One

Przemyśl • 18th of Cheshvan, 5673 – Tuesday, October 29, 1912

A SPOTTED EAGLE kept watch over the reed beds that lined the Zasanie shoreline from its five-story perch atop the Worker's House, while across the river in Przemyśl proper vendors roasted nuts and arranged fall flowers to be sold from a fleet of pushcarts. As a cold wind blew in over the Carpathians, pedestrians clad in dark overcoats or military tunics scurried about town like ants, seemingly oblivious to the ancient fault lines of language, culture, and religion that cleaved the city into Jewish, Catholic, and Orthodox fragments.

Elia Reifer lived with his aunt and uncle, Gitla and Juda Malz, on the first-floor of a three story flat halfway up the hill between Plac na Bramie and the Jewish cemetery. The eighteen months of cutting, sanding, and hauling wood added bulk to Elia's physique and maturity to the boy's features. From the waist down, he'd become his father: a stallion's thighs and piano-stool calves. Like most of his fellow woodworkers, his hands, always slightly oversized for his stature, had become rough and strong. His hair was

dark and thick, brushed back and piled high, revealing a long forehead that accentuated his deep-set hazel eyes centered on an oval face. Stubble and scabs peppered his cheek and chin after Juda introduced him to the straight razor and the styptic pencil.

A year and a half earlier Gitla and Juda had travelled to the nearby village of Medyka to bury Elia's mother, taken quickly from her prime to the grave by a fever. As *the* Jewish midwife in Przemyśl, Gitla welcomed countless babies into this world and eased more than her share of hemorrhaging mothers and choleric fathers into the next. Death was no stranger to her; she loathed but grudgingly accepted it. A month later, still mourning the death of her sister, a telegraph boy had again delivered bad news: disease had taken her brother-in-law. Contemplating the fate of Jette and Elia, her newly orphaned niece and nephew, Gitla sobbed openly, which she almost never did.

Once again, Juda had manned the cart's reigns, swerving around Hussar formations, trying to avoid pedestrians milling about the shops and cafés that lined the grand boulevard heading east. From the edge of town, where the cobblestones gave way to frozen, deeply-rutted dirt, they rode in silence, passing stand after stand of marsh marigolds budding in the drainage culvert by the side of the road, their somber quiet interrupted only by the familiar thunder of mortar fire from one of the scores of Austrian forts within earshot of the road.

At the small brick synagogue in Medyka Rabbi Sporn celebrated the life of Izrel Reifer in prayer and song before leading the procession to the cemetery, a modest square of farmland enclosed by a stone knee-wall at the edge of town. Taking her place in the wide arc of friends and family around the hole dug next to her sister's freshly-covered grave, Gitla glared at the Rabbi as he intoned the mourner's Kaddish: *He's read Torah, how dare you try to keep Elia here! He'll work for cousin Tanchem; he'll learn a craft; I'll find him a*

wife. Here, what? This shtetl be damned. Your black hat be damned. He's coming with us to the city; he's mine now. And Jette, look at her: me at twenty! But she's not me, just an orphan with no prospects. And the crooked foot? What about it? It was not of birth. An accident—a cart; it means nothing. Nothing! So, mister Rabbi, you match her with your nephew, the merchant junkman, like the farmer breeds a cow. He's got money, a lot I hear, and no wife. Oh, Jette, I tried, but what could I do? I am so sorry…

Soon thereafter, Elia was in the back of Juda's cart on the road to Przemyśl. Jette had been placed in the temporary care of Rabbi Sporn.

The Malz's apartment was a typical merchant-class Jewish-quarter dwelling. The sooty façade was poured cement over brick and featured a private front entrance to the family home as well as a shared side door leading to first and second floor rental apartments. The interior was modest but well appointed with rugs from the Caucusus covering the floors, and Polish and Jewish folk art hanging on the walls. The sitting and dining room, once a flower shop, was unusually large but lacked natural light as the storefront's window had long since been boarded over and now functioned, on the street side, as a hanging spot for posters and notices. Straight back, just past the door to the root cellar, was the kitchen, flanked on one side by Gitla and Juda's bedroom and on the other by a large storage closet, now Elia's room. A door led out of the kitchen to the stable on the alley.

Six days a week, as rooster crows echoed off the city's masonry facades and medieval ramparts, Elia Reifer washed, dressed, ate breakfast, brushed his hair, and bolted out the door for work.

"WHICH ONE?" ELIA pondered as he walked briskly down Słowackiego past the Scheinbach Synagogue. At first he had

guilty pangs every time he passed it by, half expecting Rabbi Sporn to drag him inside by his ear to study. But memories of the little brick building in Medyka quickly faded, replaced by the furniture factory as the center of his universe.

Three doors down from the synagogue was the Zemel grocery, and across the street, Besser's bakery, where a packed lunch—an apple, a hard roll, and some sausage—could be bought for a few Heller. As interested in as food as he was, it paled in importance to the young ladies working the counters of the two stores. A second glance from either would send him off with a smile; a "hello" was enough to keep it there for the entire day.

Eliza Zemel was a quiet, fair-skinned beauty with reddish hair and freckles. She was always impeccably dressed, usually sporting a tight vest that accentuated her ample cleavage, a feature Elia had committed to memory with great fidelity. Unquestionably beautiful and obviously unspoken for, it disappointed Elia that their conversations rarely wandered off the transaction at hand, try as he might to engage her.

Then there was the baker's assistant, Rivka Arm, who was also his boss's daughter, and some kind of cousin. While lacking Eliza's classical European beauty, her wide-set almond eyes, aquiline nose, and sepia skin gave Rivka a regal, exotic, almost biblical air; a Yemenite princess in Elia's mind. Add to that a razor-sharp tongue and the mystery of her many moods and Elia was smitten. She always had something interesting to say, and it was never about bread. Day after day, Elia would watch as Rivka's expression changed from smile to frown, without a clue as to why. Even so, when he thought about her, he couldn't help but to think about the buttery-sweet aroma of the bakery, the flecks of flour in her raven hair, and the way she seemed to linger a moment too long when they looked at each other.

Lunch secured, Elia dashed by Antmann's Café and

across the always-busy Plac na Bramie, past the Grand Café Hibler, slowing to a trot to avoid the army officers and well-heeled businessmen who congregated each morning at its entrance. Five buildings later, with the serrated roofline of the Old Synagogue visible on the near horizon, he turned sharply, skipping over the railroad tracks just as they split to enter the station. Crossing the road brought him to the four removable swing-doors in front of Tanchem Arm's furniture factory at number 25 Czarnieckiego.

Medyka • 18th of Adar, 5673 – Tuesday, February 25, 1913

IN THE BRIEF moments when she was able to sleep, Jette never lived the awful month that had shattered her life. In those blissful moments of forgetfulness she slept again in a room with Elia in the house across from the synagogue with her parents. She dreamt of kneading bread in the kitchen, her senses infused with the savory smell of her mama's barley and *schmaltz* boiling furiously on the stove. There was just her family. There never was that fetid stench of cholera death, and most of all, she was never forced to become the wife of Jacob the junkman.

"Woman! Now!"

Jette sat up in bed, pulled rudely back to reality by the sound of fists pounding on the front door. She climbed off the bed, knotting the tie of her robe. As she made for the door, a slurred, slightly flat folk song serenaded her from the door stoop. Jette tried not to listen, focusing instead on how the creaking floorboards recalled her grandmother's warning of the slow and painful death that would certainly follow from walking around the house barefooted.

I gave away my youngest daughter tonight. Tonight you are the queen and I the king. Indeed I myself have seen with my

own eyes—

Jette slid the barrel bolt and opened the door just as Jacob delivered the crescendo.

