The Periwinkle Overcoat

A Story of resilience and hope

Lisa Glauber

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The Periwinkle Overcoat

The bats began stirring. Some were still hanging upside down from the beams crisscrossing the attic, others had already flown off in search of insects. It was that magic moment when the day was still lingering, yet heralding the arrival of the evening. The sun had just disappeared behind the low, wooded hills. The shadows which had become longer and longer, disappeared now too. A few orange clouds were lingering on the horizon. The lights were coming on, one by one, silently, intermittently, behind the shaded windows of the humble homes of the village. The street lights were barely visible through the last orange foliage of the tall trees, guarding the road like sentinels.

Evening was here now. This was the moment Eva was waiting for. While the world beneath her was slowly falling asleep, she returned to life, that little life she still had, hidden in the attic. The access to the small space had been ably disguised in the cracks of the wooden wall.

The long day during which she had to become invisible - no loud noises, no laughing, no singing - came to an end. She was curled up behind a small opening through which she could see the world below her. The dark nights followed the monotonous days, just as the sun follows the rain and the clouds, the clear skies. A few drops of rain seeped through a crack in the roof and mingled with her salty tears.

Months had gone by. Eva had seen the meadows turn brown and then green again, the autumn leaves fall silently from the trees in the woods behind the row of small houses, and the buds swelling with sap again just before the arrival of spring. She had seen the beginning of school she too had attended and the arrival of summer break. She too had once run happily towards school each morning, with her schoolbag bouncing on her shoulders and her long, blond plaits catching in it.

Until one day she was forbidden to attend. She was not allowed to go to the library either, or to the theatre, or even to sit quietly in the public park. She enjoyed watching young couples, arm in arm, lost in their private world; or children playing ball, or elderly couples reading, turning page after page, wiping frequently their glasses hoping to see better. She only had the family garden now, alive with colorful flowers, lilacs and violets. It was lovely but lonely.

Eva was a sweet child, gentle and sunny, warmed by the affection of her parents, nourished by the biblical stories her mother Esther read to her in the evenings, instilling in her a strong sense of belonging; laughing at the typical, self-denigrating, sad Jewish jokes her father Emmanuel would tell her. Eva's given name was Eva Maria Gottlieb.

But her mother had begun calling her Lila since, as a small child, she used to point her little finger towards the purple crocus emerging from the melting snow, or towards the timid violets reaching for the warm sun from under dead and rotting leaves and pine needles, totally ignoring daffodils, more striking, more numerous, but yellow – the color of the Star of David, the beloved/hated Star of David.

She asked her mother to plant violets and purple irises in the garden and, in May, to be allowed to sit under the lilac tree, next to the sweet-smelling lavender bush. Periwinkles and campanulas were growing wild and numerous throughout the lawn; she would pick cornflowers in the summer when the ears of wheat were thick and prickly. Lila *was* her name.






When Eva's birthday was approaching, her mother took her to choose warm fabric for her winter overcoat. In the stores there was limited selection due to the war, but they were lucky to find a soft wool fabric of unusual color: periwinkle.

Now Lila was wrapping her wool coat tightly around her under-nourished body, both for warmth and for comfort. She was sliding her fingers along the hem, where she had hidden the Star of David, which she had been forced to wear and on which she had scribbled the initials E.G. She had removed it from the lapel of her coat and inserted it in the hem, smoothing it carefully so as not to be discovered. She, however, found it immediately; it represented her identity as a persecuted Jew. She did not want to deny her identity, but neither succumb because of it.

She had buried deep down in her heart the memory of her beloved parents. The hope of finding them and returning to her previous love-filled life sustained her: "I have to be strong," she murmured to herself, "I will find my family again. We will be reunited again."

Eva was also wearing a blue sweater, which reflected in her pale blue eyes, the color of the sky at dawn, enlarging them, deepening them, revealing her immense sadness. She never forgot her beloved grandmother, who had knitted it for her as a Hanukah gift, in spite of arthritic hands and poor vision. She had died a while back, the dear granny. At her funeral she had heard her mother whisper to her father, in tears: "It is better this way, she will be spared much sorrow." Eva had not understood at the time, she was saddened and shocked by those words, but now she understood.

Eva's thoughts also went frequently to Freddy, the unusual-looking youngster she had met that summer, although her young heart had been wounded by him. She first noticed him on a bench in the park, furiously sketching his surroundings on his drawing pad. "I want to describe the world through my drawings. I will be a great artist one day", he told her, after they had met and had exchanged a few words. They were attracted to each other, it was evident to both, but they didn't express their feelings. Eva did not know what was happening to her. Freddy was passing through town with his father, when the latter had had a heart attack and was hospitalized. Freddy stayed for a few weeks visiting his father every day in the hospital, then he disappeared as mysteriously as he had appeared. Yes, Eva was hurt. But she cherished the drawing he had made of them together and looked at it often. But she never thought of her little brother, who was taken to safety much before her. She was forbidden from ever mentioning him to anyone.

While she was thinking about her grandmother, curved by age, the heart of the family who always found warmth and comfort at her side, she heard a slight rustle of silent steps on the stairs, followed by a faint knock on the small door to the attic. Eva knew it was safe to unbolt the door. Anna's soft voice was murmuring to her, swooping her up in her arms and caressing her hair:

"My dear child, I brought you something to eat, the little I could find in the store. No meat today either, just some bread and cheese. Food is getting very scarce. I brought you a book and another blanket, and some more wool for your knitting. Tell me about your day. I saw some of your friends passing by and told them you had moved away." Eva was listening to the melodious voice with her eyes closed, trying to evoke past, happy images.

Anna and Fritz, the courageous couple who gave shelter to Eva in their attic, were conscious of the risks they were taking. They had grown fond of the dear child, whose presence mitigated their grief for being childless; she was the reason for the solid friendship with her parents. On the tragic day in which they were arrested and taken away, Eva was visiting the kind friends, thus escaping the same fate. They did not hesitate to hide Eva in their attic. They were Aryans, good Protestants who attended the local church regularly, and they did not give credit to the unbelievable stories of arrests and deportations, which began circulating in the small villages. They thought they were safe and above suspicion.

