

Eleven

**New York • 14th of Iyyar, 5679 – Wednesday, May
14, 1919**

ZIPRE AND RIVKA shared one of twenty-eight apartments at 109 Ridge Street. While the building had a separate mailing address, it was connected to 111 Ridge by short hallways on the odd numbered floors—like Siamese twins. Their room was ample, about ten by ten and well appointed by neighborhood standards: two beds, a plush chair with an ottoman, a small desk with a stool, and a four-drawer dresser.

“Where are you going?” Zipre asked.

“Out,” Rivka said, reaching for her coat. “Did you see that?” She gestured toward the parlor, not more than twenty feet away through the hallway door. “This place is disgusting.”

“It may well be, but it’s putting food on the table and a roof over our heads.”

“She kissed that *kurva* on the lips. And for a long time.”

“So?”

“So? All you can say is so? Open your eyes!”

“My eyes are working fine. Perhaps you should—”

“And it wasn’t the first time I’ve seen them embrace like that. If that tramp didn’t spread her legs for anyone with a

silver dollar, why I'd think she was some kind of, some kind of..." When Rivka was angry her voice tended to grow softer and more articulated. "*Lesbierin*," she sputtered.

Zipre and Rivka stood facing each other in the center of the room, about an arm's length apart. Rivka was tight-faced and intense; Zipre cracked a thin smile before uttering, "No, you don't say?"

"Don't mock me!" Rivka shot back.

"I hear that Rivka Reifer is a—" She took a step forward and whispered, "Socialist."

"I said, don't—"

"Shut up and listen to me!" Zipre put her hand on Rivka's shoulder and steered her toward the chair. "Julia prefers to have relations with members of her own sex. It is simply the way she is. Just as you adore tea and abhor beer."

"Please," Rivka said, stretching the word out as she sunk into the chair. "It's not like that at all. I just find it, well, I find it sort of—"

"You find it sort of what? Who gave you the right to find offense in what another grown person chooses to like and dislike?"

"I'm sorry, but I find it disturbing and odd, that's all."

"Forcing your tastes on another person—you of all people—it's so very bourgeois. You Reds want freedom and justice for everyone unless they happen to have different personal desires than what your precious masses deem normal?"

"That is not fair and you know it!"

"Oh yes it is. Julia is a warm, feeling woman who loves you unconditionally because her brother loves you. She took the lot of us in, without passing judgment. She loves me in the same unconditional way merely because I am friends with you two."

"I love Julia, too."

"She didn't first ask me if I like coffee, what God I pray to or if I prefer to have sexual relations with men, women, or

both. It insults me that you care who she sleeps with.”

“Both?” Rivka asked, looking confused.

“God in heaven, Rivka Arm, you can be so provincial!”

“Provincial? At least I’m not the one in love with a teenage boy.”

“And I’m not the one in love with an inmate.”

“A political prisoner, held for his—for our—beliefs. Beliefs. You should try them sometime.”

“Oh, that’s right, I forgot. You and Elia get to do as you please because you are the leaders of the unwashed masses. You’re just so superior, the vanguard, right?”

“At least my daddy wasn’t a usurer. We couldn’t afford to go to fancy schools in Cracow and Berlin and Paris. I make no apology for who and what we are.”

“It’s like Julia’s business; you look down at it, but you don’t hesitate when it comes to using the fruits of her labor. A dollar here a dollar there is just fine. You know this flat we’re in? Did you ever stop and wonder how it became free just as we arrived? Did you?”

“Well, I, um...”

“Did you?”

“No.”

“Julia had Milton toss the tenants out. On May Day. May Day! Men, women and children, booted out onto the street to make way for you, the vanguard of proletariat. But you sleep just fine here, don’t you!”

“Stop it!”

“Because you Reds are all the same, all talk until it comes time to pay the bills. I cannot believe you dare to criticize Meyer. You wouldn’t even be here if not for my father.”

“And if not for me and my aunt, you’d be saddled with a five year old bastard instead of just being a plain old spinster.”

All color drained from Zipre’s face. She stepped toward Rivka and slapped her hard across the face.

Rivka stood stunned for an instant, and then dropped her

head in tears as Zipre grabbed her shawl and stormed out of the apartment via the hallway door.

THE TWO WOMEN walked briskly arm-in-arm, scarf-covered heads tilted down partly to navigate around the bevy of foul organic obstacles that littered the pedestrian routes of the Lower East Side, but mostly to avoid eye contact with those walking, those sitting on stoops, or those congregating in front of taverns along the way. One of them knew the fastest route to Ridge Street by heart, passing by it by six days a week walking from her home on Willett Street to the bottle factory she worked in at Avenue B and Third.

The block was typical. One side of the street was a solid row of six-story flats with a zigzag of black-iron fire escapes tacked to the brick and limestone façade. The other side was the same, save the two buildings in the middle that the women headed for which had airshafts on either side. One of the women read the street number etched into the keystone over the doorway, "*Ciento once—esto es.*"

The front door flew open and a well-dressed man with his top hat pulled low over his forehead bolted out before racing off in a motor car a bit too fancy for this neighborhood.

One of the women gestured toward the red stained-glass lamp behind a heavily barred garden level window, "*Ellos son putas.*"

"*Putas Judías,*" the other one answered, knocking on the door.

At first it was a typical brothel, part of the burgeoning supply of houses catering to anyone with a few dollars—subject to the brutal supply and demand economics that operated at the lower levels of prostitution. Like most houses of prostitution, the pressure for volume, fed by a river of soldiers passing through, drove the common denominator lower and lower, bringing with it the fights and credit problems commensurate

with the clientele. The problem, in Julia's parlance, was that "Bad clients mean bad girls. Bad clients can't pay for good girls. Good clients won't pay for bad girls. So we need to get good girls and good clients all at the same time."

Marta was in charge of the house. Room by room, she transformed the building into a replica of a Fifth Avenue luxury apartment, not that any likely client would actually know what that was supposed to be like. The main floor had a fancy mahogany bar stocked with French cognac and cigars from Cuba. Most importantly, the lounging and greeting areas were segmented by walls and thick tapestries, all designed to offer the clientele strict anonymity.

Julia booked the men, who all liked and respected her or they were not invited back. It was Julia's idea to transform the business from one where men chose from a line up to one where all but the least experienced girls were available by appointment only. Volume dropped and prices skyrocketed. She had a saying that encapsulated what would quickly become one of the most successful houses in all of Manhattan: "Men have no appetite for a dish you have made too much of, but men have an unlimited appetite for a dish they think you're out of." Within two years Marta was recruiting a wide range of beauties to become "ladies in residence" for stints limited to three months at a time. A popular girl could make in a week what a seamstress or a baker would earn in a year. Milton was in charge of enforcing the strict conduct codes for both the girls and their clients. As the business grew, Julia's reputation for quality and discretion spread throughout the southern part of the island. Her encyclopedic knowledge of baseball, horseracing, boxing, and the movies also made her fine company for the civic officials and up-and-coming businessmen of lower Manhattan.

The iron plate on the door opened, revealing a masculine pair of blue-gray eyes.

"We are looking for Hullia—"

“Get lost. We don’t need no girls.” Milton slammed closed the plate.

“Excuse me, Christopher,” Julia said rising from a love seat by the door to address Milton. “Who was it?”

“Coupl’a girls lookin’ fer work. Look like gypsies.” Another knock. Milton looked perturbed. “Don’t worry ma’am, I’ll send ‘em packin.”

“I’ll take it, Milton.” Julia turned back to the sergeant, “Chris, give me a minute, wont you? Have a drink.” She walked to the door and opened the slide. “Two? Never come here in pairs. What the hell am I supposed to do when one is homely and one is a knockout? You sisters?”

The pretty one spoke, “Hullia. We look for Hullia.”

“Julia?”

“*Si, si, Hulia Harmon.*” She held up the onionskin with her name and address. Julia shut the slide and pulled the deadbolt.

“Oh my God, I’m so sorry. I am Julia Harmon. Please, come in . *¿El español? Entre.* Thank you, *gracias. Entre.*”

Neither budged from the stoop. “*No, gracias.*”

Milton poked out from behind Julia, “Everything okay, ma’am?”

“Yes, yes. Go.”

The older woman spoke in fractured English, “I am Frieda Saldago. My husband and your brother were expelled together. This is Isabella, my sister. Five letters come to her flat yesterday. We deliver.” She nodded at her sister and she handed the letter to Julia. “Now we leave.”

They turned and descended the three stone treads to the sidewalk. Julia stared at the return address written on the letter: Elia Reifer c/o Casa de Unión de Trabajadores, Obispo 20, La Habana, Cuba. “Please, come in. Allow me to thank you!” Julia called.