How God has favored me!

Jacob playfully lunged for her. She sidestepped him, slamming the door.

The smile drained from his face. "Would it kill you to welcome me into your bed with enthusiasm on just one Shabbos?"

Jacob was tall and gaunt with a thin, deeply lined face and a scraggly beard flecked with grey. His eyes were shallow-set and bloodshot, and looked like they could fall out of his skull at any moment.

"You're drunk," Jette mumbled, crossing the anteroom on her way to the bedroom.

"It is your duty to please me!" he grunted, making for the kitchen.

Back in bed, Jette closed her eyes, focusing hard on deciphering the curious collection of sounds that came from the kitchen almost every time Jacob came home from a trip.

"Wife!"

She sat up in the bed. Cane sandwiched in his armpit, Jacob was propped up in the doorway, a half-empty bottle in one hand and a skillet in the other.

"But my lamb, I brought you a gift."

Jette stood-up as he approached. "I'm sick. Leave me in peace to sleep," she said, adding as tenderly as she could, "Please?"

The skillet dropped to the floor, barely missing her toes.

"Husband, with a night's rest, I will be in full health and able to fulfill my wifely obligations."

Jacob took a swig then shook the bottle it in her face hard enough to spill some liquid. "Drink!" he demanded.

A few drops found her forehead and rolled down the bridge of her nose before finding her mouth. Spitting it out as if it

were poison, she seized the bottle, twisting it from his grasp with surprising ease. As Jette cocked her arm, she began to cry.

The bottle hit the doorframe and exploded into a thousand shards that came to rest like snowflakes on a newly frozen pond. Momentarily drawn to the eerie dance of lamplight reflected off the heavily grained wood, Jette never saw the metal ornament at the head of Jacob's cane as it plowed into her temple. A bolt of lightning arced across her vision like a photographer's powder flash just before her head hit the floor with a hollow thump.

He jumped on her, one hand thrust inside her robe, finding a breast, the other ripping at her nightgown. Jette came to and screamed, hitting him weakly in the side with her fists, trying to bring her knee up toward his groin.

Having ripped her undergarments enough for his needs, Jacob tried to push himself into her with little success. Releasing her breast, he repeatedly backhanded her across the face before gripping to her neck. Desperate as her windpipe closed, Jette signaled submission by reaching between her legs to ease his entry. She tensed as he entered her, and Jacob again went for her throat.

Jette flailed at him until a punch bounced off his shoulder and hit the floor. Only it wasn't the floor, it was metal; the skillet.

He bore down on her, red-rimmed eyes riveted on her spittle and blood-covered face.

Her hand closed tightly around the iron handle. He never saw it coming.

AFTER TYING JACOB to the bed and pulling the larger slivers of glass from her arms and legs, Jette turned her attention to the butcher-block table in the kitchen. Cursory inspection revealed nothing so with great effort she wedged herself

between the table and the wall for a closer look at the hidden side. The door was barely noticeable, even with a lamp on it.

A firm tug on the wad of lightly oiled rags stuffed into the opening had several shiny metal disks jumping free. Jette pegged them as Wilhelms—German 20 Mark gold coins—before the first one hit the floor.

Handfuls of gold and silver coins and a large roll of what everyone called green ladies—Austrian 100 Kronen notes—tied neatly with a length of brown ribbon followed. All in all, an unimaginable fortune.

Exhausted, Jette collapsed in tears into a chair at the kitchen table. After a good cry, she wiped her eyes dry. "No more crying." She picked up a gold coin. "Not now, not ever."

Jette went to her sewing box for a needle and carpet thread then to the closet for her winter wrap. After ripping open the bottom hem of the cape, she wrapped notes around each coin and stitched them into the lining.

Jacob's cane in hand, treasure-cape over her shoulders, Jette Reifer left home through the back door and limped to the east. By the time the morning's first light painted the wisps of clouds on the horizon in shades of pink and crimson, she had put Medyka forever behind her.

Przemyśl • 30th of Sa'vat, 5674 – Thursday, February 26, 1914

AFTER THE BELL in the tower finished ringing, Tanchem Arm addressed his employees. "Two finished armoires," he barked to the bored stares of his eleven men, "If Mister Meyer Weiss wants two armoires by sundown Friday, then there'll be hell to pay if we don't deliver him two armoires by sundown Friday." He removed his top hat. "Push back the Army order if you have to; I make nothing from the bastards."

Clad in a fine, full-length wool coat over a silk vest and

a floral ascot, Tanchem Arm was often overdressed, and today was no exception. His hair, expertly cut and oiled, and increasingly gray about the temples, stood in contrast to his mustache, which retained all of the rich, ebony hues of his youth.

"Don't worry, we can handle both," Izac, Tanchem's son and shop foreman, said. "One armoire's already with Zsiga, fully sanded, just a couple of coats from finished. Manes is pegging the other one this morning. Everything's already been cut and grooved." Izac turned to his fellow workers, each dressed in collarless, sweat-soaked white shirts, rough, turpentine-stained leather aprons, and brown trousers. "Any problem with delivery?" he asked, rolling his eyes.

"Not problem," Zsiga, the shop's head finisher said through a heavy Hungarian accent, smoke from his cigarette spiraling up from the corners of his mouth.

"No problem, boss, we'll work like dogs," Manes said, arms folded and sleeves rolled to the elbows. Tall and impressively muscled with a wide, chiseled face, straw-colored hair, and steely, blue-gray eyes, Manes could have easily passed for a newly commissioned lieutenant fresh out of the Austrian War College, were it not for his workingman's clothes.

"Weevils," Tanchem growled. "When I was twenty I could've done a chest by myself in time for afternoon prayers."

"Really?" Manes retorted. "I guess that means that when you were Elia's age you could have finished the whole run by lunch?"

Tanchem used the cover of laughter to leave via the front door. Cigarettes extinguished, the men headed for the wood.

"HOLD IT HERE while I drive the peg." It took all of Elia's might to hold the two planks of wood steady at a right angle. Working like a surgical nurse, he followed Manes around the work table, supplying his mentor with whatever he demanded

as they secured the second and third corners of what would become the base of the last armoire. At the fourth corner, Manes stepped back. "Your turn."

Assuming grips on the relevant wood pieces, Elia issued his first workshop order, "Mallet!"

No movement.

"Manes, mallet."

Silence.

"Please?"

Still nothing.

He released his grip and the planks fell out of true. "What?"

Manes grinned. "Time for the real lesson." He put his hand on Elia's shoulder, "Elia, you're a thinking man. So think."

"Think what?"

"Think about who is really building this armoire." Manes brushed sawdust off his forearm. "You or the mallet?"

"Me?"

"Yes; tools don't create, people create."

"All right."

"No, not all right." Manes picked up the mallet and handed it at Elia. "He who owns the mallet controls the production, not the one with the skill and know-how. If I want to produce goods with my worthless life, I must sell my labor to an owner of the mallet at the price he wants to pay."

Elia was drawn back to the years he'd spent dissecting Torah with Rabbi Sporn back in Medyka. "But isn't that just what work is, Manes?"

"No. I become the hammer-owner's slave."

"But he pays us. Slaves are not paid."

"Elia! Wake up! All of us here are just whores to the capitalists."

"Oh, come on. He's not that bad."

"Yes, Tanchem is a good man with a good soul. But make no mistake, when a slave is given food or even money for his

toils, even by a loving master, he's still a slave."

Elia shrugged. "But it makes no sense for each of us here to own a mallet when but two or three will suffice for the entire factory."

