paratroopers would wait while the transport planes returned to Israel for weapons, jeeps and supplies that would then be parachuted down to them. Meanwhile, the remainder of the brigade would set out west across the Sinai in French-provided trucks with the goal of reaching the paratroopers within thirty-six hours of their landing.

In the early evening of October 29 just before dusk, the Dakotas opened their doors and the 395 parachuters jumped into the cool evening air at the designated landing place about three miles east of the Mitla Pass. While the paratroopers waited for their jeeps and weapons, the two nurses who were part of the medical team inspected the jumpers. One of the two was György Frankel's sister, Miriam. As she completed her rounds, Miriam was happy to observe that only thirteen men had sustained injuries from the jump, with all being sprains or simple bone breaks.

Soon, the paratroopers heard the sound of airplanes overhead and were relieved to see a new flurry of parachutes dropping their jeeps, weapons and supplies. Once everything was on land, the battalion headed west for three miles and established a position at the mouth of the Mitla Pass.

While the paratroopers were digging in for the night, the remainder of the brigade moved west, fighting its way through Egyptian defenses along the way. The brigade first encountered resistance at an Egyptian army garrison in Kuntilla. After a pitched battle of two and half hours, the Egyptians fled after losing more than one hundred men. One of the heroes of the battle was György Frankel.

He had waited for the day when his sister and he might be able to parachute into battle together. When Miriam had told him about her orders, György had hoped he, too, would be assigned to jump with her into the Mitla Pass. However, the Brigade leader, Ariel Sharon, had decided that György's engineering skills might better serve the motorized part of the attack in case the brigade encountered physical obstacles. As it turned out, Sharon's instincts had been right. György, accompanied by two mortar bearing paratroopers from the brigade, had been directed to evaluate the exterior defenses of the Egyptian garrison at Kuntilla to determine the most vulnerable point for penetrating its surrounding walls. Not only had György identified the most promising point of entry, but, on instinct, he had grabbed one of the mortars from his surprised fellow paratroopers, crawled undetected to a point forty feet from the base of the wall and began unleashing a savage barrage of shells against the vulnerable façade. The wall had caved almost instantly, enabling György's fellow troops to enter the garrison and route its defenders.

Sharon's brigade was then joined by a second fighting unit, a smaller Israeli task force that had successfully captured an Egyptian border post at Ras el Naqb. The combined Israeli force then headed west toward the Mitla pass. Despite losses due to strafing from enemy jets, the column, in good time, reached the Egyptian fort at El Nakhl, to the south of the Mitla Pass in the early afternoon of October 30. There, the combined Israeli forces made quick work of the fleeing Egyptian defenders and commandeered the supplies they had left behind including a number of armored troop carriers that had been supplied by the Soviets.

As Sharon's forces were making their way west, the paratroopers on the ground encountered Egyptian aerial fire from a squadron of British-made Vampire jets that had flown from Suez. In addition, the pilot of a reconnaissance piper cub that had been flown in to assist the paratroopers radioed that a large column of Egyptian fighters was heading toward the western entrance of the Mitla Pass. The paratroopers radioed back for air support from Israel and soon

welcomed the arrival of Israeli jets that were able to take out numerous vehicles from the advancing Egyptian column. However, many of the Egyptian fighters were able to find shelter behind the rocks on both sides of the pass's narrow gorge.

At the other end of the pass, the Israeli paratroopers waited expectantly for the arrival of Sharon's forces who were moving west from their recent victory at El Nakhl. Late in the evening, the soldiers of the Israeli brigade finally arrived and were greeted by the jubilant paratroopers, but none more joyously than the greeting shared by György and Miriam Frankel. During the entire duration of the brigade's march across the desert, György had spent every waking minute worrying about his sister. Now that he saw she was safe, his relief was boundless as he threw his arms around her and hugged her as muffled sobs escaped from his throat.

The combined Israeli forces now attempted to get some rest, but soon had to find cover as a new squadron of Egyptian Vampire jets bore down on them. Only after the Vampires were shot down by returning Israeli *Mystere* jets were the paratroopers and brigade members able to regroup and advance toward the entrenched Egyptian positions. They first tried to charge through the pass with the Soviet-made armored troop vehicles and French-made AMX-13 anti-tank destroyers in the lead. However, their advance was blocked by enemy fire as well as well as by immobilized vehicles that now blocked the narrow road through the pass. There was little choice other than for the Israelis to leave their vehicles and engage the Egyptians where they had dug in on either side of the gorge.