The two women stopped and turned. “May God forgive you,” the older woman said as she crossed herself. As Julia

closed the house door, the younger woman spit on the corner of her building.

**Havana • 15th of Iyyar, 5679 – Thursday, May 15,
1919**

ELIA AND MIGUEL turned the corner and passed under the *Paifang* into *El Barrio Chino*, picking up a sea breeze, bringing much needed relief from the heat and the flies. “This is my favorite part of Havana,” Miguel said with a hint of pride.

“Why’s that?” Elia asked as he tossed his cigarette into a rain-filled pothole.

“Look around; no one stands out. The rich in silk, the poor in rags. Artisans, sailors, priests and whores; no questions asked.”

They turned onto a dead-end when Miguel stopped walking, “You’re sure you want to go through with it?”

Elia exhaled heavily. “The bastards ripped our lives apart over a book.” He put his hand on Miguel’s shoulder and drew him close. “A book. A bunch of words keeps us from our loved ones.”

“To the capitalists, these are not just words.”

“We both are on the list. You heard what they said at the Union Hall; we have no chance. None, forever. Check and mate.”

“Nonsense, my friend, there is always hope. In Havana, forever has a habit of becoming tomorrow.”

“Fine, but today, the capitalists must pay.” Miguel shrugged as Elia continued. “They jail me for my thoughts, for my beliefs; for being a revolutionary. So now a revolutionary I will be.”

“You’re a thinker, not a fighter, Elia.”

“I’m done thinking. To them, the punishment for words is the same as the consequence of actions.”

“Just—”

“I am what I am, Miguel. Besides, Rivka and I have a pact.”

“Just be careful. These are very serious people.”

“So am I.”

The Spaniard pointed to the *cervezaria* across the street, “There. Through the door, in back. Keep your head down and don’t look at anybody on the way in. And remember to knock three times.”

“What gets me in with them?”

“Just be yourself, Elia. Answer the questions. The Mexican just needs to know you’re not an amateur.”

Elia dodged a horse-wagon, walked in and hustled through the dark to a door in the back. He knocked three times. Nothing. A bead of sweat ran down his forehead into his eye, stinging. The door cracked open just enough for a man to be seen head to toe. Younger and taller than Elia, with an aggressive posture and a complex face, he had a flattened nose, a cinnamon complexion, and a squared-off jaw under deep, almond-shaped eyes set at an angle that gave away a trace of Eastern origin. He flashed a grin that sent chills down Elia’s spine before disappearing back into the room.

A dim electric bulb dangled from the ceiling, casting eerie shadows on the walls.

“Bolt it and sit,” said the man at the far end of a large square table that took up nearly the whole room. He was a dark, fat, older man, his badly yellowed teeth crushing the end of a cigar that he puffed on intermittently through a fixed grin. To his right was a man in a stylish but ill-pressed light-hued suit, looking like a waiter from one of the better *cantinas* down by the wharf.

“Smoke? Drink?” said the man to Elia’s left, as he pushed a wooden tray toward him.

Elia snapped up a cigarette, studying the three mute men, silently practicing the soliloquies he would use to pass the test.

“Speak.”

Elia sat up in the chair, looking across the table, “I am Elia R—”

The order-giver interrupted him, “We don’t care.”

Elia lit up as the man across the table continued.

“Perhaps where you are from it is allowed to be openly revolutionary? Perhaps there are no secret police to hang you upside-down and beat your man-parts with rubber hoses? Maybe they don’t murder your brothers and rape your sisters when they find out who you are? But in Cuba they do. So you will know only this cell by code name. Only I know the next cell. This way, if you are taken, you can give up only four.”

“I would never betray—”

“So we organize with stealth and guile to survive; no one has a name, no one has a family to betray.” The man patted his chest. “They call me El Quintana or just Quino. This is Taíno and our comrade in the fine attire is Milo.”

Elia extended his hand. No one took it. “History!” Quintana barked at Elia.

“You want to know about me?” The leader nodded. “I am a worker from Galicia. I was taken from the island in New York and deported for being a socialist. They found my *Manifesto*. I wish to, to continue the struggle. I was a Bundist before the war, before I was taken into the army. The Austrian army, for years. During the war I embraced bolshevism. Now I want to extend the work of Lenin around the globe.”

“Army? Capitalist tool,” Milo dismissed.

“Ten million pressed into to war. They cannot all be tools,” Taíno retorted.

“Armed and trained yet they did their master’s bidding instead of defending their class. We don’t need a sheep.”

“Sheep? While you were sipping cool tea under the palms, he was in the trenches, learning the arts of war.” Taíno turned to Milo. “Ever put a bullet between someone’s eyes?”

Ever killed a man? Well?” Milo shook his head. “Who’s the sheep then?” Taíno pointed his finger at Elia. “You. You ever kill anyone?” He snickered. “Of course you have. You were a soldier in the war.” He laughed. “How many? One? Ten? Fifty? Taíno’s face turned dead serious. “Galicia’s no sheep; he’s a wolf, and we could use a trained killer.”

Elia’s hand had a slight tremble as he drew on his cigarette. Everyone else turned to the older man awaiting his judgment. “Bundists are thinkers but they are all talk and no action. We are not about talk. We are not about debate. We are not about politics. We are about revolution.” Elia nodded. “So I have three questions for you. First, are you about talk or are you about revolution?”

“I am a revolutionary,” Elia said, looking the Mexican in the eyes.

“Good. Second, are you willing to do anything for the revolution?”

“Yes.”

“Excellent. The third is much easier. What shall you be known as?”

Elia wandered back in time to the Fort. “Hirko. Call me Hirko.”

Everyone shook hands while Milo poured four shots of rum and distributed them. “El Hirko,” Taíno said, lifting his glass. Everyone emptied their drinks then looked at Taíno. “Hirko, meet me Saturday, in front of the station at nine.” Elia cocked his head as a wicked grin oozed from the edges of Taíno’s mouth. “Initiation.”

**New York • 16th of Iyyar, 5679 – Friday, May 16,
1919**

ON ARRIVAL, EVERYONE agreed that the Oak Room at the Algonquin Hotel was the perfect locale for a farewell dinner.

For Rosa and Teddy, it was an elevator ride away, for Rivka it was a return to the First Class dining room on La Savoie. For Milton it was a great steak, for Julia, a place to see and be seen, and for Zipre, it was one last chance to be with Theodore.

The sommelier expertly sliced off the lead capsule and twisted the screw into the cork, removing it with a dramatic pull and a muted pop. Checking the neckline of the bottle for remnant he nodded his approval and sniffed at the cork, similarly impressed. “Chateau Latour, o-four.” His eyes raced around the table, lingering on Teddy before settling on Milton, pouring a taste into his glass. Julia immediately reached across the table and seized the goblet.

Draining it, she glanced over at the sommelier, “It’ll do.”

“Ma’am.” He nodded, then filled all but Teddy’s glass before departing, leaving the bottle next to Julia.

“Dinner’s on Sir Barton tonight,” Julia said. “None for six as a two year old. Ran the Derby as a rabbit for Billy Kelly. Led wire to wire. Two-ten on a heavy track.”

“That’s a lot of numbers,” Teddy said.

“The only numbers you need to care about is thirty to one.” She picked up the Latour and emptied it into Teddy’s glass. “Odds.”

Teddy lifted, “To Sir Barton.”

“Here, here!” They each sipped.

Teddy swirled the wine around the inside of his mouth before swallowing it. He smacked his lips before speaking. “Julia, I read how everyone ate horses in Przemyśl during the war. Better to bet them than to eat them, yes?”

“Absolutely, my boy.”

Teddy set his glass down and spoke to the group with a scholarly look. “So the siege of Przemyśl reminds one of the siege of Troy, but with this difference; that at Troy the men sat in horses, whereas at Przemyśl the horses were sitting in the men!⁸”

Rivka burst into laughter. Zipre, who was sipping water from a glass, had to cover her mouth to avoid spraying the other diners. Rosa leaned over and whispered in Julia's ear, soon causing her to join in the revelry. They continued to exchange bon mots and laugh over two courses of starters. After lemon coconut sorbet, Zipre excused herself for the powder room. A few moments later, Rivka also excused herself.

Rivka pushed the smoked glass swing door to the Oak Room's ladies room open and walked in, confronted by a crystal chandelier, two pedestal sinks in front of floor to ceiling mirrors framed in ornate etching and marble privy stalls, all resting on a granite inlaid floor spelling out a graceful script "A." Rivka walked to one of the sinks and began to wash her hands.