"Why must any one man," Manes emphasized the count by raising his finger, "own anything? What if all we owned were our hands, our legs and our minds? Then imagine that not only the mallets, but all the tools, the saws, the planes, even the mills and the varnish factory belonged to no one person but to every man." Manes set the mallet on the workbench. "Think, Elia. Think it through. Socialism is not afraid of intelligent scrutiny. It's a science, the science of rebuilding a just society for each and every person on earth."

"That's a lot to ponder."

"Come to our meeting."

"I don't think I know, well…"

"If not tomorrow, then perhaps later. We meet every other Thursday at the Worker's House."

Manes reached into his leather satchel and pulled out a thin, well-worn, black leather-bound book with a red ribbon page marker and a small metal clasp keeping the covers held securely shut. "Take this and read it, then come when you're ready."

"Now take the mallet," Manes said as he gripped the planks, tying up both of his hands, forcing Elia to reach across the workbench for the tool. "And as you drive the pegs, imagine a world where a tool is just an inanimate object owned by all and owned by none. Envision that we, the workers, are the masters of production."

That night, Elia read *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* from cover to cover.

After breakfast the next morning Gitla dropped a postcard onto the table, "It's Jette. She's in New York."

An electric current bolted up Elia's spine.

"How, she doesn't say."

Przemyśl • 1st of Adar, 5674 – Friday, February 27, 1914

AS HE WAITED for a General Staff car to pass before crossing the cobbled street, Tanchem could see him drinking coffee at a table in the window, his balding head just below the lettering that read Grand Café Hibler.

"Meyer," Tanchem said warmly, shaking his hand. "Don't get up." He hung his coat on the hook attached to the booth and sat. "So how is your little girl?"

"All I work for since Esther's passing," Meyer said. Revered as the richest Jew between Lemberg and Cracow, his receding hairline revealed a skull with throbbing varicose veins that most people assumed pulsed in proportion to the sheer genius of the ideas emanating from his brain.

Tanchem shook his head. "It's gypsies that bring the typhus. Bastards."

"More likely it's the army. In any case, it was God's will."

"Amen."

The waiter approached, tipping his head slightly. "Herr Weiss?" Meyer gestured toward his guest.

The waiter turned to Tanchem, "Sir?"

"Tea."

The waiter scurried away.

"Business?" Meyer asked.

"We get by. I've managed to secure some small government orders. Cheap stuff. The men hate it, but it pays the bills. The crew is a pain in my behind, as usual."

"I can only imagine."

"I have Karl Marx, Theo Herzl, and the King of Hungry cutting wood for me."

Meyer laughed. "You keep famous company. Be careful what you complain about."

"Your orders help, my friend." Tanchem squeezed Meyer's shoulder affectionately.

The waiter delivered a cup, a sugar bowl, silverware and a teapot. He poured a cup of steaming black tea and was off. Tanchem spooned sugar into his cup and stirred.

"And by you?"

"Never better. The army brings the soldiers who spend money with the merchant so the tax collector can take it back and give it to the Duke who can pay his army. One giant circle of profit." Meyer paused to finish his coffee. "I'm worried though."

"Here?"

"Yes, here."

"Why?"

"Because we live in the most densely defended stretches of land in all the Empire, that's why. Right in the center of a vast array of fortifications, each a unique, barbed-wire, concrete, and earthworks masterpiece of Austrian military engineering."

"But the Fort protects us," Tanchem said, tracing out imaginary fortifications on the table top around his teacup.

"Does it? Personally, I'd feel safer if we were surrounded only with ploughed rectangles of black dirt and farm buildings."

"How so?"

Meyer leaned in toward Tanchem, "When we were children, if someone said there was a tree you couldn't climb or a chess puzzle you couldn't solve, what's the first thing you'd do?"

Tanchem exhaled then smiled. "I see your point."

"The peace won't last. I'm not sure where or when, but the whole continent's a tinder box, just waiting for a spark. Take a ride around the fort sometime and look at the men. Look closely. You can see it in their faces; everyone's getting ready for war."

"Oy."

"And when there's a massive emplacement, the war's bound to find it."

"Check mate. But for now, business must go on." Meyer

winked.

"Then it's set? We're on?" Tanchem winked back.

Meyer looked across the table, his expression gave away nothing. "Sunday morning. We miss work, Polacks miss Church."

"Seems fair to me," Tanchem shot back, enthusiastically.

"Let's hope that's all that's fair," Meyer said, fighting back a knowing grin. "Styfi's offering three to one straight up. We win draws."

"What about the spread? I know my Hungarian's going to score," Tanchem offered.

Meyer leaned back into his chair, "Tell me again about the wonder-kid."

"My head finisher is from Budapest. Good man. His cousin, just a kid, fifteen I think, is here for a time. But he's not just any boy. He's a magician with the ball, a dead-eye shooter with legs like a racehorse; cannons on both feet. I've never seen anything like him. No one's ever seen anything like him, at least not around here."

Meyer gave a disinterested shrug.

"Everyone else becomes a little girl when he steps on the pitch," Tanchem said, his disappointment at Meyer's lack of enthusiasm obvious.

"I'll come see for myself tonight."

"Meyer, won't the Polacks cry foul? His speech is a dead giveaway. I mean he's not even a Galician."

Meyer snorted. "It's just another pogrom, my friend, this time on a football field. To them, a Jew is a Jew is a Jew. If you're not a Christian you're a foreigner, end of story."

"They could refuse to pay."

"Those idiots wouldn't complain if we fielded the eleven Englishmen from Wolverhampton." After signaling for the bill, Meyer leaned over the table and whispered to Tanchem. "For God's sake keep him hidden. I'll get Styfi to give us three to one on two goals."

"GATHER ROUND BOYS, listen," Tanchem barked to the disorganized group in short blue striped pants and white shirts. "This is Guttmann, from Budapest."

Dismissive grunts came from the back ranks of the assembled squad.

"Hey! He may look like a lad, but trust me." He grabbed Béla around the neck and squeezed. "Tell us about this modern football they play in the big city, like we talked about yesterday."

At the factory, Béla deferred to his elders, rarely joining in the discussions. But on the football pitch, the boy addressed the team as a man; clear and concise, with a measure of confidence born of complete faith in his physical gifts. His entire look changed; his nose became sharper, chin squarer, and ears more pinned back, as if somehow he had streamlined his face for speed. Deep parentheses of flesh bracketed Béla's mouth as he carefully annunciated key terms to the group of woodworkers, bakers, laborers and mill workers in accented but readily understandable Yiddish.

"It's all about space, covering space. Forget about lines: no defense, no midfield and no forward; it leaves too much uncovered. We play as two diamonds." He knelt down and smoothed a square of dirt. "Only two are fixed: the sweeper is the rear point in the back diamond and the striker is the front of the other. Everyone else is free to flow to the action." He drew two boxes with the corners pointing to each goal then added two pebbles between them. "You see? Control the whole field and bring extra troops to bear at the point of attack."

"So—" someone asked, "the opposite sides of the diamonds can be extra mid-fielders, defenders or strikers, all depending on the need of the moment?"

"Exactly. There are no lines of defense. The opposing strikers will forever find themselves—"

"—off sides, controlled by the sweeper, moving up and

back," Béla's teammate said, triumphantly.

"As long as we can get the fucking Polack linesmen to blow his whistle," Tanchem added, bringing snorts of agreement and some choice expletives from the men.

Ninety minutes later, as the last strands of sunlight ducked behind the horizon, the exhausted players, managers and hangers-on followed young Béla Guttmann off the field.

Many muttered in amazement what not one would dare say out loud, "Maybe we really can win."

"ANTMANN'S IS PACKED," Elia remarked to Hirsch as they reached the Plac na Bramie just as dusk fell. It had been an unseasonably warm week, and tonight even the overflow tables were completely filled, spilling their guests out past the cobblestone patio into the no man's zone inhabited by carts, pedestrians and the occasional motor car.