The ensuing fighting was vicious with much of it hand to hand as the Israelis sought out their Egyptian adversaries, one by one, while sustaining intense fire from Egyptian defenders who were positioned behind rocks higher up on the canyon's walls. Amidst the mayhem, paratroopers and brigade members were calling out for help as many were caught by the Egyptian fire raining down on them. As the battle continued, Miriam was pulled in many directions as she breathlessly scurried from one wounded soldier to another. György, meanwhile, had remained behind attempting to repair and dislodge the Israeli transport vehicles that were blocking the pass.

Suddenly, György saw a soldier running toward him, his arms waiving wildly. The man took a moment to catch his breath as he approached György, then balefully cried out, "It's your sister. She was hit while tending to a wounded soldier. The brigade doctors are with her. But I was told get you and that you should come immediately."

György lost no time in following the soldier. They soon arrived at the place where the doctors were tending to his sister. All it took was one look at the lead doctor's concerned face for György to know that his sister's condition was serious. Soon, the doctor confirmed his deepest fears. "She's conscious, but she doesn't have long, and she wants to talk to you. I've done all I can do to make her comfortable. I'll leave the two of you alone."

Sobbing, György knelt on the ground where his sister lay and took her hand in his. Miriam spoke first. "I'm afraid my time has come my dear brother."

György tried to hedge his response. "Please don't say that. The doctors will help you."

Miriam attempted a wan smile. "We both know I'm beyond help. But I don't want you to worry."

"How can you say that?"

“Because it may be for the best.”

“No, my precious sister. How can my losing you again be for the best?”

Miriam wished she could console her brother but knew whatever she said would be of little avail. So, she merely mustered her remaining strength and tried to help him understand the burden that had weighed on her for so long. “Do you remember how I told you what I had to do to survive in the camp?”

“Yes. It was terrible.”

“I’m afraid it was more than that. You see, when a person’s dignity is taken away day in and day out as it was for me, there is little to fall back on. Slowly, irreversibly, you feel layers of your soul being stripped away with each heinous act until your whole essence as a human is laid bare, with nothing but scarred memories to show for your life. That’s how I felt when I finally left the camp and that feeling has remained since, tormenting me every day of my life. I’ve sought help, but my sense of worth has suffered irreparably, and, at night, I lay awake reliving every tortured moment I experienced in the camp, wondering whether I’ll ever find peace, not to speak of redemption. I’ve tried to find solace in my work as a nurse, but even that hasn’t worked as the veil of despair that covers my thoughts won’t go away. So, maybe what is happening to me now is all for the best as it may enable me finally to break the chains that bind me to the hell that otherwise won’t leave me.”

“I’m so sorry. I never understood fully the intensity of how you felt.”

“No one did and no one can. My only regret is that I haven’t had more time to spend with you. But I’m consoled by the fact that you have such a wonderful family who will be waiting for you after I’m gone. Now, go out there and help clear the way so that we can get to the Gulf of Suez and end this miserable war.”

In addition to Miriam, thirty-nine other Israelis fell at the Mitla Pass, but the day was soon won and by the afternoon of November 1, the brigade was in sight of the Canal.

For the French and British, the battle that had been raging in the Mitla Pass was exactly the pretext they had sought, and both governments issued an ultimatum demanding that both the Israelis and the Egyptians withdraw their forces ten miles from the canal and comply within ten hours. As had been previously worked out, the Israelis agreed. But when Nasser resisted, the British and French launched a widespread aerial attack during which thirteen Egyptian bases were attacked over the course of two days. The attacking aircraft were soon joined by a landing force of fifty thousand British and thirty thousand French fighters. Nasser’s forces fought back, but his principal response was to block the canal by sinking several ships that had attempted passage. The desperate measure did little more than borrow a day or so of time, however. On November 5, as British and French paratroopers descended on Port Said on the eastern end of the canal, completely bottling in what remained of the Egyptian defenses, it was clear that Nasser had been soundly defeated and would soon be ejected from the Canal Zone.