A flush and the sound of a bolt sliding proceeded Zipre's appearance at the sink next to Rivka. The women rubbed their hands together vigorous under streams of warm water, their eyes fixed on the brass drains at the bottom of their respective porcelain basins.

"Zipporah, this is insane."

Zipre turned the ivory stopcock to the off position.

"After all we've been through. I can't stand to lose you."

Zipre took a towel from the small pile on the ledge beneath the sink.

"Please, accept my apology. We can't fight, not now. I need you."

Zipre dried her hands and tossed the towel into the wicker basket between the sinks as she turned to face Rivka.

Their eyes met in a stare that quickly softened. "Goddamn it, Zipre, I'm sorry," Rivka said, lips pursed, shaking.

Zipre let out a sigh. "I need you too, Riv. I really do."

"Then you—"

Zipre cut her off. "Forgive you. Yes, I forgive you. But only if you forgive me too."

“For what?” Rivka queried.

“For being so damn condescending. For judging you.”

“I’m sure I earned it,” Rivka said, extending her arms. As they embraced, Zipre began to cry. “I was stupid. We’re like sisters. Sisters should not compare the favors they do for each other.”

Zipre pushed back, their eyes met. “What makes everyone so goddamn sure they did me a favor?” She wiped her cheek dry.

Rivka recoiled, “What?”

“I was raped, it was awful and I will never fully recover from it. But what about the baby? What did it do wrong? Tell me, what did my baby do wrong?”

“But it wasn’t a—”

“Listen, I was seventeen and I told you and Gitla to do it. It was my decision and I blame no one but myself. But make no mistake, it was no great gift. How do you think I feel every single time I see a five-year-old girl tugging at her mother’s dress? Or a boy throwing a ball in the park?”

“I had no idea.”

“Remember how Gitla said it was a raisin?”

Rivka nodded.

“She lied.”

“Oh God, I never saw it that way. I just assumed, I just thought, I guess I just didn’t think about it.”

“I know. No one did. Not even me, until later.” She extended her arms. “Friends?”

Rivka hesitated. “Look Rivka, I’m not mad or anything. It is what it is. I just needed you to understand how I feel about this. You’re my best friend. It’s part of who I am.”

Rivka started to shiver. “It’s not that, Zipre. There’s something I have to tell you and it may hurt.”

“What?”

“Promise you won’t hate me. Promise.”

“What is it?”

“I’m pregnant.”

A smile spread across Zipre’s face. “I’ve known since we landed. I wasn’t born yesterday.”

Again they embraced tightly.

Rivka stepped back, consternation on her face, “We best get back before they think we’re lesbians.”

Zipre slapped her playfully on the thigh, “You are such a bad, bad girl, Rivka Arm.”

Fueled by Latour and the rapprochement of Rivka and Zipre, the mood over the main course was markedly improved. The girls chatted like gossiping schoolgirls all the way through dessert. As the waiters cleared the last of the dishes, there was a lull in conversation. Rosa seized the moment, leaning in over the table, raising both arms to bring the attention of everyone to her. “So, friends, what’s the plan for Elia?”

Everyone looked at Julia. “I made some enquiries.” She lowered her voice to just above a whisper. “He has a file in a room on the island with a red stamp on it. Pull that record and he’s just a Jew from Cuba.”

“What about transit papers?” Rosa asked.

“He’ll need to get those in Havana.”

“From what I hear, you can buy anything in Havana,” Zipre said.

“How are we going to get to his file?” Rivka asked.

“I know an alderman. He knows a cop. The cop has a buddy who...”

“Four degrees removed?”

Julia wagged her finger at Rivka. “Listen missy, it’s the way it works here. Everything that happens starts with knowing someone who knows someone. And I end up with a name—a name of a clerk on the island with access to our precious records. From there, it’s up to us.”

“Up to us to find the right mix of the twin oils that lubricate business the City: bribes and threats,” Teddy said.

Everyone chuckled nervously except Julia who tapped her

temple with her finger and said, “Yiddisher Kop.”

Zipre took the floor. “So the plan is as follows, someone will have to go to Havana to find Elia and secure transit papers for him. Back here, we will need to apply,” she smiled at Teddy, “oil to this clerk, known only by name.”

“I’ll go to Cuba,” Rivka said. “With Zipre.”

The waiters brought coffee and a plate of cookies forcing the plotters to hold their tongues.

“I guess that leaves me with the threats and bribes,” Julia said.

Rosa stirred a teaspoon of sugar into her coffee. “With all respect, Rivka, I’m afraid yours is an extraordinarily poor idea. First of all, you two girls cannot leave the country—not citizens—too risky. Besides, then you need three new sets of transit papers for Cuba instead of just one. Most importantly, Julia needs to be the one to grease the wheels of justice for Elia’s return to Ellis—none of us here has anything even close to her *savoir faire* in such realms.” She sipped her coffee.

“Then who goes to Havana to get Elia?” Zipre asked.

Teddy blurted, “We’re on a ship—”

Rosa lifted her index finger. “My son has always wanted to see the great canal. As his term at Berkeley does not start until September, I was able to book us on the Ventura to San Francisco via Acapulco, Panama City, Veracruz,” she said, reaching for a chocolate-covered shortbread cookie. “And Havana.”

“We sail Monday; parcels and mail at nine, anchors up at noon,” Teddy added.

**Havana • 17th of Iyyar, 5679 – Saturday, May 17,
1919**

IGNORING THE INCREASINGLY vocal come-ons from the prostitutes working the entrance of the station, Elia headed toward the darkened alcoves in front of a row of tightly shuttered shops at the far end of Calle Arsenal. Out of the reach of the many arc-lamps illuminating the train plaza in garish yellow, Elia smoked a cigarette while trying to spot his contact amidst the churning swell of pedestrians. As he crossed Calle Egido they made eye contact and a tilt of Taíno's head had them heading toward Curazao, a diagonal that led into the heart of La Habana Vieja, where the city's details faded quickly to undifferentiated gray.

They walked wordlessly through a series of quick turns: across boulevards, down small streets, and up narrow alleys until Taíno pulled Elia into a doorway. After unlocking the door and pushing Elia through it, Taíno stuck his head out for one last peek around the corner. Confident they hadn't been followed, he joined Elia, bolting the door behind him.

The room was pitch-black and smelled of solvents. There was a loud metallic crash, then another.

"Goddamn it!" Elia heard him say from the dark before a low-watt light clicked on, illuminating Taíno's reptilian grin.

Taíno pointed to a large glass jug near the wall. "I'll hold the carboy, you tip the barrel."

"What's the plan?" Elia asked, tipping the surprisingly light barrel onto its rim.

"His name is Villavicencio. Capitalist and monopolist."

Elia braced himself and lowered the edge of the barrel until the petrol trickled out into the jug.

"Raised sugar prices. The biggest crop in Cuban history and they raised the price. How many starved? And he fired the workers who complained."

"Pig. How many?"

“He fires us, we fire him back, yes comrade?” As they finished, some gasoline spilled on Taíno’s hands and pants.

After the Cuban stuffed a large cork into the top of the bottle, Elia hoisted it onto his shoulder, securing it with one arm. They hiked through the old city and down the Prado Marti, which was packed with strolling merrymakers and scandalously dressed whores. The carboy on Elia’s shoulder went unnoticed, thought to be beer, rum, or some other fuel for another night of debauchery.

Taíno pointed across and down the alley. “There it is.”

“You sure?”

“That’s one of his factories. Let’s teach the bastard a lesson, yes?”

“Tell me again what he did.”

Taíno checked for onlookers then headed for the back of the factory. Elia followed.

“Let’s go, army-man. Time for some revolution,” he said with, eyes afire while a dog barked in the distance.

The small crowbar that the Cuban had brought just barely moved the hasp so Elia set the jug down to try his hand. While he was tugging, Taíno fished through the garbage bins in the alley, retrieving a length of metal pipe. The longer lever did the trick, ripping the four screws along with a sizable chunk of wood from the door-frame with a loud groan. Both men froze when the dog barked again before quiet settled again on the alley.

“Quickly!” the Cuban urged. Both men rushed inside.

“Tell me, what, exactly, did Villavicencio do?” Elia lifted the carboy and Taíno pulled the cork and then supervised the spreading of petrol through the nearly dark establishment.

“Get back to the door, Hirko! We’re both soaked. Let’s not go up with the building.” As they made for the door, Taíno wiped his hands on his shirt then struck a match, illuminating him, bringing every curve on his smirking face into perfect focus as he tossed the flame into the store. “Run!”