"Yea, it is," Hirsch said quickly, anxious to return to his lecture. "Anyway, so it looks like Shackleton flatly refuses to cooperate with Koenig. Can you imagine? An entire continent of nothing but ice and snow and the English decide to make camp at the exact place the Austrians chose as their base. I wonder what's at the pole anyway. When I was a boy, I used to think there must be a real pole coming from the ice and that if you took hold of it you could spin around with the earth. What do you think of the…"

Hirsch's commentary went unheard by Elia who was busy scanning the outside tables and peering through the glass at the patrons seated in the window booths. He skipped over dozens of familiar faces before alighting on Rivka Arm's kerchief-covered head, in profile. Once there, nothing else mattered. He imagined running his fingers through the thick, black rope of hair flaring from beneath her floral scarf as it exploded into an alluvial delta of textured furrows down the back of the chair. He tried to envision the exact hue of

brown at the center of her deep, wide eyes as he marveled at how their slightly down-turned edges seemed to imply confidence rather than sadness. He could almost taste her endless neck, undulating ever so slightly as she spoke.

"Elia, schmuck," Hirsch whispered before elbowing his friend in the gut. "Stop staring."

"Yea," Elia said, peering through the window just below the "Antmann's" stenciled onto the glass at a table where four girls were seated. Before he could react, Rivka turned her head and her eyes locked with his. Her gaze lingered just long enough to cross the chasm between simple recognition and intimacy. A moment later, he turned back to Hirsch, embarrassed for having been caught looking, but far more interested in the faint but distinct smile he was sure he saw on Rivka's face.

• • •

11 March '914
Julia Harmon
Ridge 111
New York

Most Precious Sister,

I can't begin to tell you how relieved I was when Gitla showed me your card from America. After what people said, I never expected to hear from you again.

At first, the junk man said that robbers tied him up, took his money and kidnapped his wife. He even went so far as to offer a reward and tried to get the police to look for you. Of course, no one believed a word he said. And while no one would say it, everybody thought he had it coming.

But enough about the past, let me tell you about

Przemyśl. When I'm not kicking the football or finishing wood, we are at the cafés, talking and drinking like old women after a wedding. But what a wedding it must have been; boys, girls, men, women, Jews, Polacks, Ruthians, common soldiers, Hungarian hussars, traders, merchants—the whole zoo. We cover a thousand topics—sports, arts, politics, oh yes, politics! Socialism, Zionism, and Anarchism—so many isms to keep track of.

Every morning I walk to Arm's furniture factory where I haul a lot of wood and sweep a lot of floors. There are eleven of us, different as night and day—but all brothers. I work as an apprentice to the most skilled of them, Manes, a socialist who talks constantly of the coming war. He says that to forestall the workers from taking over, the bourgeois are conspiring to have the workers kill each other. He's usually right; let's hope he's not this time.

Sunday is a big football game against the Polacks. We have a secret weapon and I think we can really win. I will tell you all about it in my next post.

Please write me and tell me of your life in New York.

Love,
Elia

Two

Pzemyśl • 17th of Adar, 5674 – Sunday, March 15, 1914

"SEVENTEEN FINE PIECES of kosher meat, eh sister?" Malka said, knowing that it would embarrass her sister to no end. "All lined up for the camera, dressed to play ball in their blue and whites, nine unspoken for, each ripe for the plucking."

"You dirty tart!" Rivka spat back, wagging her finger and sporting a playful grin.

"Manes, the mighty Oak. Oh, to be wrestled in those arms. Is all of him is so tree-like? What do you think, sister?" She tossed her reddish blonde hair off her face and raised her eyebrow twice.

"If daddy hears you, he'll—"

"Then there's Elia with those beautiful legs. He's just a bit green for me but oh, so tender and yummy for you. Didn't you say that you fancy him? I hope so, because every time he looks at you, he drools like a baby. And then there's Hirsch, a face like a—"

"Enough, coquette! You're incorrigible. Jump in the river before you combust. Besides, when I marry, it will be for love, not legs."

Malka nodded in acknowledgment.

Rivka mimicked her older sister's previous move, tossing a black tress from her face as dramatically as she could, "But I must admit that Soli does have quit a fine rear."

The sisters giggled as the powder flashed and the negative was exposed, capturing the Hebrew Hashacha Football Club of 1914 on the glass plate in the camera.

THERE WERE NO grazing animals and no shepherds to chase the footballers off Blonie Field, just west of town on the road to Sanok. While church bells echoed on the breezy morning it seemed like the town's people were being sucked from their homes toward a drain at the center of the chalked-off rectangle in the middle of the one flat pasture in the valley. The chatter from the throngs coming from the old town was mostly Polish with a smattering of Ruthian, while those on Jagiellońska and coming across the bridge from Zasanie were evenly split between Polish and Yiddish. A fair number of uniformed soldiers came as well, adding German, Hungarian and even a little Czech to the mix. As fans made it to the field, they segregated themselves roughly by the two main languages, Polish on the west, Yiddish to the east of the pitch. Not that there wasn't some mixing, particularly at the ends of the field where Meyer Weiss and Jurek Styfi were busy taking bets and laying off risk, conversing in the universal language of money.

"Quite a turn out, Jurek."

"One goal, Meyer. Polonia minus one. Two to one. Nine hundred total."

"Done."

"We'll talk again at the interval."

Almost everyone sang along as the army band struck up Haydn's stirring old melody, now the Austrian anthem, *Gott erhalte Franz den Kaiser*.

MEYER WAS BEAMING, holding court at a centrally positioned table at Antmann's. "Schnapps, bring us Schnapps!" he ordered to the hovering waiter, pounding his finger on the cardboard coaster on the table. "Mister Arm!" he called as Tanchem approached. As they shook hands, Meyer slipped a wad of green banknotes into his palm. "You should have seen Styfi's face!"

"Any troubles?"

"Business is business."

Tanchem stuffed the money into his trouser pocket before taking a seat. "What'd he say when the *wunderkind* hit the pitch?"

"Nothing. Absolutely nothing. For forty years I've waited for Jurek to have nothing to say. "Well, he did say one thing, right before Guttmann entered. Just one little word."

Tanchem raise his palms to the sky, "What?"

"He said 'Yes'. One little word. He said 'Yes, double the bet.'"

"Doubled?"

"Yes, as in twice as much."

"What a priceless Polack!"

"Well, not exactly *priceless*."

They snorted coarsely as the schnapps was delivered.

Meyer lifted his glass. "Well played my friend. Very well played. Brilliancy prize, in fact."

"*L'Chaim*, Meyer."

"*L'Chaim*, Tanchem."

MANES, HIRSCH, ELIA and half a dozen fellow footballers sat at a large table inside the café, nursing drinks along with a variety of cuts and bruises.

Manes reached out and poked at Zsiga whose head was resting on the tabletop, then pointed to the window table where Tanchem and Meyer were toasting. The triumph was

obvious on both men's faces even from a distance. "Look at them. All of you look at them."

Zsiga lifted his head and looked as requested, then looked over at Manes, back to Tanchem, and finally back to Manes. "I need another beer."

"They think they can buy us off with free beer," Manes said before emptying his glass. Reaching out into the aisle, he managed to snag the apron of the waiter, reeling him in like a fish on a line. "Another round. Bring us another round. Dov, you need schnapps?"

Dov Zemel, who had been mumbling to himself at the end of the table, turned to display the plum-colored shiner below his right eye. "I'm going to find that rat-bastard Polack and split his head open."

"It appears we *can* be bought with beer, comrade," Elia said, just loud enough to be heard.