Unfortunately for the French and British, as Nasser was facing a humiliating defeat, two onlooking powers did not see his expulsion from the canal as a desirable outcome. First, the

Russians, who until then had been preoccupied with an anti-Communist revolt in Hungary, threatened to send in their own troops if the British and French did not leave. Even more galling to the French and British invaders, was the position of President Dwight Eisenhower who had expressed opposition to the invasion as early as October 30, believing rightly that the Arab world would see a Franco-British return to the canal as a power grab by two former colonial powers. In addition, on the heels of the Russian threat, Eisenhower was now making it clear that the United States had no desire to engage in a confrontation with the Soviet Union over the Suez Canal. Should the British and French refuse to withdraw from the canal, Eisenhower announced that the United States would take action by imposing crippling economic sanctions against the two European countries. France and England had no choice but to stand down and agreed to a cease fire on November 6.

While the French and British assault on the Egyptian bases in the Canal Zone was playing out, two other military advances were also taking place elsewhere in the Sanai. At Rafah, on the gateway to the Gaza Strip in the northeast corner of the desert, Israeli ground forces had overcome minefields, barbed wire, reinforced concrete defenses, anti-tank cannons and strategically placed machine gun nests to take control of Gaza. Meanwhile, the Israeli paratrooper brigade that had emerged victorious from the Mitla Pass had turned its attention to the prize that Ben-Gurion had insisted upon while at Sevres, the control of the Straits of Tehran at the southern tip of the Sanai Peninsula.

From where the Israeli parachuters had stood as they looked out onto the Canal Zone, they could also see a north-south road that hugged the east bank of the Gulf of Suez for a distance of one hundred miles before ending at the port of Sharm el Sheikh with its commanding position overlooking the Straits of Tehran. With their Suez objective having been completed, the Israelis now turned their attention to the north-south road and Sharm el Sheikh. The march to Sharm el Sheikh would take two days and two more battles. However, on November 6, at about the time that the British and French quieted their guns, the Israeli force, now augmented by an airborne infantry unit that had been flown in, marched into Sharm el Sheik and took command. David Ben-Gurion would sleep better that night knowing ships sailing through the Straits of Tehran on their way to Israel would be able to sail through the Gulf of Aqaba unmolested.

It had been eleven years since Julien Krauss had returned to Canada as a war hero. Offered his choice of law firm positions, he had tried his hand at private practice with one of Montreal's most venerable law practices. However, as with Lester Abelstein, he had found that private practice failed to hold his attention. Meanwhile, beginning with the summer of 1947, Julien had become spellbound by the debates that were taking place in the United Nations regarding the future of Palestine. His interest was in no small part due to the fact that one of the most influential leaders of the United Nations discussions was a senior diplomat at the Canadian Ministry of External Affairs named Lester B. Pearson.

Pearson had openly and repeatedly expressed the view that any resolution of tensions between Arabs and Jews in Palestine would have to encompass the establishment of a Jewish homeland in part of the territory. As Julien observed with delight, Pearson had been so persuasive in expressing this view that the plan adopted by the United Nations on November 29, 1947, called for the partition of Palestine with the Jewish population receiving part of the territory as its own.

Julien's interest in the partition plan had taken on a greater personal interest when, soon after the November 29 vote, he received word from his sister Gabrielle that her new husband György, their daughter Lili, and she would be moving to Palestine. It was then that Lester began thinking about the beneficial role Lester Pearson had played in shaping Gabrielle's future and wondered whether there might be a place for him working at the diplomat's side. A few telephone calls later, Julien found himself in Pearson's office. Pearson was aware of Julien's war record, not to speak of his impressive legal credentials, and quickly offered him a job and a nearby office. The following year, Pearson became Canadian Secretary of State for External Affairs, and, as Pearson moved up to the highest reaches of the Ministry of External Affairs, so did Julien.

Julien's diplomatic experience and knowledge of international legal institutions had led to adjunct teaching positions at both McGill Law School and NYU Law School, to which he commuted by airplane once a week. Now, almost ten years since joining Pearson, Julien found himself aiding his superior in another United Nations matter that directly affected Israel.