Elia stared motionless into the business, now fully illuminated by the fast moving conflagration. “You idiot! It’s not a factory, it’s a store!” he screamed. “The wrong place, goddamn it!”

“Yes, a store. He gouged the neighborhood.”

“But you said—” Something exploded in the store.

“Run!”

They dashed back through a different series of quick turns: across boulevards, down small streets and up narrow alleys until they were back in the garage and the door was bolted behind them.

“So army-man, we start the revolution!”

Elia ignored him, focusing instead on the steel-chain block-and-tackle hanging from the ceiling with a gigantic, soot-covered motor dangling beneath it.

“Be proud, comrade.”

“Don’t comrade me, you bastard! What the hell did we just do?”

“We burned down a capitalist’s store.”

“You told me he was a sugar baron, not the corner grocer.”

“What’s the difference?”

Elia wiped sweat and petrol from his brow with his shirttail.

“Come on, killer, it was the time for action.”

Elia looked him in the eyes, stone-faced. “Do not call me killer. Do you understand? Never.”

Taíno briefly lost his smirk. “What are you going to do? What?” He flashed his evil smile again. “Kill me?”

Elia looked at the wall of specialized tools, particularly at the crowbars. “I’m warning you.”

They glared at each other until Taíno eased into a smile and began to nod his head. “You misread me, comrade. I mean it not as a slight, but as the highest of complements. You are a hero.”

Elia finally exhaled. “Hero? Hardly.”

“I’m serious. As a man, I’ve been in my share of fights.

Some I've won others I've been beaten within an inch of my life. But fights change only relations between men. It is war that alters the dynamics of nations. I've scared a few capitalist swine; you've moved mountains. The army is the way to revolution. Lenin may have inspired with his oration, but without armed, disciplined troops, he'd have been just another raving hot-head." He glanced around the shop, then at Elia. "In fact, I am thinking about joining the army in the next year."

"It's not what you think it is."

"Tell me what it's like."

"What are you, insane? There's no glory. If mountains move, it's a shovelful at a time. It's hell."

"Tell me about open combat."

"Since you're so impressed with me, why don't I just tell you about the first man I shot? About your hero's first kill."

"That would be—"

"He was a capitalist. A Bolshevik. An anarchist. No, he wasn't anything; he was just a target. No one in war is anything but a target. And you know where your hero shot him?" Elia poked his finger at Taíno. "In the heart? In the head? No, I shot him in the back. He was running away and I shot him in the back. Quite a hero, eh?"

"Still, I—"

"Then there was my friend, my brother, my comrade, Manes. A hero if ever there was one. Ten times the man either of us will ever be. One second we're sharing a cigarette, the next moment he's dead. Gone. Cold. Forever. Who killed him? British? Italian? Why? In war, the shell doesn't care about politics. The shrapnel couldn't care less if it tears through a goat or a hero."

"So?"

"And finally, in a coup de grace, the hero lights up a sugar baron's factory—or is it a gouger's business—or did he just torch some poor family's grocery store?"

“We did what we were told to do. What we had to do. Like you did in the war.”

“Whatever meaning you need to draw from this, by all means, draw. Just don’t smile when you call me killer and don’t ever call me a hero or I swear you’ll—”

“May I remind you who’s in charge here? You’re upset. Don’t say anything you’ll regret in the morning.”

“Morning? Are you joking? I’ve done things I’ll regret every hour of every single day of the rest of my life. And who the hell are you to tell—”

“Easy, Hirko.”

“Fuck Hirko. My name’s Elia. From Medyka.”

“And I’m Fulgencio. From Banes.”

Elia stared at the Cuban with his lips held firmly together, eyes tightened and skin flushed. Fulgencio stared back with equal ferocity before the left side of his mouth began to lift and tremble, contorting his face into a crooked, unconvincing grin.

Fulgencio extended his hand, “Comrade. We’ve had a tense night; we’re both wound a bit too tight. Why don’t we forget all this and go have a drink, as friends.”

Elia looked at his hand, “Get your filthy hand out of my face.” He backed away slowly, toward the door.

“*Bastardo.*” Fulgencio pulled his hand back. “No one leaves the cell.”

Elia turned and ripped the door open.

“And no one refuses the hand of Fulgencio Batista! No one!”

Elia ran out into the street.

“You’re a dead man, Elia!” Batista yelled. “If I ever see you again, you’re a dead man!”

Elia ran to past the edge of town. After scrubbing his body with sand in the ocean, he fell asleep behind a stand of yucca on the beach.

**Odessa • 18th of Iyyar, 5679 – Sunday, May 18,
1919**

JONAS TAPPED TOMAS’S right fist, which he opened, revealing a pawn. He held it up to his son. “Black. Say black, son.” Jonas smiled, then took the pawn and began to set up the board sitting between them on the cot.

Malka dressed while Lea played at her feet. “I know what you think, but I’m going back to the factory. We really don’t have any other choice. Eighty rubles is eighty rubles,” she added.

Tomas and Jonas played speed chess, each move taking no more than five seconds. “And a loaf of bread is what, five-hundred? It’s as hopeless as it is insane,” Tomas replied. “We need to head back to Italy.”

Malka picked up Lea and her Steiff elephant doll that she hadn’t let go of since Vienna, and dropped her on Tomas’s lap. “No, and I will not have that kind of talk around the children. The *Hashomir* and the Rabbis are in talks directly with Denikin—right to the top—no intermediaries to bribe. I know they’ll let our boat go this time.”

“Let’s hope the third time’s a charm.” Tomas pushed a pawn. “Sending our Reds to ask for favors from a White General was not this rabble’s finest political maneuver.”

“*Poalei Zion* isn’t exactly Reds, more like—” Malka shrieked, then jumped on the cot, scattering the chessmen.

“What? What’s wrong?”

“Rat!”

Tomas rolled his eyes as Lea scurried into her mother’s lap.

“Please, kill it,” she begged.

Tomas swung his legs to the deck and slipped into his shoes. As he reached for the cracked engine rod that he kept propped in the corner by the bed, the rat scurried under the canvas curtain that divided the steerage hall into family

cabins. “Some other Zionist’s problem now.”

Malka brushed Lea’s hair. “Don’t worry sweetheart, it’ll all be fine when we get to Jaffa. There aren’t any rats in Palestine, only camels.”

Tomas let the rod hit the floor loudly. “We’re not going to Jaffa. Not on this garbage scow and not from here.”

“Oh yes we are.”

“Listen Malka, I love you and I love the kids, but enough’s enough. I’m tired of boxcars, I’m tired of Odessa, and I’m tired of this stinking boat. I’ve been shot at for five years. Five years! So don’t tell me that everything will be rosy tomorrow. I’m sick to death of tomorrow.”

“We’re here, aren’t we? Alive, I do believe.”

“Dumb luck; the rock-stupid mathematics of war. That a bullet didn’t find us, a germ didn’t infect us, or plain old starvation didn’t take us, is just—”

“God.”

“A statistical anomaly.”

“No, it’s fate. We’re going to get to—”

“Enough! To hell with fate. Was it God’s will that the Reds and Whites should trade off occupying Odessa—not once but four times—just when we arrive? God may have a plan for you, but he sure as hell doesn’t seem to have one for the rest of us.” Tomas exhaled loudly. “I’m sick and tired of God.”

Jonas began setting up the chess pieces while Malka began to brush Lea’s hair, trying to keep her from crying. “That is so sad, Tomas.”

“You’ve known how I feel about it.”

“To think that we four find ourselves on the Roslan in Odessa harbor as the result of statistics is... sad. To think that Jonas was brought back to you by some equation is lunacy.” Jonas banged a pawn on the board. “It’s one thing to not believe in God but it’s wholly different to have no faith, to believe that there is no purpose. That is truly sad.”

“I’m not a sad person, I’m a logical person. I can look

at a set of facts and make educated conjectures about the future.”

“Without faith, without believing, there is no happiness. If life is just a big machine with each part acting precisely in accordance with the laws of nature, then what is love? Is it just another statistical anomaly? Of course not.”

Tomas exhaled toward the ceiling before chuckling. “You’re quite the optimist, Malka. I wish, I really do wish, I could see the world like you do. It might actually make more sense.”

“I will always love you, Mister Lenard, but you need to understand that we are leaving Odessa on this boat. We will get to Palestine and make it to Ein Gev. We are going to build happy and fulfilling lives for ourselves and for the children.”

“And I love you too, Malka, but you need to understand that—”

“Father, your move.”