Manes frowned at Elia and then turned away to more receptive ears. "They bet us like horses. It's always the same, comrades."

"We played a friendly and we came up short. There is no shame in this. The fact that some people made a wager on our fun had no bearing on the outcome," Elia said, "None at all."

Manes turned and jabbed a finger at Elia's chest. "You're either naïve or you're a fool. And I know you are no fool."

Izac set his beer stein down with a thud. "Get off the kid's back and give it a rest for once? It's just a game. We played out of our minds and just barely lost. Even so, we scared the shit out of those Polacks."

Manes's eyes tightened as he leaned toward Izac. "We could have won. They held him out for the first half only to make more profit!" He stood, kicking the chair backwards. It fell against the back wall, deformed, but not broken. "Are you all idiots? Are you?"

Zsiga filled the brief conversational gap with a deeply

reverberating belch, setting all of the men at the table to laughter.

The noise level at Antmann's stayed at near deafening levels for the rest of the night, questions about motivations quickly replaced by socializing and celebrating. Heavier than usual drinking commenced as the word spread that Weiss would be picking up the night's tab not only for the footballers, but for everyone else as well.

Elia was talking to Béla with his back to the door. He turned in time to see the Arm girls taking seats only two tables away. Malka was already flirting with a troika of pie-eyed boys, while Rivka, in an animated debate with Manes, turned her head slowly, letting her eyes alight on Elia. She smiled, stopping his heart in mid-beat. Someone blocked his view of her and by the time they'd moved, she had reengaged with Manes, her back to Elia. Heart restarted and pounding hard, Elia maneuvered his way over to their table as quickly as social decorum would allow.

"No!" Manes said loudly, trying to be heard over the din of the café. "It makes no difference what you are to the Bund. You are not a man or a woman; you are a seamstress, a worker, and a Jew. Class matters, not gender, not religion. Besides, many of our leaders are women."

Rivka nodded vigorously at Manes. "The Zionists want me to milk cows or something in the desert while some bloated bourgeois rabbi makes me recite in Hebrew and then sells me into marriage like a piece of meat to some money grubbing capitalist! Here I can read seven journals a week in Yiddish, Polish, German and Hebrew. Here, I have an extraordinary world of opportunity at every turn."

"Working-class equality for race, religion, and gender," Manes added.

"Manes, Rivka," Elia said, "mind if I join you?"

Manes pulled a chair out from the table and patted the seat. Elia set his stein on the table and sat, inching the chair

forward.

"Yes, please, join us." Rivka smiled, "We were just discussing the equality inherent in socialism."

"And the inequality inherent in the synagogue," Manes added.

"What do you think Elia?" She asked.

"I don't think there's anything inherently unequal or unjust with the synagogue, per se. It all comes down to people, to the individuals who are in control, the bosses, the rabbis in this case. If they are tolerant, if they are open minded, then the systems they run will be likewise."

"But they never are. Besides, under true socialism, there will be no bosses to corrupt the system," Manes asserted.

"I agree with you on a small scale. At the interpersonal level up to, perhaps, the size of a small factory, bosses aren't necessary. I believe this to be true of synagogue also. Do Jews really need rabbis to practice being Jews? No. My aunt Gitla is a prime example; the finest Jew I've ever met hasn't set foot in a synagogue in thirty years."

"So Elia, where do you disagree with Manes?"

"In the larger picture, some kind of boss is inevitable because the need for adaptation to the times is ever-present. Jews survive because we adapt our laws through Talmud. Rabbis are the ones who lead this."

The rest of Antmann's was loudly toasting a footballer so Manes leaned over in his chair to be closer to Elia and Rivka and make his point heard, "Marx says that after a brief organizational period, the vanguard melts away, leaving the proletariat to run their own affairs."

"Well, isn't that convenient!" Rivka said with little laugh and a toss of her hair.

"I am beginning to see the advantages of a socialist state. And God knows I have seen how the rabbis can treat women," Elia said. "But let me tell you one thing; socialist, zionist or tsar, there will always be a boss. Always. And if that boss is

a good man—"

"Or woman," Manes interrupted.

"Or woman, the system will be inherently fair. Austria has been good for the Jews not because Austria is fair, but because Franz Joseph is a righteous man."

"I couldn't agree more with Elia. People, more than systems. Not all rabbis are unjust. Not all socialists are honorable and not all capitalists aim to enslave the workers," Rivka said animatedly.

"Tanchem is a capitalist, but a fair one," Elia blurted out.

Rivka put her hand on the arm of Elia's chair.

"So you don't think there can be a true, worker-led socialist state?" Manes asked, "So you think there are fair capitalists? So I think you're both dreaming."

"And I think you're wrong," Elia shot back.

"And the world continues to spin," Rivka said in a sing-song voice.

Manes reached for his beer stein and finished it. "You're both clever thinkers. The true socialist doesn't shy from intelligent debate. Why don't you come hear one of our Russian comrades speak next month?"

"About what?" Elia asked.

"Very topical. Vladimir Medem on why zionism is inherently contrary to socialism."

"I'll be there," Elia said without hesitation. He looked over at Rivka, thinking her even more beautiful up close than across the room, hoping she'd take her time before saying yes, prolonging the interval where it was socially acceptable for him to explore her features with his eyes.

"And so will I," Rivka said.

Elia thanked God before taking his eyes off her.

Przemyśl • 14th of Nisan, 5674, – Friday, April 10, 1914

"WHAT'S THE MATTER, Elia?" Gitla asked.

He lifted the end of the sofa and positioned it back up against the wall. "Nothing. I'm fine."

"Don't bullshit a bullshitter. All day we've emptied the house to the street, scrubbed every nook and crack, then moved our worldly goods back in, and not even a caw from my little crow."

Elia exhaled audibly then slumped back into the couch. "I'm torn."

"We're all torn, Elia. Talk, let it out."

"I have declared my solidarity with my fellow workers, with the working class."

"And…"

"And I'm still a Yid, a Jew."

"A duck is a duck is a duck."

"In my heart, I can't believe in both Zion and in Przemyśl. So I made my choice to stay, to fight for my class, and to retain our Yiddish way of life."

"I'm proud of you for taking a stand," Gitla said. "Any stand. But why the long face? Everyone is many things. It's only sad if you're only one thing."

Elia looked up studying Gitla's features. While these were clearly not the steely-grey eyes of his mother he could easily see his mother's soft, wide mouth on her. "Can I be a good Jew without the Synagogue? He asked. "Without a Rabbi?"

"That's it? That's all?" She let out what sounded like a tire going flat then continued, "Tonight we join with a thousand other households in this valley and rid our homes of all traces of leavened bread. Most will do so for one reason and one only: the rabbi told them to. They will use a candle to illuminate, a feather to sweep the cracks, and a tin to collect the offending crumbs because that is what they were

told to do: eat only matzo rid the house of leaven. But what of the Malz home? Why are we doing it? I'll tell you why: because it's good to clean your house to the cracks every spring. Some holidays we clean our souls; for Passover, our homes. And do you really think God gives a rat's behind about a crumb of bread behind the stove? God is busy; she has much better things to watch. For the Malz, this whole crazy holiday comes down to the story of the matzo."

"How so?"

"Take flour, fold in water then stop time."

Elia looked puzzled.

"Up to now, Matzo and bread are one. Put the preparation in the oven, *pfft*, matzo for Passover. But take a walk before baking and *pfft*, bread—sell the lousy loaf to the Poles. What's the difference Elia?"

With the skill of a Vienna lawyer and the confidence of a Berlin surgeon Elia answered. "The difference is… time. Time."