Anna and Fritz's lives were orderly and ordinary. Recently they had retired. Their activities consisted of an occasional movie, a Sunday picnic on the river banks in good weather, bicycle rides in the flat countryside, visits with friends where nobody addressed the real problems of the day. They didn't have the means to travel. Where would they go anyway? They took walks in the park, surrounded by pigeons for whom there was no stale bread to distribute anymore. They were careful not to attract attention to themselves, much like every-one else. Anna shopped in the small neighborhood grocery store close to home. She was well liked for her gentle nature and ready smile. Everyone knew her.

After the arrival of Eva, Anna began asking extra rations of milk, bread, cheese; she did not have enough money to make purchases on the black market. To justify the greater need for food, she would explain, "My nephew came here in search of a job, in his village he can't find any." But there was no sign of this nephew, he was invisible. When the

grocer asked about his job hunt, Anna answered: "He is still searching and leaves early in the morning and gets back very late in the evening, when it is already dark."

The grocer became suspicious, and hoping to save himself and his family, he mentioned his suspicions. The inevitable followed. One clear, cool autumn day, Eva heard an unusual commotion in the street below, tires screeching, yelled commands. Peeping from her hiding place, she saw soldiers with swastikas on their berets and guns in their hands. A curious, yet fearful crowd, began to gather on the sidewalk.

This time the steps on the stairs were not soft, but heavy, swift. Hard fists came down on the small door, unhinging it in no time. They caught Eva by the arm, tugging her with violence and pushing her down the steps. She was terrified, unable to move or shout. The bats, alarmed, flew off in bright day light.

On the street, they pulled her periwinkle coat off her. "You won't need this coat where you are going, it will do fine for one of our patriotic girls." The coat ended up on a pile of other stolen, confiscated, ripped-off clothing.

In a nearby village lived Martha, a lively, pretty adolescent, with short dark, thick, unruly hair and intelligent, smiling eyes which evoked immediate sympathy in all who met her. She belonged to a rather modest family, which did not disdain to wear second-hand clothing, not now, anyway, during the difficult war years. Every Wednesday, in her parish, there was a distribution of clothing which had belonged to the deported Jews. Martha was hoping to find some warm clothing for the approaching winter. She did not linger on the thought of where it might have come from. She was the first on line, that Wednesday, her hopeful eyes moving swiftly from one cardboard box to the next, filled with dresses, robes, stockings, jackets, coats and sweaters. Her eyes fell on a sleeve hanging over the rim. It was part of a coat. It stood out for its unusual color, which she liked and which went well with her dark complexion. It was periwinkle.

But the color did not remind this child of flowers, of which she did not even know the names, nor of colorful and sweet-smelling shrubs. To her, the coat was simply a source of warmth for the winter. Her parents had more serious problems caused by the war, than teaching her about flowers. Food had been getting scarcer and scarcer, and the winters colder and colder. Martha snatched her find and ran home happy, clutching the coat, anxious to try it on. She was not disappointed, the coat fit perfectly.

Now she wanted to examine it carefully, especially the hem, to see if the coat could be lengthened later on, if necessary. Her hands went through the pockets, found them empty, the buttons were all intact, the lining and then…she noticed a small swelling in the hem.

Confused, she showed it to her mother, who, thinking that a small critter nested inside, unstitched the lining and found the Star of David, with the initials E.G. well in sight. Martha took it into her hands, delicately, hesitating, almost with a sense of fear. She knew very well what it was. How could anybody not know?

Throughout the winter Martha wore her almost new coat to school, warmed by the soft wool fabric, which was the envy of her schoolmates. But Martha had a persistent thought and secret desire: to find out who E.G. was and how did the Star of David end up in her coat? Martha wanted to know, to return the Star of David back to E.G.

The first signs of spring could be felt in the air: crocuses, violets, periwinkles and some irises could be seen in the fields. On a day like many others, the news circulated that, on the holy day of Sabbath, the Jews deported from the whole county, would be transferred to trains with unknown destination. The population was asked in no uncertain terms to attend the sad event, to make clear what would happen to Jews and to all those who helped them by hiding them.

Martha was standing in the front row, alongside the street. She was still brooding over the Star of David, which she kept hidden in her coat pocket. She had been hesitant about wearing her coat on that first sunny spring day, but she had not yet stored it for the summer, so at the last moment she slipped into it before leaving home, almost on a premonition, an intuition.

Martha scanned the street and the column of people shuffling along, moving slowly towards the railroad station with their small bundles. All wore the Star of David on the lapel, but one.

Eva too, in the center of the column, scanned the crowd, hoping to see a friendly face to say good-bye, but mostly to find Anna and Fritz, the dear, courageous couple who had sheltered her for many months, at the risk of their own lives. But instead she noticed them further down in the same column! Great sadness and a sense of guilt overcame her!

Suddenly her sight rested upon a figure standing on the edge of the road, wrapped in a periwinkle coat; she looked up at the girl who was wearing it. Eva's and Martha's eyes connected. Eva's filled with tears slowly descending on her pale cheeks, Martha was surprised, astonished. She realized that this blond girl was E.G., and that she, Martha, was wearing her coat.

Quickly Martha took the Star of David from her coat pocket and handed it to E.G. with a stealthy handshake. "I am Eva", Eva managed to whisper among tears. She mingled with the crowd destined to oblivion. No crocuses or violets grew along the way, no lilacs, irises or sweet-smelling lavender, no cornflowers to be picked in the grain fields and gathered in a bouquet, only yellow daffodils. Lila ceased to exist.

A Special Bond

Martha now knew Eva's name. She followed her blond hair intently as she moved along the edge of the road, her image becoming smaller and smaller, until it disappeared, engulfed by the crowd around her. Martha was so absorbed in her observation, that she did not notice immediately the many severe, disapproving eyes upon her for her small gesture of humanity. When she realized it, she shuddered and felt panicky. She moved away slowly at first, then rushed toward home through side streets to avoid being followed and recognized.

She entered the woods leading to her house: she thought she heard footsteps, but it was only the rustling of leaves displaced by a fleeing rabbit. She thought she saw a man with a gun, but it was only the outline of a deer with big antlers against the sun. The murmur of branches bending and moaning in the wind sounded to her like invisible people whispering. Her pretty periwinkle coat got caught in some branches as she ran, and she imagined hands grabbing her. The sudden flight of birds startled her, as she accelerated her pace. Soon she was out on the open road which bordered farm houses. She walked briskly, getting lost in the narrow alleys, looking back occasionally, but no one followed her. She felt safe now, and soon she reached home.