“Jonas?” They swiveled toward the boy. The chess board had been reset exactly as it was before Malka had upended it and Jonas was contemplating the board with the same flat affect his parents had become accustomed to since he came to them in Vienna. Tomas and Malka tackled the boy, and along with Lea, everyone took turns hugging and kissing each other as the chess pieces again scattered.

New York • 19th of Iyyar, 5679 – Monday, May 19, 1919

“HOW YOU FEELING, Rivka?”

She patted her stomach, “Tired.”

“Good. Let’s take Broadway, I need to pick up a German paper.”

“Sure Zipre.”

“It’s Sarah, S-A-R-A-H.”

“All right already, Sarah Weiss, baker’s assistant.” They

walked arm in arm at a fast clip south on the grand boulevard.

“My back is shot, and I don’t think I can even feel my hands. I need a hot bath in the worst way. Wiltz is such a putz; a slave driver.”

“Poor Sarah!”

“And a lecher. He should be arrested.”

“Oh, how I wish I could bottle this moment of enlightenment for all times,” Rivka said grandly. Only ten hours kneading dough and the golden child of the bourgeoisie embraces worker’s solidarity; calls for revolution.”

“I must admit, labor does focus one’s attention on the darker dynamics of capitalism.”

“Say it loud, sister-comrade!”

“Not so fast, comrade Arm.

“The capitalist pedigree is strong in her!”

“I think that we can agree on one thing—after tasting Wiltz’s breads the Vienna Model Bakery wouldn’t make it ten minutes in Vienna.”

“Or Przemysł, for that matter. Say, any word on your accounts?” Rivka asked.

“That’s just too hysterical, sister-comrade!” Sarah said in her own grand voice. “Oh, how I wish I could bottle this moment of enlightenment for all times. Only ten hours kneading dough and the vanguard of the proletariat embraces a bourgeois’ bank account.”

Rivka raised one bushy eyebrow. “Touché, S-A-R-A-H Weiss. Touché.”

“Oh, I’m just pulling on your leg. Anyway, all the bank would say is that the account has been frozen. I cabled father on Monday. No word yet.”

“I’m sure it’s just some spanner in the works.”

“Probably. But things are not all that good back home. Poles and Ruthians are at it.”

“Again.”

“Currency all over the continent is becoming worthless.”

“The system collapses under its own weight.”

“I’m worried about Meyer.” They turned east on Houston, stopping at Max’s News and Candy, a sliver of a storefront on the corner of Lafayette. Sarah went in and re-emerged with a newspaper and a bag of popcorn.

“What’s the news from *das Vaterland*?”

Sarah read silently.

“What?” protested Rivka.

She continued to read, opening the paper to continue an article. “They still won’t trade Marks until the surrender agreements are signed. Only the neutral countries are making a market. In Switzerland, it’s down over seventy per cent. If you do the mathematics, a Mark here would be worth...” they crossed the Bowery. “Seven cents.”

“Oh my God.”

“And dropping fast.”

“Don’t worry; your dad’s the shrewdest banker in Galicia.”

“Which would be fine if there still were a Galicia.”

“Good point.”

“Listen, I’ve still got a few hundred dollars and we both have steady jobs. No worries!”

“You disobeyed you father and ran off to America. I’m pregnant and my husband’s in Cuba, a deported undesirable. No worries.”

“Rosa and Teddy are on their way to Havana.”

“And Julia goes to see the clerk next week.”

“Perhaps we’ll have a good Shabbat.”

“Perhaps.”

They walked in silence, munching on popcorn. After crossing Houston they saw two paddy wagons heading up Ridge and could see that there was one more being loaded with girls by policemen in front of the stoop at Number 111. “Damn,” Rivka said, recognizing a Captain from his previous visits to the house. “Cross and keep walking,” Sarah said under her breath.

They spent the next two nights on the couch of a co-worker over on Stanton, a few blocks away, before agreeing to a seven month sub-lease for a small but private single at the end of a five-story climb in their friend's building.

Twelve

**Havana • 21st of Iyyar, 5679 – Wednesday, May 21,
1919**

“*VEINTE CALLE DE Obispo, por favor,*” Rosa said to the driver as they climbed into the old Ford, her spirits lifted by the change in aroma from ocean detritus to smoldering tobacco. While the driver looked and dressed nothing like her late husband, the sweet cigar aroma brought back memories of the Officer’s Club in Nagasaki. No matter how hot and humid it was Robert would always be bathed, moustache trimmed, sporting a clean white shirt, a tie and a coat while working. She smiled, and then turned to her son, “It lacks the drama of the ravines, but with the ocean smells, the port complex, and especially the stifling heat and humidity, it reminds me a little of Nagasaki.”

Five city blocks later the taxi turned off the Avenue Del Puerto, putting the harbor behind them, heading into La Habana Vieja, coming to a stop a few intersections later. The driver parked in the shade and pointed two doors up the street. Rosa paid him three American dollars, more than twice the usual fare. “Teddy, tell him to wait. And stay with him.”

“But mama—”

She raised her finger.

Rosa walked into the Casa de Unión de Trabajadores’ reception hall either completely unnoticed or thoroughly ignored. She stood in the hall, taking in the frenetic scene around her. An artist was painting a wall as men argued in six languages next to a table with a small printing press manned by three dark women. There were children everywhere.

Wielding a photograph of Elia from the previous autumn, she circulated through the building. Most of the adults, suspicious of well-dressed people, tried to avoid her or refused even to look at the photo. The few who would look either said they didn’t recognize him or simply shook their heads and walked away, even after she rattled the coins in her dress pocket. Discouraged after ten minutes, she headed down the concrete steps to the sidewalk.

Just before Rosa got back to the taxicab she became aware of footsteps following her. She spun around. “Are you following me? Who are you?”

The man looked back at the entrance to the Casa then quickly scanned up and down the street before pointing to the archway of the apartment building they were standing in front of. Rosa signaled to Teddy that she was all right before joining the man under the arch.

“Missus Reifer?”

“I am a friend. Do you know where he is?”

“Why are you here?”

“I’m here to help him.”

“What’s his woman’s name?”

“Rivka.”

The man smiled, relieved. “I am Miguel. We were on the boat together.”

“Rosa Pike.” She gestured toward the car. “And my son, Theodore. We crossed the Atlantic with Elia and Rivka.”

“I know.”

They shook hands. “Pleasure,” she said. “I hate to be rude, but we sail in a few hours. I have to find him and arrange for papers.”

“Papers? That takes weeks.”

“I have some connections.”

Miguel raised his eyebrows.

“So, where is he?”

“There was...”

“What?”

“Trouble. He became involved with some bad people, *Pistoleros*”

“Is he hurt?”

“He’ll be all right.”

“Where?”

“There is much new building being done to the west. Many men hired for construction.”

Rosa pulled a small roll of bills from her pocket, peeled off an American ten. She offered what was a small fortune to Miguel.

“I don’t want your money.”

“No, take it. Please.”

“I don’t know why you’re helping Elia, but I can only assume that it’s because you are a caring person. Yes? So allow me to put my terms it terms that you will appreciate. Elia has his Rivka, I have my Frieda.”

Soon Rosa and Miguel were back in the taxi with Teddy, heading out of town to the west, along the coastal road.

“There, at the sign. Pull in,” Miguel said, pointing.

Teddy read, “*Nuevo Club Náutico de Miramar.*”

The ocean stretched across more than half their field of vision behind the nearly finished club. It was a cream-colored stucco structure, laid out with two wings off a main building, set at obtuse angles to follow the arc of the cove on which it sat. Where each of the two wings met the main building, stylized lighthouses soared five stories into the air.

The top of each of the three structures were covered with workers and small piles of masonry.

Miguel told the driver to turn off the engine and wait before pointing to a well-trodden path that led into the scrub-covered rise to the right of the development. A hundred meters later they came to clearing; a garbage dump, littered with broken crates, empty petrol drums, and assorted construction debris. Their noisy approach had the half-dozen or so people who lived in the dump scurrying for cover, like roaches fleeing a kitchen light.

“He’s here,” Miguel said.

“A socialist hiding at a yacht club. Now that’s irony for you,” Teddy said, dryly.

THE WAITER BROUGHT Rosa a pot of tea and poured it into a tall glass over ice with fresh mint and sugar. Teddy and Elia ate black beans with ham, washed down with carbonated lime water. Miguel drank beer while he wasn’t working on a bowl of steamed clams. They talked, each bringing the other up to date on the circumstances that led to their having lunch at a café on the waterfront at Playa Baracoa.

“Rosa, I can’t accept this,” Elia pleaded.

“The last time someone turned down money I pushed at them,” Rosa mused, looking at Miguel, then back to Elia, “he ended up blackmailing me.”