In the wake of the Suez crisis and Eisenhower's demand that France and England stand down, Pearson had been at the United Nations in New York trying to hammer out an agreement for the withdrawal of the combatant countries. The going had been difficult as the margin of trust had been extremely thin and the two European countries were insistent on saving face. Finally, Pearson had proposed the first-ever, large-scale peace keeping force for preserving the stability of the canal and protecting shipping. The idea had taken hold and the United Nations had voted to support such a mission.

The plan was implemented in the form of a six-thousand-man peacekeeping force from ten countries under the command of Canadian General E. L. M. Burns. On December 22, the United Nations peacekeepers entered the Canal Zone and saluted their withdrawing French and British counterparts who could now claim with their heads held high that they had succeeded at their mission. Among those watching the somewhat surreal exchange of military forces was Julien Krauss. When Lester Pearson proposed the peacekeeping mission, the last thing Julien had expected was that he would soon be monitoring events in the Canal Zone while sitting under a relentless Egyptian sun as the combatants in the Suez crisis withdrew in favor of the arriving United Nations peacekeeping force. However, Pearson had persuaded him of the importance of the peacekeeping mission and of the need for proper monitoring.

In addition, Pearson had other motives. He knew that a very difficult negotiation lay ahead at United Nations headquarters in New York regarding the placement of peacekeeping forces at Sharm el Sheik where Israel had been entrenched since November 6 and was now resisting United Nations and United States pressure to leave. Pearson wanted Julien to head for New York to help facilitate the negotiations, but only after he had experienced firsthand what was involved in installing a large UN peacekeeping force in such a way as to instill confidence in the withdrawing parties.

Julien had returned to New York at the end of the year following the French and English withdrawal from the Canal Zone. Negotiations had indeed been difficult and, as anticipated by Pearson, had centered around the establishment of another large-scale United Nations peacekeeping force at Sharm el Sheikh to ensure free passage through the Straits of Tehran. Israel had not been satisfied, fearing that the United Nations might remove its forces in the future with little warning. Thus, as a condition of withdrawing its forces from Sharm el Sheik, Israel had insisted that any future action involving the UN peacekeeping force be brought before the full United Nations General Assembly and that the United States publicly express the view that Israeli

access to the waters of the Gulf of Aqaba constituted United States policy. For its part, the United States was adding to Israel's unease by insisting that the freedom of passage issue be coupled with an Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip.

It had taken two months for the key parties to the Sharm el Sheikh negotiations to reach the point where a solution was finally in sight. During this time, Pearson's team had acted as mediator and facilitator, a role that would win him the Nobel Peace Prize and a growing chorus of UN supporters who wanted him to serve as Secretary General. However, he had not done it alone. For many long days and nights, Julien Krauss had plied the unpredictable waters of the United Nations seeking to cajole and convince the contending parties of a plausible solution to the difficult negotiations. His opposite number from Israel was the determined, but engaging, American-born Israeli diplomat, Lester Abelstein.

As the negotiations wore on leading to President Eisenhower's February 20 announcement that would provide the Israelis with the assurances they wanted to hear, Julien and Lester's relationship moved from the respectful to the cordial. Soon, they were exchanging stories about their wartime experiences, with Lester expressing admiration for Julien's forays as a combat flyer and Julien marveling at Lester's dogged activities in support of the War Refugee Board and his involvement in the Nuremberg War Crimes Trials.

On March 6, Israel removed its last forces from the Sanai, including both Sharm el Sheikh and Gaza. That evening, Julien and Lester got together for one last time. In more than two months, they had learned much about one another and their actions on behalf of Israel and the Jewish people. Julien had also spent time talking about his family—his devoted South African wife Kayla, his sister, Gabrielle, who had chosen a new life in Israel with a small child who had won her heart, her Hungarian husband, György Frankel, whose efforts in Prague had been so essential in procuring weapons during the war of independence, and the sacrifice of his sister, Miriam, at the Mitla Pass.