She arrived hot and perspiring. She went straight to her room, passing by Emma, her mother, without a word. Her behavior was unusual. Emma saw fear in the girl's face and decided it was best to confront her later, when she was calmer. Martha took off her beloved periwinkle coat quickly, brushed it carefully and packed it away with some moth balls for the next winter. Finally, she could not escape Emma's quizzical look any longer. They had few secrets from one another.

Martha, having regained her composure, told her mother what had happened. She was a sensitive child, who never let a beggar walk by without giving him a glass of water and a few coins from her piggy bank, nor a stray dog without throwing him a few morsels from her sandwich.

But she was too young to realize the danger she might have put herself in, during times when everyone mistrusted everyone, even well-liked and friendly neighbors.

When her father Gustav was told of the events of the day, he did not hesitate; he got in touch with his brother Anthony, who had a farm-stead in the countryside, some distance to the north. Anthony acted immediately. These were dangerous times. A small van arrived in the dark and approached Gustav's house slowly and silently. Martha, with her suitcase packed in haste, rushed to the waiting van and disappeared into it. It took just a few minutes for the street to return to its nightly silence. No lights had appeared in the windows.

They took a short cut through the woods, those same woods which, a few hours earlier, had frightened Martha. The tall trees now were friendly and offered protection. Then they sailed swiftly through the countryside on dirt roads, hitting a rock now and then, swerving to avoid obstacles. In the pale moonlight which appeared intermittently through the clouds, they saw sheep huddled together for the night under a shed; cows chewing their cud peacefully; a colt stretched out alongside its mother, ready to gallop and play with the other colts at the first sign of dawn. They saw haystacks ready to be stored in the lofts for the winter; they saw the maturing wheat and barley with their golden ears slightly swaying in the nightly breeze.

Her uncle Anthony said to her, "This will be your life, your home for a while". So peaceful and reassuring was the country side at night! She did not even notice that the road was winding up a steep hill before reaching the farmstead. Martha closed her eyes and she soon drifted off to sleep.

Her uncle carried the sleeping girl to the room of one of his daughters and placed her silently on the bed. He was a tall, gentle man, in spite of the hard work that had hardened his hands, but not his heart. His intelligent, clear blue eyes were always smiling, they had no dark sides. He looked people straight in the eye, with a clear conscience. He was a man of his word, ready to help other farmers in the busiest times of the year. A simple handshake sealed a deal.

The next morning, when Martha awoke, she saw several smiling faces around her bed, watching her with curiosity. Martha would learn their names later: Rita, the oldest daughter; then Marie and Gretchen, the twins; Luna, the youngest who was born one evening with full moon in a cloudless sky. The three boys, fortunately, were too young to be conscripted.

Anthony himself was exonerated from military service, having a severe limp caused by a wound in a leg when he tried to wrestle a recalcitrant steer to the ground. Besides, the food grown on his farm was essential for the nation at war.

He was proud of his girls. They had inherited his complexion, blond hair which was braided into heavy tresses, and his clear blue eyes. It was easy to love them, and they responded to his love with respect and obedience.

Martha was at first disoriented, she looked out of place in her city clothes. She was given rough country clothes, a blouse, a pleated skirt, heavy stockings, boots, an apron, a kerchief for her unruly dark hair. Again, those were clothes belonging to someone else, but she did not mind, she was used to this. The children surrounded her, each claiming her attention by pulling her sleeve, wanting to show her their home – her new home - the farm buildings and especially the animals: horses, cows, pigs and chickens.

Martha was enchanted by the view in front of her: in the distance she saw majestic mountains covered with snow in the winter, below the wide, green valley, with the river winding peacefully south - a silver ribbon as far as her eye could see - through the cultivated fields, nourished by the melting snow. She imagined her parents on a Sunday outing on this same river, further downstream. A shadow of sadness appeared on her face, soon dispelled by the laughter and joyfulness of the children. She inhaled with full lungs the scent of freshly cut grass, of sweet spring flowers, jasmine, lilacs and lavender.

Martha then met her aunt Gudrun, a severe looking lady with dark-brown braids piled on her head, shifty eyes, heavy around the hips and with stocky legs. She was attractive when she smiled, softening her expression, and showing healthy white teeth through her pleasant mouth, but it rarely happened. She was sun-tanned from working in the fields with her husband. She ruled the household with a firm, efficient yet fair hand, and she was deeply religious.

Gudrun greeted Martha with a handshake and the words: "Good, another pair of working hands. We can use them in the summer." To welcome Martha with an embrace did not occur to her. Her daughters always sought, and received, affection only from their father. She had never learned to show her feelings.

Gudrun had had a difficult childhood. Her parents had perished in the fire of their homestead, probably caused by an unattended wood-burning stove. She and her orphaned siblings were taken in by other farm families, as was customary. Gudrun was lucky, she found a good home. However, she did not think so. She thought she was not treated equally with the other children, and was always fighting for fairness.

She became very hard, never let her defenses down, never showed her emotions. After growing to a fairly attractive, hard-working young girl, she found a good man, Anthony, who understood her and soon asked her to become his wife. Gudrun married him more to get out of her situation than for love. But in time she learned to love him.

Martha noticed that one of the boys, Jacob, was less effervescent than the others. He stood aside shyly and did not take part in the general excitement of the morning. With his dark, curly hair, soft brown eyes, dimples in his pale cheeks, he did not resemble the other children, who were sun-tanned, strong, well-fed and rambunctious, whereas Jacob's arms and legs were thin, and he was small for his age.

She soon found out that Jacob was an orphan who had been taken in by the family. She also noticed that he did not take part in the morning prayers, and would not touch the fragrant sausages that were served on Sundays. Martha knew what this meant and hoped that the other children would not notice, lest they reveal his secret inadvertently while playing with their neighbors. The parents certainly knew. It was the good-hearted Anthony who had agreed to take the little boy in. Gudrun was reluctant, remembering her own bad experience.

The chores on the farm were never ending, distributed evenly among the boys and the girls: the girls set the table for breakfast, lit the wood-burning stove to cook the porridge, cut the whole wheat bread baked at regular intervals throughout the year; then washed the dishes and made the beds.