“It was not blackmail. I would have told her where you were,” Mig protested. “You know me.”

Rosa patted him on the shoulder. “You’re what we call a *mensch*, Miguel. How about we just call it emotional blackmail?”

Everyone had a good chuckle before Elia turned serious. “Rosa, I mean it, I can’t accept this money. It violates everything I believe in, everything that is me,” Elia protested, sliding the wad of bills back across the table at Rosa. “Don’t

worry, I'll be fine."

With surprising speed Rosa pushed the bills back toward him then held his wrist in place, sandwiching the twenty dollar bills between Elia's palm and the table. She wagged a free finger at him, "Mister Reifer—"

Teddy sat back into his wicker chair.

"You're stranded in Cuba, flat broke, gangsters are out to kill you, and you've slept for a week in a pile of garbage." Rosa's finger made exclamation points in the air with each phrase she spoke. "'I'll be fine' just doesn't cut it."

"I've been through worse, Missus Pike."

"Don't be wise with me, Elia Reifer," she said, her tone turning distinctly authoritarian. "You may have seen war and you might have been through hardship, but you've never been responsible for your own child and until you do, you don't really know accountability."

"All right, but for now, it's just me. Me and Rivka. And we'll get by, we've got morals and we've got pride. And revolution is our life."

"If there is one thing I can speak to you about with great authority, it is that life does not always follow the script you write. I didn't plan to get sick in Japan and I didn't expect to marry the doctor that nursed me to health. And I certainly didn't expect him to pass on so soon, leaving me at the far corner of the earth with a little boy. It would have been easy to quit, bobbing up and down in the river of life, pushed only by the current, but that is not how a responsible adult acts, not one with the responsibility of a child."

"I understand it. You have children so you understand responsibility. What you don't seem to understand is just how far I'm—we're—willing to go to build a new world."

She knocked on her head with her fist. "I don't know why we're even here, why I even bothered coming to Cuba. Maybe I misjudged you, Elia Reifer."

Elia exhaled while looking up at the sky. "Rosa, please,

I'm sorry." He looked back to her, "Everything came apart for us at home. We are dead to our roots. We can never return. We'd lost everything except each other. Then there was Paris and Savoie, like a dream, a fairy tale of taste and art, of romance and friendship. Then from the highest of highs, it all comes crashing down again." He put his free hand on top of hers. "You've been the closest thing I've had to a mother since we escaped, since Gitla. And I don't really know why you do it. I'm not sure that we're worthy."

Rosa looked sternly at Elia, "Buck up and listen to me, Mister Reifer." Her finger pointed to within inches of his forehead. "The Pikes do not take people under their wings casually. But when we do, we have a few principals that must be adhered to. First, there is nothing wrong with charity. Second, we do not want to be paid back. Rather, if the circumstance ever arises, help out a worthy stranger. Third, we don't keep an account of deeds, God does that for us." She let go of his wrist, "Are you with me?"

"Yes ma'am. And I thank you."

"I don't know what they did to you, and I don't want to know. I just need you to grow up; stop being so selfish."

"I'm trying to, Missus Pike. Life doesn't always cooperate."

"If you're half the man I know you are, you'll put your happiness, your pride, even your beliefs aside and put the needs of your children first. There must be no limit to what you are willing to endure for the good of your issue, now and forever after. Get it?"

"Um, yes."

"So do you see now why you must take the money?"

"Yes, but I don't—"

"Givalt! Men can be such idiots."

"You sound just like my aunt."

She shook her finger at Elia, "For heaven sakes, Rivka is carrying your baby."

His fist closed around the money; the lull in conversation

filled by the sounds of breaking surf and foraging gulls.

Teddy glanced at his watch. “If we leave now, the embassy should be open by the time we get back to town.”

ICED TEA, COFFEE, and cookies were served by two stern-faced men in crisply pressed uniforms on the embassy’s palm-shaded veranda.

Rosa poured cream into her coffee. “Thank you for seeing me on such short notice, Commander McGerr. We’re only here until seventeen-hundred.”

“Once a navy wife, always a navy wife.”

“Thank you, I appreciate your hospitality.” She sipped her coffee. “I feel very much at home here.”

“The pleasure’s all mine. I can’t tell you how delighted I am to finally meet you in person, Missus Pike.” He stirred his iced tea. “As you know, I fancy myself something of a historian.”

“Of course, but Havana is such an important post for our Navy. Perhaps the single most strategic port anywhere. Where do you find the time?”

“Naval attaché is my vocation, but history is my passion. Well, history and opera. In any case, I’m writing a book about Perry’s first anchorage at Edo Harbor—the Black Ships, the opening of Nippon—that sort of thing.”

“I still have the *katana* he brought back.”

“Amazing. I have so many questions for you about Lieutenant Pike, and letters can never take the place of an in-person interview.”

“You know, Commander, that I never met my father-in-law in person.”

“Please, call me Michael.”

By the time she was done talking, McGerr had taken nearly a dozen pages of notes, and had promised Rosa a prominent spot on the acknowledgements page of his book.

As the waiters cleared the service, an ensign delivered two sets of steamer tickets to New York, along with travel papers embossed with the official seal of the United States Navy.

**New York • 22nd of Iyyar, 5679 – Thursday, May
22, 1919**

THURSDAY AFTERNOON MILTON dropped off a large envelope for Rivka Arm in care of the Vienna Model Bakery, 788 Broadway. Sarah by her side, she opened it as soon as the quit-whistle went off. Inside were two letters, one addressed to each woman in Julia's barely legible script. Rivka opened hers first.

WESTERN UNION

HAVANA CUBA 22 MAY 1919

JULIA HARMON 111 RIDGE STREET NYC USA

NEED PAPERS MIGUEL SALGADO AND E

ARR MONTSERRAT 26 MAY

LOVE R AND T

Scribbled on the cable was:

See Hutchinson. Say you know Mickelson. -JH

"Thank God," Rivka whispered.

Sarah flipped open *The Times* to page thirteen and scanned the Shipping and Mails in the last column. "Leviathan from Brest... El Norte from Galveston... Caronia from Liverpool... here it is, Montserrat from Havana. Due Monday. You know we're going to have to go see Hutchinson tomorrow."

"I know."

Sarah opened the much thicker letter. She liked seeing

her American name in print, even if in penmanship it resembled that of a six year old. Inside were several legal looking documents. “The deeds to the buildings, and this, I think—yes, it’s called, what—yes, here, ‘Power of Attorney.’”

**Przemyśl • 22nd of Iyyar, 5679 – Thursday, May
22, 1919**

“PAWN TO QUEEN’S four.”

“Pawn to queen’s four.”

Jurek pushed his white queen’s bishop pawn forward, undefended into the teeth of Meyer’s defenses. “Any word from your daughter?”

“Queen’s gambit?” Meyer queried, contemplating the board as if it were a fancy desert with a big fuzzy-green mold on it.

“I’ll take that as no.”

“*Putz.*”

Jurek smiled and drew deeply on his cigar. Tapping the ash from the smoldering tip into the ash tray, he exhaled then addressed his friend, “You know, Meyer, in thirty years you’ve never once failed to complain about an opening. There’s no pleasing some people.”

Meyer leaned back in his chair and repeated the cigar ritual. “Every decision, every move early in the game leads to trouble.”

“Oh, please.”

“There is no right move. I take, you have an open file, I decline, and you hold a sword over my head.”

“Meyer,” the Pole said, leaning in toward the Jew. “You can win either way. In chess, in life, one move in the opening does not a game make.”

“Unless it’s a blunder.”

“Players like us do not blunder, at least not in the opening.” Jurek caught the eye of the waiter and signaled him with a

wave of his index finger.

Meyer reached across the board, “Pawn takes Pawn.”

“Accepted; excellent. You know, Meyer, openings, to players of our caliber, are a bore. Every gambit, every variation already played a million times, analyzed and documented. Quite one dimensional, really.”

“Agreed. You know the same could be said about the end. It’s more subtle for sure, but ultimately, at least for strong players, nothing but mechanics and tempo.”

“The middle’s the real game: gambits, sacrifices, and attacks.”

Meyer stared, transfixed, as reflected light danced off the deeply etched surface of his empty glass. “She calls herself Sarah.”

“Who?”

“My Zipporah is now Sarah. She’s in America, in New York.” The waiter arrived with vodka. Positioning a small glass in front of each man he poured each three-quarter full from a decanter before scurrying off to take orders from a group of military men who had just arrived.

“I know, with that couple.” Jurek winked. “It’s a fine place for her. With Europe in ruins and Russia with the Reds, America is in perfect position for the future. All of the opening variations are done.”