She reached out to knock her knuckle on the crown of his skull while Elia continued, "There is a moment, an instant in time, when good becomes bad, when white becomes black. The course of things changes in the beat of a heart. The matzo, made so quickly, reminds us that time is precious."

"That's my boy. Time is our most precious gift from God. That's why the Malz house eats matzo. Not because a rabbi told us to, but so once a year we can burn the value of time into our souls. Some men, good men, need to be led, to be shown the path. Children too need to be led. In fact, I would say that most people need to be led to the inner truths. But not all. Remember always, God sees directly into each and every living heart. And to Her, an act that comes from your heart is much more meaningful than an act that comes from mindless obedience."

They sat silently for a moment. "You would have made such a wonderful rabbi, Aunt Gitla, if such a thing were

possible."

"Why you little bastard!" she snorted. "I'd rather drink digitalis tea."

Przemyśl • 28th of Nisan, 5674 – Friday, April 24, 1914

ELIA LEFT THE factory at six-thirty sharp. He crossed the rail tracks and bought some chestnuts from a street roaster before fording Jagiellońska, a veritable river of humanity flowing to the Old Synagogue a few minutes before sundown and the start of Shabbat.

Crossing the bridge to the Zasanie side, his eyes were drawn to the Worker's House, abuzz with activity. As he approached the crowd, the gas lamps lining Kościuszki ignited, projecting a hundred dancing shadows on the five story brick and limestone structure, the largest building between Lemberg and Cracow.

An elderly man with a limp swung the two wooden gatefold doors leading to the meeting hall open before securing them to the brick wall with oversized hook-and-eyes.

"Sit! Move in, closer. Everyone sit!" Manes's voice commanded over the chatter of the hall, his hand gestures encouraging the assemblage to order. He paced back and forth on the dais, dressed in his woodworking uniform of flannel pants with leather strap suspenders, and black leather boots. He wore a slightly dirty white shirt, soaked at the armpits, with his sleeves rolled up over sinewy biceps.

As he perused the room, self-consciously raising his fist to the many familiar faces he saw along the way, her voice jarred him like a sucker punch. "Elia, come, I've saved you a chair."

A pleasant shiver ran up his spine. "Rivka! Be right there. Thank you."

Elia quickly turned toward Manes, yelling at the top of his lungs while thrusting his fist toward the ceiling, “Sterner!” Manes was engaged in a shouting match with a bearded man in the third row but acknowledged his apprentice by raising his forefinger into the air, signaling his intent to return the address.

As Elia turned and walked toward Rivka, Manes yelled back at him, “Reifer!” The room hushed. “The working class rises up!”

The room erupted in a cacophony of encouragement, “Yes!”

“Fight and win brothers!”

“No bourgeois war!”

Elia sat next to Rivka, keeping strictly focused on the front of the hall. A man in a white smock, a baker, stood no more than two feet from Manes and yelled directly to his face, “When?” Then he turned to the crowd and repeated, sweat mingling with flour on his red, pudgy face, “When, comrades? When?”

“May Day!” Rivka yelled.

Elia turned, looking at her with a equal parts pride, animal attraction and intimidation. He leapt to his feet, pumping his fist in the air, bellowing, “May-Day! May-Day!” Rivka rose beside him, soon joined by the entire row, then the next one, then the entire hall.

For several minutes, bakers, tailors, and woodworkers chanted “May!” in unison while the fists of shopkeepers, accountants and lawyers pushed skyward following each iteration of “Day!”

Though the evening nearly brought frost, it felt like mid-summer in the hall. His shirt unbuttoned to the solar plexus and soaked to translucence, Manes caught Elia’s eye and winked.

“Sit, Comrades!” Manes yelled. “Quiet!” he implored several more times before a modicum of order was restored. As the crowd eased back into their seats, Manes prowled the stage

hunched over, visibly mouthing words, occasionally licking the tips of his fingers, silently practicing his coming oratory.

Without warning, the glorious warmth of Rivka's palm spread across the back of Elia's hand as Manes mounted the podium step and began speaking.

"Comrades, friends, fellow workers," he paused, wiping his brow with a handkerchief as the house finally came to a hush. "While most of us are Yids, you must turn to the person at your side and greet him not as a Jew, but as a comrade, a fellow working man. We meet tonight as brothers and sisters, our daily toil the bond that holds us fast. Yes, do it now, turn and embrace your class, your people, your destiny!"

"Brother! Unite! Destiny!"

"But what of the bourgeoisie and their capitalist masters? What are they doing to prepare for May Day?"

"What?" The question came from a soot-covered worker in the back.

"Do you believe that they are idle?"

"No!"

Manes lowered his voice, forcing the listeners to concentrate in order to hear his words. "Do they sit idle as we organize, as we move toward our rightful place? No. The capitalists are scared, comrades. Every day they move more cannons to the fort. Dig more ditches, encamp more soldiers. And not just at Przemyśl, not just on the San. The Tsar masses his pawns to the east, the Kaiser to the west; there is no end. Everywhere, the ruling class readies to set worker on worker. No, friends, the capitalists are scared of us, and they have but one card left to play to stop us from upsetting their world order." Manes left the podium in dead silence. From the far edge of the stage, palms open and facing the audience, he answered his own question, "War."

Immediately shouts of "No capitalist war!" were heard from several seats. Soon the phrase was being rhythmically

chanted by the assemblage.

Manes returned to the dais and resumed speaking well before the chants ebbed. "There is one and only path to our salvation, comrades. One road, one strategy: solidarity."

"Fight!"

"Revolution!"

"As a lone carpenter, I am nothing. But as part of the great body of workers, we are strong. Show them we are one. Come to the rally on May Day." He thrust a clenched fist into the air as he continued, "Bring your fellow workers." Bringing his fist down hard on the wooden podium, he shouted, "Tell the bastards that we are not afraid!"

The Hall exploded with shouts. "No fear!"

"May Day!"

"Bastards!"

Manes waited for relative quiet before continuing. "Friends, I have spoken enough. Now it is my honor to bring you a friend, a scholar, and a hero to the working class. He comes to us from Russia and brings with him the hope, wishes and desires of working people who suffer capitalist oppression far worse than any of us here can imagine. They are true fighters on the front line of the class war. But tonight, our distinguished guest is not going to talk about the war between the capitalist entities. He is not going to address the Tsars, the Kaisers or any other bourgeois interlopers. No, tonight our Russian comrade will tackle a much more insidious foe of the working masses. An enemy not from without, but rather from within. A wolf in sheep's clothes.

"In a rabbis clothes," someone shouted.

"Comrades, I give you Vladimir Medem!"

The room erupted in rhythmic clapping as everyone stood. From the side of the front row of chairs a short man in a dark suit stood and walked toward the dais, stepping up onto the stage in a fluid, catlike move. He had several pages of notes rolled in one hand which he set on the podium, never

altering his serious expression. Medem waited impatiently for the crowd to calm to a low mumble before reading from his prepared text.

"Two streams, two factions, two enemies fighting each other to the death, the Bund and Zionism. Two factions: one proletarian, the other bourgeois. A class party and an all-Jewish movement. Different in social make-up and basis, different in their aims, different in their ways and means, different in their entire world view, and—perhaps most of all—their view of Jewish life…"

Medem spoke for almost an hour, interrupted every few minutes by standing ovations, and revolutionary chants. At one point, after delivering a particularly barbed attack aimed at the bourgeois rabbis of Galicia, a heckler questioned Medem's faith before he was shouted down and escorted out the door by a trio of burley Bundists. He finished with a flourish as his monotone finally gave way to sing-song, fist-pounding crescendo. "In all areas Zionism is a deterrent, a brake, an obstacle!"[1]

Brisk night air hit each worker in turn as they filed out into the cool, starless night, fanning out, walking toward their homes alone or in pairs. "May I see you home?" Elia casually asked Rivka, his outward demeanor belying the agonizing mental preparation and detailed choreography that lead up to his simple query. He brought an arm to his waist, elbow out.