	The parents milked the cows. The boys fed and groomed them, took them to pasture, and mucked out the cow-shed.

A midmorning snack of thick soup and weak coffee was brought to the farm hands who cut the grass, or turned it to dry in the sun, or raked the hay into bundles and carried them to the hayloft on wagons drawn by horses. Abundant harvests of wheat and barley were greeted with gratitude, as grains provided much of the nourishment for the family.

The vegetable garden provided lettuce, spinach, peas and beans; especially important was cabbage, which, treated with brine, became storable sauerkraut for the winter: potatoes, onions, root vegetables were stored in the cool cellar. The produce surplus was home-canned for the winter.

Jams were made from wild berries collected in the woods by the younger children. Anthony would say, "Nothing shall be wasted on a farm." The family was practically self-sufficient and rarely went down to the village store for supplies, such as sugar, salt, oil, matches.

They made butter from cream skimmed off the milk, and preserved it as ghee; they made cottage cheese from surplus milk; they baked bread and cakes on holidays, with the plentiful eggs from the chicken coop. Much of the meat came from the chickens - it was Gudrun who went to the chicken coop and returned with a few headless chickens. Anthony was not good at using the ax.

Once a year they made sausages from the slaughtered pig. The meat had to be ground several times to a fine paste, mixed with just the right amount of fat, flavored and preserved with secret spices, and then encased in clean gut. Families were proud of their sausages and would not reveal their own special recipes.

Other daily chores included preparing meals, knitting, sewing and mending. There was also laundry to do, hanging it in the sunniest spot of the garden for drying and finally ironing sheets, shirts, blouses. Martha had so much to learn, every day a new skill. She was a bit ashamed of her idle summers the previous years.

Although Gudrun imposed strict discipline, there was time for games: ball playing, hide and seek, bowling hoops, bicycling on the dirt roads, hitting empty cans with slings and racing competitions. They played in the hayloft, hiding in tunnels carved in the hay with the help of Anthony. He secretly favored the tunnels, seeing them as a possible hiding place in case of danger. Jacob would not go near them. He was afraid of dark places.

Martha felt very protective towards Jacob. They were the outsiders, the "Flüchtlinge". She hugged him whenever she found him sitting under a tree, with his arms around his knees and his head dangling down miserably. She always spoke to him softly; she helped him with his chores; she covered for him when he failed at a task to spare him a scolding; and she defended him when he was taunted.

The two of them took walks alone in the open country-side or in the nearby woods, hand in hand. Anthony was glad of their friendship, while Gudrun did not feel comfortable about it.

Jacob soon became very attached to Martha, who was a bit older than he was, and trusted her completely. He confided in her, spoke of the time he had to hide, of the dark places, of his parents he could not forget. Likewise, he could not forget the day they were summoned by the authorities and never returned home.

Martha understood his sorrow. She could not forget either, not the day she met, and lost, Eva. She thought of her as a symbol of womanly strength and dignity. She wondered: did they cut her long, beautiful, blond tresses? Maybe that was why Martha would not let Gudrun braid her hair which was growing rapidly. Did Eva suffer hunger? Martha would not eat to satiety and lost weight, prompting Anthony, worried about her health, to contact her father Gustav. But Gustav knew his sensitive child, and thought she was simply homesick. It was the first time she was away from her mother and father.

One morning Jacob, his eyes sparkling, his dimples deeper than ever, his attitude exultant, took Martha by the hand. He had made a decision. "Come with me, Martha, I have a surprise for you." He guided her under a beech tree, a lonely beech tree among the pines. "Please sit down, and close your eyes." Martha complied, expecting a childish game. She heard rustling leaves, and then digging in the soil.

"You can open your eyes now, said Jacob, give me your hand". In it he put a tattered and torn Star of David. Martha of course knew what it meant, and was touched by Jacob's trust in her.

"Jacob, darling, I knew you were Jewish," she said. "How did you know?" he asked. "Well, you did not join in the morning prayers and you would not touch the Sunday sausages." "Do the other children know?" Jacob asked, alarmed now. Martha reassured him, that they were too young and too far removed from the war.

Martha revealed to Jacob her own secret: she once found a Star of David and was able to return it to the girl who had lost it. She knew what the Star meant to that girl - by her grateful look – and to Jacob: it was a link to their parents, their culture, their faith. She would never forget that girl, Eva, she said, as she would never forget him, Jacob, and gave him a hug. He had opened his soul and being to her. Jacob got up and ran around the beech tree a few times before telling Martha, "I have a big sister named Eva, but I am not allowed to mention her. I don't know where she is." Could it be her? No, Martha thought, Eva is a fairly common name.

"I am like this beech tree, standing alone and different from the other trees." Martha reassured him, "You will grow tall and strong, and give love to others, much as the beech tree gives shelter and safety to birds. But you must promise me never ever to show this Star to anyone. Bury it again and touch it only in your thoughts. You can dig it out at the end of the war. Promise me!"

Martha was not missed in her village as it was summer and many of her friends had gone away on vacation. But now summer was ending and Gustav thought it was safe to bring her back home. The war was going badly and the authorities had other worries than to pursue a young good-hearted girl.

So Martha, on a cool, early autumn day left her sheltered paradise and returned to the valley. She had learned many new skills, but most importantly, she had learned to work and the value of work for the well-being of a family, instead of idling about. And she brought with her many fond memories.

	One of her happiest memories was of the day when she returned to the field after lunch to tend to the flock of sheep and found two just-born lambs, all wet, trying to get up on their wobbly legs, helped by their mother and immediately searching for her nipples.

She still smiled remembering the day when she brought the thick mid-morning soup to the farmers, stumbled, fell and spilled part of it. She quickly scooped it up and pushed it back into the bucket. Nobody noticed the few extras in the soup! She frowned when she thought of the day she didn't get lunch, because she had been caught talking during the Sunday service by Gudrun. She remembered with fondness the nights she spent in the pigsty to watch over the sow which otherwise might have crushed the new-born piglets. She was with Rita and the two girls shared their teenage secrets throughout the night.