Lester, in turn, had talked about his own family—especially his remarkable wife, Hilde, who had gravitated so strongly to Judaism and whose desire to move to Israel had been instrumental in Lester finding his greatest professional satisfaction as an emissary for the State. He had then kept Julien spellbound discussing Sumner Welles, his mentor at the State Department, and the many officials at the Department of Treasury, starting with Secretary Henry Morgenthau, Jr., who had made the War Refugee Board a reality.

Their discussions had taken them long into the night. Lester had recalled sorrowfully how friends of Hilde's and his had fallen during the difficult days following Ben-Gurion's declaration of an independent Jewish state, and Julien had described how his family had managed to escape from the Germans during the war, largely through the efforts of banker and humanitarian, Angelo Donati. They had talked about others who had been instrumental in rescuing European Jews and in creating a state in the ancestral homeland of the Jewish people. However, no matter how many memories they were able to invoke, they knew they could never know the names of all those who had seen and sacrificed so much to make Israel a flourishing reality. Even so, as they raised a glass to one another and took one last sip, they knew with equal certainty that these unknown names, persons such as Jimmy Wilkins, Blaine Stewart, and Miriam Frankel, were, like them, heroes, all.

Epilogue

Kibbutz Ramah Gan, Israel: Jonathan's Life Comes Full Circle **November 1973--May 1976**

After Lester Pearson became Prime Minister of Canada in 1963, Julien Krauss remained in Pearson's administration as a principal advisor to Allan MacEachen, Pearson's successor as the Secretary of State for External Affairs. During this time, Julien continued to teach as an adjunct at both McGill and NYU. When Pearson's tenure as Prime Minister ended in 1968, Julien decided to leave government service and teach full time as a law professor. In a rare feat, he had been able to continue teaching at NYU as an adjunct while assuming full-time responsibilities at McGill.

It was during the fall 1969 semester at NYU that Julien met Harriet Franklin who was then a third-year student interested in human rights. Harriet had signed up for Julien's international law course and had elected to write a paper on international women's rights in lieu of taking a final exam. Julien and Harriet had spent several sessions together during which Harriet had discussed her ideas for the course paper. Harriet had immediately taken to the worldly Julien, and Julien had liked Harriet's straightforwardness and passion. As they continued to meet, Julien learned that Harriet's family planned to make *Aliyah* to Israel and Harriet learned that Julien's sister, Gabrielle, had emigrated to Israel at the dawn of the state, and that his wife, Kayla, had spent time on an Israeli *kibbutz* in the 1930's.

A friendship had begun to form between mentor and mentee and Harriet invited Julien to meet her parents, Elliot and Sandy Franklin. They had talked about the Franklins' plans to emigrate to Israel as well as the work Julien had done that benefitted the Jewish state. Julien had impressed the senior Franklins just as he had impressed Harriet. The family had implored Julien to contact them in Israel the next time his family visited Julien's sister.

Julien's and Harriet's friendship continued after she chose to work for the ACLU following her graduation. Her family was disappointed that Harriet would not be joining them in Israel but had nevertheless been supportive of her decision. After an exhausting but rewarding year and a half working with the ACLU, Harriet knew the time had come to visit her family. The visit had so greatly exceeded her expectations that, when she returned to New York, she couldn't get the thought of moving to Israel out of her mind. She consulted with Julien, and he encouraged her to follow her passion, with the added benefit of being with her family.

It had been a good decision. For, soon after Harriet arrived in Israel, she had met Efraim Kreisler, who was both a computer programmer and a Hebrew language teacher at the *ulpan*—the Hebrew language immersion program for recent immigrants—where Harriet was studying Hebrew. They liked one another from the start and soon they were dating. Less than a year later, they were engaged, and Harriet had taken the Hebrew name Haviva.

Both Haviva and her parents agreed that Julien and his wife, Kayla, should be invited to the wedding. He had accepted and asked whether their daughter, Deborah, who would soon be studying public health at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, could join them at the wedding. Graciously, the Franklins had agreed.

The wedding had been postponed because of the Yom Kippur War which had caused all civilian activity in the country to come to a standstill. As the country held its collective breath

and mobilized into a wartime footing, Efraim had put aside his wedding clothes and donned the uniform of an officer in the country's military reserve. Haviva was sick with worry as were so many other young Israeli women whose boyfriends and husbands had been activated to help fend off the invading Arab armies. But Efraim came home, although many did not.