Meyer picked up his glass, emptied it in a single swallow then eased back into his red velvet chair. “Then I guess it’s time for the real part of the game to start.”

**New York • 23rd of Iyyar, 5679 – Friday, May 23,
1919**

THE GROWING NUMBER of detainees on the island made the authorities nervous, so they banned anyone who didn’t have a good excuse from riding the ferry. If the Red sympathizers

were going to make scenes and foment protests, better it happen at the Battery than on Ellis Island. Nevertheless, “We have an appointment with Mister Hutchinson,” was ample for Rivka and Sarah to secure the twenty-minute passage. The ride was choppy and Rivka vomited just after landing.

They walked toward the Great Hall, reviewing the plan. “Remember, we have less than three hundred so we need to start much lower,” Sarah cautioned.

“What if he says no?”

“Calm down. The more agitated we appear, the higher the price.”

“Worse still, what if he has us arrested?”

Sarah put her arm on Rivka’s shoulder and stopped, each turning to face each other. “Rivka, we already know he’s on the take. Julia doesn’t know anyone who isn’t on the take. We just won’t let him say no. Okay?”

“Thanks.”

“You ready?”

“Let’s go.”

The door has a panel on it with the words “Mr. P. Hutchinson, Asst. Mgr. Records” etched onto the smoked glass insert. After what seemed like eternity, it opened and a man said, “Please, come in.” It was a private office, barely big enough to fit a desk, a metal file cabinet and a single chair in front of the desk that had to be angled just so in order for the door to be freely opened and closed. A bulb hung at the end of a cord over the desk. Rivka took the chair, Sarah stood beside her. Hutchinson rearranged the mess on his desk with an air of supreme importance. Abruptly stopping, but not in any sense finished, he looked up. “So, what can I do for you?”

He was a slight, balding man wearing a grey flannel suit that appeared to be a size too large. It was hard to tell if he was closer to twenty five or fifty.

Sarah composed herself, determined to choose each

word carefully before speaking, “We are friends of Mister Mickelson.” No reaction to the name, none. “He suggested we speak with you; that perhaps you might be able to offer us assistance.”

“And who might we be?”

“Pardon my manners. I am Miss Weiss and this is my cousin, Missus Reifer.”

“Citizens?”

“We are legally admitted, working aliens, looking forward to becoming American citizens.”

“I see. And what kind of assistance are you seeking?”

“My husband, Mister Elia Reifer, arrived last month—”

“First class, on La Savoie,” Sarah interjected, thinking that Rivka’s accented English wouldn’t help. “It seems, somehow, that between the liner and this island, some anarchist, possibly a Bolshevik, stashed one of his vile diatribes in her husband’s valise. It was discovered on inspection and he was denied entry.”

“Go on.”

“I have known this couple for quite some time and I can attest to you that they are not anarchists.”

“Then why doesn’t your cousin’s husband file an appeal?”

“Oh we would. Yes, of that there can be no doubt. But, unfortunately, time does not permit us to work through the appropriate legal channels. Rivka, Missus Reifer here,” Sarah lowered her voice to just above a whisper, “she’s with child.”

He nodded his head. “Yes, I see. So what can I do?”

“Well, if, perhaps, his record were to go missing...”

He glanced at the photograph on his desk, his wife and two young children Sarah assumed, then back at her. “Do go on.”

“Most of our funds are still in transit from the continent. We can offer you one hundred dollars in gratuity if you can facilitate his re-landing.”

“Wait here.” He rose from his desk and was out the door.

“Is he going for the guards?” Rivka asked Sarah.

“He’s going to check the files.”

Hutchinson returned surprisingly quickly. After securing the lock on the door he sat on the edge of the desk, one foot on the floor, the other dangling next to Rivka. In his hand he clutched a manila folder.

Rivka spoke, “I see you’ve found his—”

“Let’s cut the BS, shall we?”

“I was just—”

Sarah put her arm on Rivka and squeezed gently. “Yes, let’s get down to business Mister Hutchinson.”

He dropped the folder into Rivka’s lap. “First of all, your husband, or whoever he is, is as Red as a tomato in September. So don’t offend me by sayin’ he ain’t. Okay?” He waited. “I said, okay?”

“Okay,” both women replied.

“Good. Now yes, his records can be misplaced, but this is particularly hard to do as he was caught with the goods out and out, open and shut. So understand that one hundred isn’t even close to the number needed to fix a problem like this. In fact, it’s a bit insulting.”

“But it’s all we have,” Sarah said.

“I see.”

“Really!”

“You think I’m an idiot?”

“No sir.”

“Then you expect me to believe that a bunch of kikes come over here first class on a ship like Savoie and all you brought with you is a lousy hundred bucks? Please.” He stood and walked around to his chair. “I wasn’t born yesterday, you know.”

Sarah fumed at herself for having impulsively shown her hand, thinking of how her father would have scolded her relentlessly for committing such an obvious blunder.

“How much?”

“Five hundred.”

Sarah thought through the possible moves, taking into account her precarious financial condition, running through the permutations in her head, quickly settling on the best possible gambit. “Rivka, will you please excuse us for a moment?”

“What?”

Sarah lifted at her arm, pulling her from the chair. “Please excuse us.” She moved her friend toward the door.

“No, I’m—”

“Rivka, please! Don’t argue with me.”

“But—”

The door closed behind Sarah and she moved to where she was facing the assistant manager across the desk. She stared at him and he returned the gaze.

“So, Miss Weiss?”

With a hand she reached for and released the clasp holding her hair fast on her head. “Call me Sarah.” She shook her head gently back and forth and her tresses cascaded down her neck and over her shoulders. She unbuttoned the top clasp on her blouse, parting the fabric along with a few stray hairs, inhaling deeply to accentuate the depth of her ivory cleavage. “Two hundred.”

“Ma’am, please.” Hutchinson tugged nervously at his collar.

Sarah put a hand on the table and began to walk around to where the clerk was seated, dragging her hand across his desk as she moved. His stare moved from her chest to the hand. As it approached him, he recoiled, pressing himself hard against his chair back, avoiding her hand as if it were attached to some sort of monster. “Mister Hutchinson,” she cooed. When she reached him she let her hand slide off the table, on to his thigh where it wandered purposefully.

He was trapped in the chair up against the wall. To one

side he could see his wife and children, staring at him, their smiles now shouting in disgust and outrage. To the other side, inches from his nose, were two shockingly exposed, sickeningly alluring breasts. “Please. Please. I think I’m going to be ill.”

Sarah moved the crevice between her breasts to within an inch of his nose, “Two hundred, Mister Hutchinson. Do we have a deal?”

He sprung out of the chair, interposing the table between them.

“Well?” She moved around the table toward him.

He moved, keeping her a full desk away. “All right, fine, whatever. Please, just button up.”

She put her hands on her top button. “Then we have a deal?”

“Yes.”

“There is one more little item,” Sarah said, tugging at the neckline of her blouse. “I think he was a sick deportee. Healthy now. A Mister Miguel Salgado—”

“I’ll do what I can, now please, leave!”

Sarah turned away from him and secured her buttons before opening her handbag.

“Not here,” Hutchinson said in a loud whisper, wiping his forehead with a handkerchief.

“Where?”

“Meet me... Meet me at the corner of Pearl and Fulton. Six fifteen. Know where it is?”

“I’ll find it. You just bring the files. Two files.”

“It’s right by the Brooklyn Bridge.”

“Convenient to your home then,” Sarah said, flashing a very brief smile.

“How? Listen, I don’t ever want to see you as much as set foot in Brooklyn. If you do, I swear I’ll—”

“Once this is done, this never happened; we never met, Mister Hutchinson.” She made for the door.

“TWO HUNDRED. EXCHANGE this afternoon.”

“Thank God. Can we trust him after we pay him?”

“You know what Rivka? That’s exactly what he’s thinking about us right now.”

How’d you do it?”

“I reasoned with him.”

“Why alone? What did you tell him?”

“Like Teddy said, bribes and threats.”

“You didn’t tell him about Milton, did you?”

“There are things that some men are more scared of than thugs.”

“Like what?”

She cupped her breasts in her hands, “These.”

“No!”

“Oh, yes. Only took one button. I was willing to go to two.”

Rivka laughed before abruptly stopping. She thought for a moment before continuing, “So what the hell were you going to do if he took you up on it? If he wanted a sample of the goods?”

“Oh, I knew he wouldn’t. Look at him, such a—”

“You had no plan, did you? My God, Zipre, were you planning to let him have his way with you?”

“I took a risk. A calculated gamble.”

“You didn’t answer my question.”