Bread-baking time was especially memorable. This took place about every three months, starting with sour dough rising in big washtubs for a few days. The dough would then be shaped into round loaves and baked in wood-burning stoves, after removing the cinders. The baking went on all night and filled the house and the neighborhood with the most tantalizing fragrance of freshly baked bread.

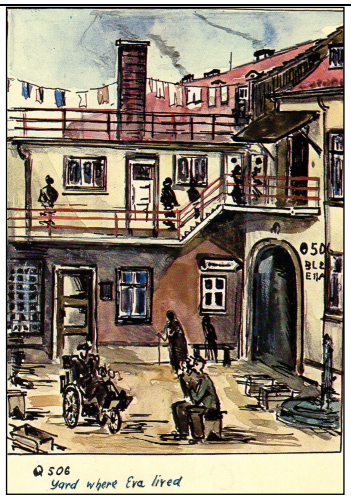
Everyone helped; the older girls were even allowed to stay up all night to help out. They spread white sheets over every available surface to make room for the loaves to cool when they came out of the oven. In the morning the girls had the pleasant task to bring gifts of fresh loaves to the neighbors. The favor was returned, so that now and then every family had fresh bread.

Martha had made lasting friendships in the farmhouse up on the hill. She embraced her cousins one by one and promised to return the following summer. She embraced and thanked her uncle Anthony for his hospitality and shook hands with her aunt Gudrun. Saying good-bye to Jacob was especially painful, as she knew his destiny was precarious. A special, secret bond had been established between them. Would Martha see him again?

A Cruel Hoax

Eva wanted to forget: forget the long hours on the train, the hunger and thirst, the desperate cries, the darkness and lack of fresh air, the pungent smells and filth, the sensation of being crushed against other helpless human bodies, the lack of privacy, the fear, the terror, the rape of dignity.

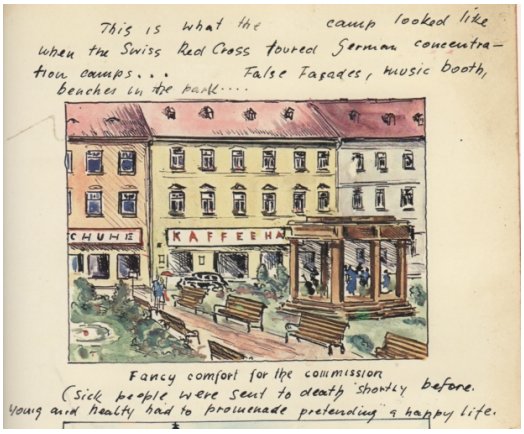
The journey to Terezin took days. Rumors circulated that the concentration camp would be as miserable as their journey to reach it. But when Eva got off the train - shoved and pushed down by the other desperate individuals gasping for fresh air, stiff from lack of movement, barely able to walk - and arrived at destination, she could not believe her eyes.



She was assigned a pleasant room together with a middle-aged woman, Katia, originally from Russia, and believed to be a gypsy, who quickly bonded with Eva as she reminded her of her lost teenage daughter.

This picture and the following ones are taken from "The Book of Alfred Kantor" by Alfred (Freddy) Kantor

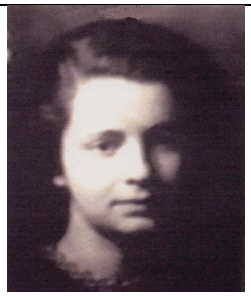
There was a flair of activities: young people were digging big holes alongside the streets and planting fairly-sized trees – Eva thought one of the boys looked vaguely familiar. Colorful flowers were planted everywhere. Benches were placed in the parks where recently seeded grass was already sprouting. Small groups of musicians were practicing their own compositions in the parks, alongside grandmothers knitting and chatting. Candy was distributed to the children.



Children were happily engaged in all kinds of games, their songs and laughter filled the air. The food was abundant, meat and fresh fruit was available. In the mornings children attended school in hastily painted classrooms furnished with new benches and desks; in the evenings movies by Riefensthal were shown and actors' groups performed in over-crowded, improvised theaters.

Yet Eva was deep in thought. Katia tried to make her open up: "What is troubling you, Eva?" "Katia, the day I was deported, I met a sweet girl. She was looking at me with her dark, intense eyes. Suddenly our eyes met, and she stretched out her hand, in which she had my Star of David. I had written my initials on it, but I had been forced to hide it. It meant so much to me! She found it sown in the seam of my periwinkle winter coat, which she was wearing. I hope I will meet her again to thank her. That Star sustained me through the terrible train experience."

Great emphasis was placed on sports: a volley ball tournament was to take place a few days after Eva arrived, boys against girls. Eva was tall and so she was recruited for the tournament. To her great surprise, on the other side of the net, she recognized Freddy, the boy she had briefly met in her village and who had mysteriously disappeared.



He recognized her too, and was so surprised that he dropped the ball, missing a winning shot for his team. He was so happy to meet Eva again! He had thought of her often, she had captured his youthful heart.

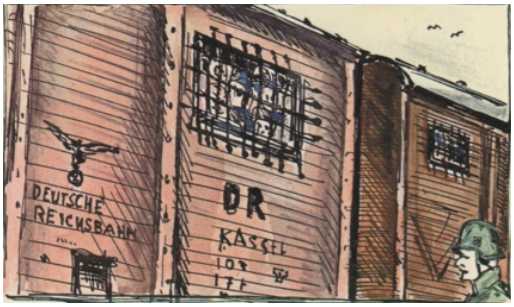
After the game, won by the boys as expected, they had a brief chat. Eva learned that Freddy's father had died of his heart attack, and that he, upon his return home, was immediately deported to Terezin. " How is the famous artist, do you still draw?" asked Eva, amused. "Look, I still have the drawing you made of us in happier days. I always take it with me."

Eva returned to her room bubbling with enthusiasm. Life here was so different from what she was led to believe: the music, the manicured alleys and parks, flowers everywhere, the English lessons, the decent food. And then Freddy! It was the first time she felt such happiness, which she did not understand, because of a boy.