After the hard-hit nation had recovered from the devastation of war, Efraim and Haviva set a new wedding date, and one of Haviva's aunts who had remained in the country for the wedding had decided to treat Haviva to the American tradition of a bridal shower. Many of the guests who had come from the United States had found the need to return to their jobs and families when the originally scheduled wedding had been postponed, among them Charlie and Diane Brody. So, there were not that many women at the shower. But there were enough, among them Efraim's mother, Agatha Kreisler, Aviva's mother, Sandy Franklin, and Jonathan Sternbloom's wife, Bracha.

As the former son-in-law of Lorenz and Agatha Kreisler, and the son of the deceased Anton Sternbloom, one of Lorenz's closest friends, the wedding family had happily extended an invitation Jonathan to attend the original wedding. As word spread of Jonathan's exploits at Rambam Hospital during the recent war, he had also become an eagerly anticipated wedding guest. The anticipation had increased with the knowledge that Jonathan would be bringing his new wife, Bracha, his daughter Channy and his soon to be adopted son, Roni.

Asking Bracha to join the shower had been the inspiration of Agatha Kreisler. Initially reticent, Bracha was happy she had accepted the invitation as she had found it easy to open to the other guests who were delighted to hear about Jonathan's and her romance at Stelenberg and the miracle of how Jonathan had, again, found her.

The women had finished watching Haviva unwrap all the presents. They were now enjoying an abundant array of Israeli salads and desserts and going over the list of guests from outside the country. The names were mostly well known, including Jonathan's former wife and Yaron Kreisler's sister, Sarah Kreisler Kaufman. In talking with Bracha, Jonathan had had only good things to say about Sarah. Now, as Haviva continued reciting the guest list, Bracha was looking forward to meeting the woman whom Jonathan had married so soon after Bracha had fled from Stelenberg, taking Jonathan's dreams with her.

As Bracha mused about Sarah, Haviva continued with the names on the list. Only those of Julien and Kayla Krauss were unfamiliar, but her mother explained that Julien had been an influential law professor of Haviva's and that her daughter had insisted that Julien and his wife be invited to the wedding. Since Julien's sister and her family lived in Israel, he had found it convenient to accept and had even asked if his wife and he could bring their daughter, Deborah, who planned to study in Israel.

Efraim and Haviva's wedding proved to be a joyous affair, offering a release from the tensions caused by the Yom Kippur War. Despite her eagerness to meet Sarah, Bracha had been nervous once again. However, her anxieties had quickly been set aside as Sarah turned out to be an easy conversationalist with a good sense of humor and an honest humility about the problems Jonathan and she had faced.

Jonathan, too, had found it easy to be with Sarah and the two had quickly fallen into talking about old times, both the good and the bad. Jonathan had enjoyed similar reminiscences with Lorenz and Agatha Kreisler and, aided by a few glasses of schnaps, was feeling quite satisfied.

Suddenly, he felt a tap on his shoulder and looked around. Standing in front of him was a pleasant looking woman his age, her grey hair pulled back stylishly and her manner carefree and inviting.

“Don’t you remember me?”

Jonathan looked at the woman, at first confused. However, as she spoke further, her voice and her South African accent came back to him.

“Is it possible? But how could it be? Is it you, Kayla?”

“Of course, it is, you silly goose. Now give me a hug, before I bring my husband over to meet you. We’ve had the happiest of marriages, but he doesn’t know how close I came to telling you to stay that day you visited me at McGill.”

For a moment, Jonathan reflected on what might have been, but then snapped out of it realizing how silly it was to spend time on a teenage fantasy when he had so much to appreciate in the present.

After they hugged, Kayla called over Julien and Jonathan introduced the two of them to Bracha. At this point, Bracha did not know what to expect, but was thankful that the women who kept turning up from Jonathan’s past were contentedly married and happy at how their lives had turned out. With relief, she observed that Jonathan, too, appeared content to recount the past without showing any signs of regret. In addition, Bracha found Kayla to be vivacious and an eager conversationalist. She decided that her best course was to listen and learn.