"I'd be delighted," she said, entwining her arm in his.

They crossed the bridge and then made for the quay, strolling silently along the river until they were no longer within eyeshot of the Worker's House. Rivka navigated as they walked, while Elia's gaze alternated between the path directly ahead and quick glimpses of her face, her hair and the gentle arch of her neck.

"Do you buy it?" Rivka asked. "Medem is good, but I don't buy his drivel about Yiddish and Hebrew."

"What do you mean?"

"He seems to say that if we speak two languages, we will lose both to a third. But I fail to see his logic. I speak Hebrew, Yiddish, German and Polish. There are always many languages. Hebrew goes back to the prophets, Yiddish perhaps five hundred years. I just don't see the problem unless he's talking about language metaphorically, on another level."

Just beyond the railroad bridge a clump of trees on the crest of the levee eclipsed the lights of Przemyśl, sending a shadow down the embankment and half-way across the San. As they reached the darkness they stopped and turned to be face-to-face. Rivka's free hand found his and their fingers met, briefly touched, and then intertwined tightly.

A fragment of speech came from Elia's mouth before being smothered by a Rivka's lips. Eons passed as each of his senses took a turn re-defining his soul, recasting his life.

Their eyes met; they exchanged immodest smiles. Rivka stretched, catlike, relaxing her neck, hair cascading down her back, an ear softly alighting on her shoulder, exposing to him the most fertile strip of land the universe had to offer. With eyes wide open, Elia fell on her. From clavicle to earlobe to forehead to face, his lips and tongue lingered at every ridge, plateau and valley.

That night, Elia dreamed like he had never dreamed before.

Several days earlier he had seen a reproduction of a portrait of a woman at an exhibition at the Worker's House. The painting, by a young Spaniard, both intrigued and disturbed him with a distorted, yet curiously meaningful sense of space and order. Somehow, the artist had captured the woman from every dimensional and emotional perspective simultaneously. A part of his brain had spent the past several days trying to make sense of it, trying to apply it to his everyday experience.

He saw Rivka from a hundred angles concurrently; he saw

her face painted not only in length, height and width, but in a dozen other dimensions, and he saw himself as being in all of the spaces, places and sensations at the same time. His dream had no plot, no beginning and no end—just shadows of and suggestions of relationships far too complex to fully understand, far too intriguing to ignore.

A rooster's crow floated in the open window, waking him at sunrise.

Przemyśl • 10th of Iyyar, 5674 – Wednesday, May 6, 1914

"SIT, ELIA. TEA?" Tanchem asked.

"Well… I guess. Yes, thank you." Elia admonished himself for his awkwardness and resolved to be more forceful. They sat silently as the waiter delivered a steeping pot of herbs in hot water and a small white sugar boat with a protruding silver spoon to the center of the table before placing two white cups and saucers onto two wooden coasters. The entire set-up took no more than five seconds.

"I wanted—" Tanchem and Elia began simultaneously.

Tanchem reached for the tea pot. "That was quite the stunt you pulled off at my factory Mister Reifer," Tanchem said in a low monotone while pouring. "May I assume you are here to apologize?"

Elia's mouth was dry but he dared not take the first sip of tea. "You must know that I have nothing but respect and admiration for you, Mister Arm. The strike had nothing to do with you or your factory. It was about May Day, about worker's solidarity. When Manes and I spoke to the workers—"

"We're not talking about Mister Sterner; we're talking about you, Mister Reifer."

Elia nodded.

"Now are you or are you not going to apologize?"

Elia squirmed in his chair. "I will work next Shabbat to make up the time lost. And I will get the others to do the same. And I—"

Tanchem leaned in across the table toward Elia, "Will you answer me? Are you going to apologize?"

Elia took a long, deep breath, "No. No sir."

"I give you a job and you lead my workers out on strike against me and refuse to apologize. Is there some other reason you're here? Have I missed anything?"

"Um, well, yes. There is."

"Out with it!"

Tanchem loaded sugar into his cup as Elia spoke. "Mister Arm, I wanted to talk to you with regards to your daughter. Rivka and I have talked on several occasions and I believe that we have many interests in common." He thought about the skin that ran from her ear to the back of her neck. "We both enjoy the theater." He could feel her thick black hair as it flared out from the knot below her kerchief. "So, I would like your permission to accompany her to the theater to see your very talented elder daughter as she performs in the Aleichem play." He paused. No response. "Of course, my intentions are completely honorable." He tried not to think about her lips, her breasts.

"You have some nerve, Mister Reifer," Tanchem growled.

Elia's pulse sped. "Sir, I…"

Tanchem spun the spoon around the cup more times than was strictly necessary to dissolve the sugar before abruptly smiling at Elia. "Good thing that I like nerve, Elia. There's far too little nerve in today's youth."

Elia dropped his head and sipped his tea, stunned.

"And I appreciate resolve and conviction. While I can forgive you for striking my factory, I would never have forgiven you if you had jettisoned all of your beliefs just to please me. A man, a real man, does not apologize for acting

on his principals."

"Mister Arm, I can't thank you enough for you—"

"Mister Arm? Only the priest calls me that. You will call me as Tanchem."

"Thank you, Tanchem."

"Now, about my Rivka." Tanchem set the spoon down and spoke, looking down at his tea. "Elia, you're a good boy growing into a good man. Coming to me like this takes much courage and even more heart." He sipped his tea. "Rivka may be my youngest, but ever since Lea passed on, it is she holds the Arm's together. She is the rock of the family, the rock to Malka, and my rock." He again took a sip, then for the first time looked up at Elia. "You have my blessing to take my daughter to the theater." Elia let the words roll over him like a warm bath. "But if you ever do anything to dishonor my precious, I will kill you with my own hands. Understand?"

"Yes, sir. Your trust in me touches me to my soul," Elia said. "Of course I must now ask Rivka."

Both men smiled and sipped tea before Tanchem added, offhandedly, "Of course, I will be attending as chaperone."

Elia daubed his mouth with a napkin. "But of course."

Sarajevo • 4th of Tamuz – Sunday, June 28, 1914

IT WAS A typically humid, scorching Bosnian summer day. Archduke Ferdinand's convertible *Graf und Stift Rois De Blougne* coasted down the Appel Quay, taking the route and the speed suggested in the strongest possible manner by Governor General Potiorek, host of the military reception that had just concluded at City Hall. In spite of the anarchist bomb that blew up the car behind them on their way from the train station to town, Ferdinand and his wife, Sofia, showed not a hint of fear as they chatted in the backseat with the

giddy ease of expectant parents. Being a commoner, Sofia was forbidden to ride in the same carriage as her husband while in Austria proper, but here in the provinces no such rules were enforced. Being together on their anniversary was a present that delighted the couple to no end; they were as in love this day as they were on the day they married, fourteen years previously.

The royal couple ignored the tug of deceleration as the roadster slowed, following the mayor's car as it turned onto Franz Joseph Street, away from the River Milgacka. Sitting forward in the front passenger seat, Potiorek immediately protested to the driver, loudly declaring this to be the wrong route while poking the hapless wheelman with his crop. The driver slammed on the brakes, bringing the *Graf und Stift* of the heir to the Austrian Empire to an abrupt stop directly in front of a nondescript food store with "Schiller's" painted on the window glass.