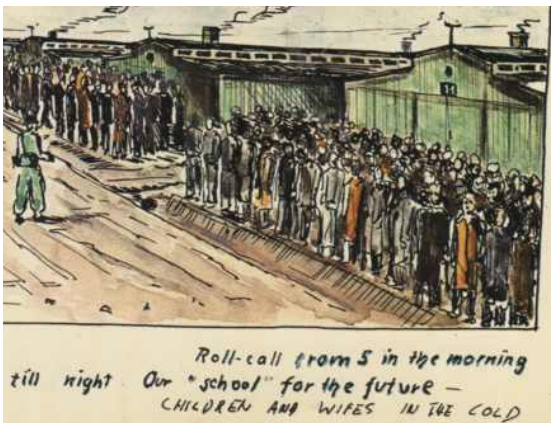
Katia looked at Eva with sad, tearful eyes. How could she tell her that it was all a cruel hoax to deceive the International Red Cross? But so it was. The International Red Cross came and left, content to spread the deceiving propaganda throughout Europe. Eva was in tears and searched for Freddy, but he had been deported that morning and taken to another concentration camp. He didn't have the time to say goodbye.

Then the real life started for Eva, Katia and the thousands of other prisoners. All the amenities had disappeared as rapidly as they had sprouted, and severe discipline was reinstated. The cloudy skies added to the somber mood which had descended upon the prison, and the rain swept across the now benchless, abandoned parks .

The two women were assigned to the kitchens, so they had enough food, albeit of poor quality. But even this small advantage ended when they were deported to the next concentration camp.

The journey took 30 hours, the prisoners were stacked 90 to a wagon. Any movement was impossible. Eva had experienced the horrors of the interminable train ride before, but now she was not alone, she had Katia by her side.	

The women were housed separately from the men, thousands in wood barracks with bunk beds, but no mattress. They had a particularly severe guard, who exerted her authority cruelly to conceal her own shortcomings and fears. She gave orders in a high pitched voice, brandishing her whip dangerously close to the prisoners and on occasion on the prisoners themselves. She was short, wore a black uniform and black leather boots which made her look even more menacing.



As soon as Katia was alone with Eva, she gave her survival tips: never look the guards in the eye, answer with "Yes, sir, yes, madam", do nothing to attract attention to yourself, stand in the middle of the group at roll call, and for God's sake never sneeze or cough in the presence of the guards: to get sick was a death sentence.

Eva and Katia were assigned to work in the tailor's shop: they had to sew uniforms for the soldiers, so many a day, sleeves and collars and jackets and pants, for long hours each day. When one fell behind in her assigned workload, the other would help out. It was exhausting work, with no breaks, no water, no stretching. In the evenings, after a miserable dinner which left them still hungry, all they could manage was to reach their bunks and collapse, day after rainy day, after sunny day, season after season.

They slept close to each other. Katia would hold Eva's hand and evoke beautiful images for her, of green places she had visited, teeming with birds and bird song – above all the melodious and magical voice of the night songstress, the nightingale – of colorful butterflies fluttering effortlessly and silently through the air, of trees reaching high into the sky, where squirrels abounded and teased one another, of crystal clear rivers rushing to the valley from steep mountains, until she heard Eva's regular breathing: she had fallen asleep. What a waste, Katia thought with bitterness, these young girls will never experience the most precious gifts of life: love and motherhood.

When Eva could not fall asleep, she would tell Katia of her past, of the pretty young girl she had been, named Lila by her mother, because she loved that color; of the care-free hours she had spent in her garden surrounded by lilacs, periwinkle, violets and sweet lavender, which attracted swarms of humming bumblebees in the summer. She closed her eyes, trying to recreate the sweet scents of her garden. She remembered the bee sting she suffered while trying to catch purple butterflies in her net, and which had caused her sharp pain, but how insignificant it was compared to her swollen and aching feet now!

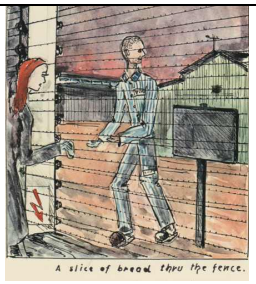
In the winter, on snowy days, seated at the windowsill of her room, she would watch thick snowflakes fall silently to earth, covering everything, even her beloved flowers. But she knew then that the snow would eventually melt and give way to spring. She longed for that silence now, just a few minutes of empty silence, instead of the silence broken by the moans of her fellow prisoners.

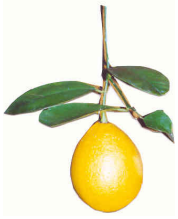
Wind gusts would occasionally push the white mass against her windows, which she would open quickly to catch the snowflakes on her tongue and let them glide down her throat. Oh God, how she wished for some of those cooling drops to trickle down her burning throat now! Only Katia knew of her dangerous predicament.

They hardly got to see the men who were housed in similar barracks beyond strong fences, and who were assigned to heavy construction work, at least those still strong enough.

When a new contingent of prisoners would arrive, anxious men and women, pushing and shoving to get a better view, scrutinized the silent mass of disheveled people, hoping to recognize the familiar face of a husband, a wife, a child, a friend.

And so it was on this cool October day: to Eva's surprise and joy, she saw Freddy among the onlookers, and Freddy saw her. He too was anxiously searching the incoming prisoners, fearing that his mother, whom he had left in poor health at Terezin, would be among them. Unfortunately, she was. Eva did not see any faces familiar to her. She had abandoned long ago the hope of finding her parents alive.

	Freddy was still in good health. After having been assigned to construction and road work, he had been transferred to the kitchens. This enabled him to sneak some food to Eva, who shared it with Katia and with Freddy's mother.

	The three women were overjoyed with the gift of a lemon, which Freddy got hold of, God knows how. Maybe he still received packages from his sister's husband, who was a gentile. They held the lemon in their hands in turns, they smelled its fragrance, rubbed the peel on their skin, before finally cutting it in small pieces and eating it. The sour juice burnt their sore mouths and gums. Eva sprinkled imaginary sugar on it! Katia gave Eva her part, hoping it would help her recover.

"Do you still draw?" Eva asked Freddy with a smile, on a rare occasion they were able to share and exchange a few words, albeit with the fence between them. "Yes, when I can find pencil and paper to draw

what I see. With these images I will let the world know what is happening at Auschwitz. I am forced to destroy my sketches, but the images are etched in my memory."

Eva's health was deteriorating. Katia noticed, Freddy noticed. She was anxious before each roll call fearing that her hoarse voice would give her away. She stood straight and answered as forcefully as she could, grateful to survive another day.