After attempting to condense forty years into a few minutes, the topic at hand inevitably turned to children. Kayla stated that she had wanted a large family, but she had been blessed with Deborah, their only child. Kayla looked around the room to see if she could spot Deborah so that she could introduce her to Jonathan and Bracha. Finally, she saw her talking to a handsome young Israeli man who was in uniform.

“There she is, talking to that nice-looking young soldier. I wonder who he is.”

Bracha could barely contain herself. “Your daughter has, somehow, found my son, Roni. He was wounded in the war. But thanks to my husband, he’s fine now and has been off crutches for a while. Deborah and he seem to be having a good time together and there will be plenty of opportunity for introductions. So, maybe we should leave them alone. Meanwhile, I’ll bring over our daughter, Channy, to say hello.

Roni and Deborah had, indeed, enjoyed talking to one another at the wedding and they had never stopped talking after that. More than two years had gone by, and Deborah had completed her studies at Ben-Gurion University. With her degree in hand, the decision to marry Roni had been easy. Now her parents were attending another wedding in Israel, but this time the bride was their daughter.

Roni had completed the process of being adopted by Jonathan and had insisted that his new father and Bracha escort him to the outdoor chuppah that would be erected at *Kibbutz Ramah Gan*, Kayla’s sentimental choice for the site of the wedding. The wedding day had finally arrived and could not have been more beautiful as the Mediterranean behind the chuppah seemed to offer

a special sparkle in recognition of the happiness felt by the entire wedding party. Having been escorted by his parents, Roni now stood under the chuppah and waited for his beloved to join him. Beside him, in his wheelchair, sat the presiding officiant, Rabbi Chaim Goldston, now the *kibbutz's* rabbi emeritus.

Soon the wedding guests rose at the site of a Julien escorting a beaming Deborah down a bridal path adorned with flowers. As she watched her husband and daughter, Kayla was engulfed with a rush of memories from her teenage summer at the *kibbutz*—how impressed she had been with a much younger Rabbi Chaim Goldston, her relief when a fellow teenager named Jonathan Sternbloom had rescued her from two young and inebriated Arab villagers who had naively gotten into the *kibbutz's* wine cellar, Jonathan's and her first kiss behind the *kibbutz* bakery, and the feel of her young lover's touch under her bathing suit as Jonathan and she embraced in the warm waters at the beach in Tel Aviv. But, as Jonathan had also recognized, Kayla knew that her days on the *kibbutz* were memories to be cherished but that she was now at the *kibbutz* to celebrate a wonderful present. As Julien and she lifted Deborah's veil, she kissed Deborah with her thoughts now focused only on the happiness of her daughter.

The ceremony had been beautiful, and the old rabbi had outdone himself in recreating the remarkable chain of history that had led from Kayla and Jonathan's summer at the *kibbutz* to the marriage of their children. The food was abundant and, as the afternoon gave way to evening, the standards being played by the band became more dreamlike and soothing.

The band leader was now encouraging both sets of wedding-party parents to dance with one another. Obliging, Kayla grabbed Jonathan's hand and led him to the dance floor. As they danced with arms extended at an appropriate distance, Kayla looked into Jonathan's eyes and spoke ever so softly.

“As you were leaving my dormitory at McGill, I knew how disappointed you were with me, but I also knew how much you had loved our summer in Palestine at the *kibbutz*. Do you remember what I said to you?”

“I'll admit that I've tried to block out much of the memory of that visit. But I do remember that moment. As I was walking toward the door, you said that one day I would return to this land and there would be someone waiting for me. You were, of course, right. It's taken me most of my adult life to rediscover Bracha and to realize she would be the one waiting for me. But, now that I have, I'll never let go and always cherish your parting words of so long ago.”

At Jonathan's words, Kayla could feel her eyes becoming watery. However, soon a smile, at once ironic and self-satisfying, crept over her tear-stained face. Again, she looked at Jonathan and whispered. “I'm so happy for you and I really believe what I said way back then. But, in my wildest dreams, how could I have imagined that my prophetic wish for you would apply to my wonderful daughter, Deborah, as she found her own special someone, your handsome son Roni, waiting for her under the chuppah in this beautiful place so laden with memories of long ago!