Unseen, a thin, tubercular man crept from the building's shadows, a Belgian made semi-automatic Browning pistol in hand. The first bullet sailed effortlessly through the car's door, hitting Sofia in the stomach, killing her unborn child instantly and rupturing her abdominal aorta, sealing her fate. The assassin leapt off the curb to the open-air automobile, taking aim at the speechless Archduke from point blank range. The projectile found its mark, slicing open the pale white skin on his Excellency's neck, tumbling through sinew and viscera before exiting just to the side of his third vertebra before coming to rest in stuffing of the car's seat-back cushion. The sound of blood spurting from Ferdinand's carotid artery mingled with the rev of the V8 as the royal driver stomped on the gas, U-turned, and squealed away across the Lateiner Bridge, toward the governor's home.

Sophie tried several times to speak but could muster no wind. A trickle of red formed at the corner of her mouth, ran down her chest and merged with the growing tangle of

shredded silk and blackening gore where her stomach had been. As they cleared the bridge she summoned all of the remaining life from within her and managed to push out a faint whisper, “For heaven’s sake, what’s happened to you?”

Meanwhile, Ferdinand was frantically using both hands to try to stop his blood from leaking out through the two holes in his neck. Choking on his own fluids, he vomited violently down the front of his uniform, clearing his throat just long enough for him to utter his last words, “Sophie dear! Sophie dear! Don’t die! Stay alive for our children!”[2]

Both were dead before noon.

ENTERING THE THEATER, Tanchem led them to a block of empty seats in the fourth row where they sat: boy, girl, father.

Once seated, Elia and Rivka turned to assess the patrons in the theater. A group of ardent Zionists was sitting next to a small klatch of devoted socialists, lit cigarettes the only common ground between them. Meyer Weiss and daughter Zipre, as close to royalty as there was in Jewish Przemyśl, sat talking in the front row. Morrie the waiter sat chatting with Flamenbaum the newsman. Woodworkers Max, Moe, and Hirsch were there, smoking while scanning the crowd for friends and young ladies of their fancy.

Rivka read aloud from the program that was handed to theater goers at the door. Elia ignored the program in his hand, shifting to read over Rivka’s shoulder:

SCATTERED AND DISPERSED
Scenes from Jewish Life, in Three Acts
By Sholem Aleichem

THE LIGHTS WERE cut and as the heavy red curtain closed the audiences' silence gave way to claps and cheers. Within seconds the theater was alive with a chorus of appreciation that organized itself into rhythmic clapping and foot stomping. As the curtain reopened and the lights came up, the reception lost its cohesion, though not it's volume.

Elia, Rivka and Tanchem joined the other theater goers on their feet and began alternating chants of "Malka!" and "Bravo!" as the players took turns stepping forward and bowing, each smiling broadly as they squinted, trying to spot parents, siblings, and loved ones in the dimly lit theater.

Moments later the theatergoers headed out onto Jagiellońska and fresh air. The crowd formed a crush just past the door and Elia, shuffling slowly just behind Tanchem, took Rivka's hand. Through a forest of heads, Elia was finally able to make out the cause of the bottleneck; a young boy was taking coins and handing out newspaper extras as fast as he could. Tanchem dove into the crowd and emerged seconds later with a sheet of freshly printed newsprint before the threesome made a beeline for a streetlamp on the quay for detailed reading.

They saw the oversized type at the same time.

Przemyśl • 22nd of Tamuz, 5674 – Thursday, July 16, 1914

AFTER SEVERAL PULLS on the Havana, Meyer was convinced that the cigar was fully ignited. He reached toward the table and casually slid one of his white ivory pieces forward two squares, adjusting its position so that its circular base was fully inscribed within the white square. "Pawn to King's four," he said absentmindedly in Polish.

Jurek, who had just moved to a sitting position fully square with the table immediately lifted a red pawn by its bulbous

head and, angling the base toward Meyer, sailed the piece in a short arc to its resting place, dead in the center of a red square. “Pawn to Queen’s Bishop four.”

“*Putz*,” Meyer said under his breath, picking up a Knight. “Knight to King’s Bishop three.”

“Knight to Queen’s Bishop three,” Jurek said, planting his red knight behind his pawn, adding, with a grin, “Kiss my Polish rump.”

“Hooligan. Pawn to Queen Four,” Meyer said in a faux-angry tone. “You haven’t played the damn Sicilian in two years!”

Picking up his pawn, Jurek exchanged it for Meyer’s with the sleight of hand of a magician. Holding the captured piece aloft, he deadpanned, “Pawn takes pawn,” then added in Yiddish, “Resign?”

Meyer smiled broadly, leaned back in his chair and attended to his cigar. “If I wouldn’t tip my King to Lasker as a boy, what makes you think I’d resign to a *goy*?” He moved a piece before he removed another piece, “Night takes pawn.”

Both had been exceptional young players. They had met back in ‘93 when they were among thirty Galicians of all ages and origins chosen to play a simultaneous exhibition against Emanuel Lasker, the great international grand master. On the train to the match in Lemberg, their fathers ignored each other while the two boys honed their skills by calling out moves while manipulating imaginary pieces. Over the years, as each amassed their own fortunes, they developed a close working relationship that occasionally bordered, but rarely actually crossed over into, friendship. While neither had ever seen the inside of the other’s home, they had met for lunch, cigars, and chess at Hibler on the third Thursday of each month for nearly a decade now, continuing their old habit of calling out moves in homage to their chess pedigree. Like a bridge across a great river, they connected two of the three great constituencies that made up Przemyśl, the Poles and

the Jews. This flow of information helped the shopkeeper, the priest, the Colonel of the Fort, and even the police. But most of all, it conferred a huge financial edge upon the two chess players.

"Just because you went a few more moves than me doesn't mean you hadn't lost at the same time as me, and the other twenty eight—after Lasker's first move. Knight to bishop's three."

Meyer lowered his voice as he leaned out over the table, "My people in Vienna tell me to not be fooled by the demands. There is no answer Serbia can give that will be accepted. It has already been decided. Knight to bishop's three."

"I know, I know," answered the Pole. "My men in Berlin are sure that Germany will support Austria if they mobilize against Serbia. The Kaiser says Russia is in no way ready for war."

"Nonsense! The Tsar is bound to Serbia by treaty. I can guarantee you that Russia will not stand by idly and allow Austria to violate the Serbs."

"Makes sense."

"I know it for fact. My agent in Saint Petersburg is the brother-in-law of the Russian minister to Serbia. Or I should say, was. He dropped dead last week in Belgrade. Bad timing!"

Both men chuckled nervously before pulling on their cigars in unison.

"And don't forget the French," Jurek added. "Poincaré is in Russia this weekend."

"*Tsurus*. Nothing but *tsurus* ahead." Meyer considered the chess board. "Like our game, you can survey the pieces, run the possibilities, and predict the future. Austria is a Rook to Germany's Queen. Serbia is a bishop. A fienchettoed bishop, lurking, dangerous.

"And Poland is a pawn," Jurek said. "A passed pawn."

"Passed pawns ignored in the middle game come back to

haunt in the end."

"Is Europe playing the middle game?" Jurek asked.

Meyer shook his head. "The middle game doesn't start until major pieces are exchanged. Everyone's still playing the opening."

"Could be, old friend. Could be. Still, we can think ahead, play out the game in our heads."

Both men paused, contemplating. "Brilliant," Meyer said. "War means a free Poland which means—".

"Trouble."

"Solve the puzzle, Jurek. It's mate in four."

The Pole sat back in his chair. "Austria mobilizes against Serbia."

"Attack"

"This forces Russia to mobilize, forcing Germany to mobilize, forcing France to mobilize, and forcing Britain to mobilize."

"Check."

"Once nations begin mobilizing, conscripting infantry, co-opting industry, and confiscating railways, nothing stops it."

"Checkmate."