A German officer on his rounds had noticed the blond, blue-eyed, fair-skinned girl (she did not "look Jewish" to him) and summoned Eva to his office. His wife had asked him for someone to help in her household.

He asked Eva many questions: "Do you know how to cook?" No. "Have you taken care of children before?" No, but I had… I have a little brother. "Are you with your parents?" No. "Do you know where they are?" No. "Are you in good health?" I have a sore throat…

The officer was pleased by such sincerity and innocence. She would learn, he thought, and kept her. Eva could not communicate with Katia or Freddy to tell them where she was. This made her miserable, but she was a prisoner in the German household no less than they were in the German prison. They feared that she had been taken to the gas chambers because she was sick and probably did not pass the medical exam. Freddy was devastated. With the loss of Eva, he had lost the will to fight for survival.

Eva was confined to a room for fear of a contagious disease. But with enough food and a warm bed, she recovered quickly. Through the bedroom door, she heard the familiar noises of a normal household: banging doors, clattering dishes and glasses set on the table or taken to the kitchen, conversation and laughter, little footsteps stopping at her door: she was sure that the children peeped through the keyhole to watch her.

Though secluded, she soon learned their names and the routine of the household, so that when she was released from her temporary confinement – after a doctor had pronounced her healthy - she was familiar with her new surroundings.

But she could not reconcile to the fact that, amid the horrors she had experienced – which she knew continued to be perpetrated on the prisoners – a German family could live a normal, even a comfortable life.

Eva and Martha, hundreds of miles apart from each other, were engaged in similar activities: tending to children and helping in household chores. Martha got up every morning joyfully. She opened her eyes to majestic mountains rising amid white clouds and listened to the sounds of an awakening world – a clucking chicken made her run to the chicken coop to gather freshly laid eggs. She heard the commotion in the barns, as the animals wanted to be fed. She filled her lungs with the scent of cut grass, of freshly baked bread, of basil growing tall in the vegetable garden.

Eva, upon rising, looked down on a poorly kept garden, where she was not allowed to set foot for fear of being discovered. Even high-ranking officers were restricted from employing Jewish labor. The two girls were also two worlds apart: Martha's world, though the country was at war, was peaceful. Her village had not been bombed as it had no strategic landmarks, while Eva's world was the worst of all worlds. The sounds she heard were gun shots, the scents she breathed in came from the crematory, the clouds she saw were black.

Weeks, maybe months went by. Conversations at the dinner table became fewer and angrier, and were substituted by long silences. The commandant frequently was at meetings, and when he returned he looked angry and worried. His wife did not dare speak to him. Lately her eyes were swollen and red from lack of sleep and from frequent crying. Or maybe because of too much alcohol. Eva had to dispose of more and more empty wine and beer bottles.

But at night, when the children were asleep, they did talk, loudly, angrily, pleadingly. Eva often heard the words: "What about the children? What do we do with the children?" She thought the couple, under the strains of war, was about to split. There was so much turmoil and movement lately in the concentration camp. Military vehicles would rush here and there, always accompanied with loud shouting.

One winter dawn she awoke to a silent, empty house. She ran from room to room and saw unusual disorder, open drawers, clothing thrown on the floor, toys flung everywhere. She looked out of the window trying to understand what was happening and just managed to see the taillights of a military vehicle packed hastily with a few belongings, leave hurriedly the compound.

Eva was alone in the house, disoriented, afraid. She did not know what to do. So she did nothing.

After a few days she decided to join her fellow prisoners and cautiously left the house through the garden. There were no guards and no guard dogs to be seen. There were abandoned vehicles everywhere. The camp had been evacuated some days before and only a small group of prisoners was left behind.

Eva searched in vain for Katia, who had been her source of strength for so many months. The make-shift, life-saving knife which had cut the precious lemon into small pieces, became death-threatening to Katia. She had cut herself. The wound became infected and Katia, in her debilitated state of health, was unable to fight the infection. Her fate was sealed. Eva did not find Freddy either.

The crowd Eva tried to join shunned her. Eva was puzzled. The prisoners were skeletal, mere shadows, unrecognizable as human beings, while Eva was in good health, with a full head of short, curly hair. They taunted her, they called her names, "Traitor, collaborator, bitch, whore," and spat at her. Eva had not been touched by anyone. The word "collaborator" hurt the most.

She tried to explain that she had been a prisoner just as they were, that she had been forced unwillingly into the German household, that she had tried to escape a few times to no avail.

They did not believe her. A small group with clenched fists surrounded her, pushed and shoved her around violently, then closed in on her, in a circle, closer and closer and closer, until they pressed against her with their poor emaciated bony decaying bodies.

Eva could not move, she could not breathe, she gasped for air, her throat went dry, she heard the rattle of train wheels again, she thought she was back on the train, then she was engulfed by darkness: "Katia, Freddy" were the last words she whispered before losing consciousness.

The new world

Eva was lying on the frozen soil, the mud melting under her warm, feverish body, forming small puddles. She was unconscious. The other prisoners had lost interest in her, as their attention had been focused on a group of soldiers standing in front of the gates. They did not have the hated swastikas on their uniforms. They held machine guns, but these were not pointed at them.

It was January 27, 1945. Auschwitz was being liberated by young Russian soldiers. Only four, at first, immobile, speechless, unbelieving, almost embarrassed to look at the incredible scene before them, out of a sense of decency, of pity. So many small, emaciated children, clinging to the chicken-wire fence, under the hated sign "Arbeit macht frei."

Eva did not want to face the world, so she just lay there, shivering. Some time had elapsed, but, when she heard words she recognized from the few English lessons at Terezin, Eva slowly became aware of her surroundings. She had been taken to an American hospital compound and was lying on a stretcher. The sun, peeking through irregular wintry clouds burned her sensitive eyes. She tried to open them slowly and to focus on a shadow bending over her. At first she was fearful and pushed away the cup she was being offered, spilling its contents. Gentle hands were offering her water and covering her with a blanket.

"I am Jamie, an American medic, you are free and in safe hands now. You can close your eyes and rest. I will return with some food." Eva fell asleep, finally releasing all her fears, emotional and physical sufferings and deprivations. She slept through the day and the following night. Jamie checked on her periodically and was finally able to get her to eat some warm soup with a few small pieces of meat in it. "Thank you Jamie, I am Eva", she murmured in gratitude. It was the beginning of Eva's return to health, trust in human beings and friendship.