“This is serious stuff, Rivka. Lives are at stake. We don’t always get to choose between black and white, sometimes, we have to go with gray.”

Rivka raised her voice. “Answer me. Would you have slept with him?”

“I don’t know.”

**Eastern Mediterranean • 25th of Iyyar, 5679 –
Sunday, May 25, 1919**

“WE TOOK THE Bari from Trieste.”

“Did you say Trieste?”

“Why, yes, I did.”

“You came by boat from Trieste?”

“Yes.”

The color drained from Tomas’s face and he lost focus on the slightly older man with whom he’d struck up a conversation.

“What’s wrong?” the stranger asked.

Tomas turned his head aft, following the ship’s wake back to the rapidly shrinking port of Limassol. “I don’t know if I should laugh...” He leaned heavily on the ship’s railing. “Or cry.”

A hand gently squeezed Lenard’s shoulder. “In my life as a scholar, a physician, and a Jew, it has always been quite obvious that when you have a choice between laugh and cry you are invariably better off selecting the laughing route.”

Tomas stood upright and offered his hand. “Tomas Lenard.”

They shook. “Martin Scherzer.” Somewhat portly with a full but well-groomed beard, which, like his hair, was pitch black, he wore his spectacles at the very end of his rather large nose, peering over the top of them for any object more than an arm’s length away.

“The walk of a drunken sailor,” Lenard mumbled before laughing out loud.

“What’s so funny, Mister Lenard?”

“It’s just that we were in Trieste five months ago. There were no ships, so we had to find an alternate port. We traveled all the way to Odessa by train.”

“Ah, yes. The drunken sailor of Brownian motion. I get it now.”

“I’m sorry; I don’t mean to be rude.”

“Of course not. Ugly time to be touring Russia, though.”

“When we arrived, Odessa was no, what is it, Berlin? Frankfurt?”

“Tübingen. I was a doctor, a surgeon, actually, during the war; before that I lectured at University. Trieste was merely our port of embarkation.”

“Ours too, or at least that was the plan.”

“Our train, our boat to Limassol, our transfer to the Roslan, all smooth as a baby’s bottom.”

“Of course.” Tomas smiled while exhaling and shaking his head back and forth. “Ours was as smooth as a wood rasp.”

“I’m sorry.”

“No need to apologize, we’re fine now. It’s just mathematics, I guess.”

“Hard trip but you still have your humor. That’s a blessing.” Martin pulled a leather pouch from his jacket and began preparing a pipe. After several failed attempts at ignition, Tomas moved close to him, cupping his hands around the match until the tobacco glowed bright red in the rapidly ebbing twilight. After several puffs, Martin was satisfied with the effort and nodded his head. “Mathematician?”

“Prisoner and mechanic is probably the most apt description, but I digress. Professor of Physics and Mathematics, Budapest and Szeged. Retired.”

“Tillie, my wife, has family in the Crimea.” He massaged the bowl of his pipe. “Actually, her father. She’s heard nothing for months other than what horrors we read of in the newspapers.”

“A Jew?” Tomas asked.

“Yes. Her father is, or was, a surgeon in the Imperial German Navy. Last we heard his ship made port at Sevastopol. Almost exactly one year ago.”

Tomas exhaled loudly, shaking his head.

They both leaned on the railing and looked out to sea. The slice of moon had become obscured by clouds as full

darkness descended on the eastern Mediterranean. The two men stood in silence for several minutes.

“Children?” Martin asked.

“Jonas and Lea. Fourteen and three. You?”

“Two.” He went silent for a moment. “One. Harold. I’m joining him at Rothschild Hospital in Jerusalem.”

Tomas looked out toward the dark ocher glow a few degrees above the horizon. “We’re headed for Ein Gev, a cooperative in the north. She read about it in a Zionist publication then fell in love with a photograph of the Kinneret.”

“Interesting way to choose a life.”

“That’s my Malka.”

“So you’re to be farmers?”

“I suppose so.”

“Know anything about the agricultural arts?”

“No, but I’m sure we will figure it out.”

“How?”

“Reason.” There was a break in the clouds overhead; Tomas gazed at the stars in the Pleiades. “And faith.”

New York • 26th of Iyyar, 5679 – Monday, May 26, 1919

IT PROVED MUCH easier for Sarah to post the bond required to get Julia out of jail than to explain to her exactly what a second mortgage was. Harder still was the argument over what to do with the house, which was like a running gun battle that started as soon as Julia was sprung and continued all the way to Battery Park.

Sarah was adamant, “Between what you pay the girls and buying off the police, from the beat cops up to their captain, you make *bubkis*. And what happens when a precinct comes under scrutiny from City Hall? I’ll tell you what. They toss your behind in jail.”

“So how do you want to put bread on the table, open a bakery?”

“You’re not listening! Two things are going on. The bankers in this town are aching to lend money on the cheap and everyone wants a nicer apartment. We took five thousand out of Ridge Street after a five minute meeting with the bank.”

“Yes, but if the rents aren’t paid, we lose the building!”

“That depends.”

“How?”

“You paid ten thousand for Ridge, right?”

“Five in cash and borrowed five.”

“Right. But I just took five out, so how much do you have in the place now?”

“Nothin’, I guess.”

“But we still own it.”

“How?”

“Because the value of the place went way up.”

“So what happens if the value keeps going up and you sell it?”

“We pay off the bank...”

“And keep the rest as profit.”

“And if the value goes down?”

“We give it back to the bank. Walk away.”

Julia smiled. “No risk.”

THREE BLASTS FROM the Montserrat’s foghorn pulled Elia from sleep. He sat up in his cot, trying desperately to focus the images from his dream which were disappearing like constellations at dawn. As he slipped into his shoes, a fully formed, if not highly abstract, vision of Rivka splayed on the bed of the hotel in Paris filled his senses. A moment later it was replaced by an inspector yelling for guards in the hall on Ellis Island. Elia’s stomach ached; he fumbled for his cigarettes before heading upstairs to the promenade.

The fresh air and sunshine cleared Elia's head as he found a viewing spot along the railing.

"*Buenos días, Elia,*" a voice said over his shoulder.

Elia turned to see Miguel surveying the panorama. "*Buenos días, Miguel.*"

The two men embraced tightly as a pair of gulls hovered high over the deck before peeling off toward the shore.

"Good luck, Elia," the Spaniard whispered.

"And to you, comrade."

"Let's hope our women were convincing."

"Otherwise..." Elia started humming *The International*. After the first few bars, Miguel joined him. The two men stayed embraced on the deck of the ship until the song ended.

Elia leaned his elbows on the gritty railing, one foot on his small valise, the other braced against a row of silver-dollar sized rivets lining on a piece of steel ribbing that protruded from the deck. Neither man spoke as the city's skyline grew on the horizon by the minute, details of its shining towers and belching smokestacks emerging through damp eyes barely held open against a fresh offshore breeze.

"Elia?"

"Sorry, I was drifting."

"Thinking about a name?"

"Kind of... I need to have a cigarette. There's something I need to do; to decide on. Alone, I'm afraid."

Miguel nodded.

Elia picked up his bag and made for the stern of the ship, largely deserted as the better view of the Statue, Coney Island and the Manhattan skyline was off the bow. He found a spot against the lee bulkhead and lit a cigarette.

"We need to talk, Manes." Smoke rushed over his shoulder as he exhaled. "My friend, my comrade, my brother, my dear, dear Manes, I know you're here with me and I know you'll know what I should do." Elia knelt, opened his valise, and wrapped his hands around Manes's book. Clutching it

to his chest, he inched his way to the gunwale.

“Maybe you know that Rivka carries my child—maybe from where you are you see everything. Doesn’t this mean I have to toss it? You’re a father too so you have to see that nothing—not happiness, not belief, not even principal—comes before your own flesh and blood.” Elia leaned out over the railing; oil-soaked trash bobbed in the water as medicinal odors wafted in over Staten Island from the densely packed factories on the New Jersey shoreline. “But I have never felt as connected to the working class and have never been more committed to the revolution than I am at this moment. And if I am willing to jettison all I believe in so easily, what kind of father could I possibly be?” Elia brought the book to his lips then balanced it on the boat’s gently arched gunwale. He filled his lungs with a long deep pull, exhaling as he spoke, “So what do I do Manes? What shall I become, a principled deserter or a responsible coward?”

A gust flipped open the leather cover and turned the pages one by one before the *Manifesto* fell from the railing, As the ship’s foghorn cut through the rumble of the boat’s turbines, Elia laughed triumphantly into the wind then flicked his cigarette into the foaming black waters of New York Harbor.