The problems for the Americans soldiers were enormous. They had to feed orphaned and malnourished children and adults, treat their visible and invisible wounds, try to find their relatives or to relocate them.

Eva was getting slowly back on her feet, waking up earlier each morning reinvigorated. One morning she was watching a young boy moving about among boxes, sacks of dirty laundry, cases of fresh and canned food, parked vehicles. The place was filthy, wet and muddy, and soon the boy slipped and fell, breaking out in tears. Eva ran and picked him up, holding him tightly against her, calming him with soothing words. The next morning several young boys and girls were in front of her tent waiting for her to get up. She found herself unexpectedly, but willingly, in charge of the youngsters.

Eva was glad for this opportunity; it helped her fill the day usefully, while waiting for the bureaucratic hurdles for her repatriation to be solved. She organized games, food parties to help youngsters regain weight; she invented exercises to strengthen their weakened bodies, even made them aware of the beauty of the few flowers which were growing here and there around the camp. She taught them happy songs, such as: "Alle Vögel sind schon da, alle Vögel, alle", a harbinger of spring, a song which several children had heard from their mothers' voices and which Eva was humming to them now. But mostly she helped them by listening to their sorrow, trying to give them the comfort and love they should have received from their parents. She mended their tattered clothes and battered souls.

The war was over, but Eva was still on the "Displaced Persons List" for over a year now. No Gottlieb had come forward to claim her, as if all who had known and loved her had been wiped off the face of the earth. She saw many of "her children" leave in good health, and others arrive frightened and in poor health. Those who had the worst nightmares were allowed to sleep in her tent on improvised cots. She would wake them, cradle them in her arms and sing them back to sleep.

After some more months the person in charge of the military hospital asked Eva where she would like to relocate, maybe to the Promised Land? She had no living relatives or close friends in Germany, because, as Jews, they had lived in the shadows for many years. She remembered only vaguely the dark-haired girl who had handed her the Star of David. But what would she do in a country which was not yet a real country, where conflicting interests caused only turmoil and strife?

She had not attended high school, due to the years in hiding and in concentration camps. She had no skills and had very little to offer. But Jamie had a plan. He was in daily contact with Eva and came to appreciate her loving nature, her selflessness and good humor, her moral strength, in addition to her blooming beauty: her hair was growing back strong and shiny, her eyes had regained the twinkle of a happy teenager. Her laughter was louder and frequent.

In short, Jamie fell in love with her and wanted to take her back with him to the States. He submitted his plan to his captain: he told him his parents had a large farm in the Midwest and that they, as well as his siblings, would welcome Eva with open arms. He wrote to his parents full of enthusiasm awaiting anxiously for their reply, which was positive. They sent pictures of their farm, as a guarantee of their good intentions. Jamie then decided to talk to Eva.

Eva was naive, yes, but not to the point of ignoring the implications of Jamie's proposal. She was aware of his feelings toward her. She liked Jamie, he was tall, strong, athletic, a typical American youngster, optimistic, with smiling eyes and a contagious laughter, and with a strong desire to live, which Eva had lost along the way. She was grateful for his having reconciled her with this world, but she did not feel the flutter in her heart that she had felt the few times she had been with Freddy.

Her dilemma was this: do I accept reality or do I follow my dream? In her innocence she felt she could live alongside Jamie for a while as a sister – she relied on his puritanical Midwestern upbringing - while trying to find Freddy. She was aware of the fact that moving away from Europe would make the search more difficult, for Freddy as well, should he try to find her. Neither of them actually knew whether the other had survived. She was encouraged by the successes of the Red Cross in reuniting families.

So she found herself on a military plane flying towards her new home. She had to overcome her fear of flying for the first time, and the uneasiness of not fully understanding English. Jamie was very patient with her: his hopes flew higher than the plane!

At the military compound, they had supplied her with some sort of documents, which were scrutinized very carefully at each check point. With each new stamp, the document looked more and more official. Everyone knew what was going on in Europe and turned a deaf ear.

In the space for "religion" Eva had inserted "Protestant". Nobody bothered to check her arms. Only Jamie knew. She would lie, cheat, betray, before allowing anyone ever again discriminate her because she was Jewish. She knew the meaning of the Statue of Liberty (one reason she opted for America), but was totally unprepared for what awaited her.

After arriving at the military base in Virginia, and having been officially discharged, they took a Greyhound bus for the long journey through half the country. They arrived exhausted: Jamie was smiling from ear to ear, happy to see his family again, after so many months of uncertainty, while Eva was bewildered and overwhelmed by the events. Jamie missed his German shepherd who always came running to greet him and was given the sad news of his disappearance, shortly after he left for the army. Jamie was up half the night to tell his parents and siblings, gathered in the family room with drinks and snacks, of his experiences during the war. They were immensely proud of him. He was barely out of high school when he had volunteered for the army. He was not a foolish boy in search of adventure, rather a patriotic young man with high ideals.

The next day he showed Eva around: she had never seen such a vast expanse of land, extending to the horizon, where grains were ripening to form a golden sea, dotted here and there by an occasional farmstead – sometimes noticeable only by wisps of smoke from a chimney - much like Jamie's, which consisted of the house proper, the stable, the barn, the pigsty, the chicken coup, the machine shop, the equipment yard. An impressive compound.

The village, by contrast, consisted only of the post office, the church, the community hall for dances on Saturday nights and movies, and a few shops on both sides of the dusty road; a coffee shop, which sold more booze than coffee. There was no doctor - only a make-shift pharmacy which sold the most common remedies - nor a vet. The farmers themselves knew how to treat their sick animals.

During the summer months that followed, the work at the farm left little room for doubts or second thoughts. Eva did her part of the work, much as Martha was doing hers an ocean apart. Eva actually enjoyed the daily routine, the Saturday night dances in the community hall, the occasional movies, the swims in a water hole.

She enjoyed the dinners with all the family members gathered around the sturdy oak table, especially on Sundays, when neighbors or relatives were invited. She joined silently in the prayers of thanks for the abundant and nourishing food on the table. Everyone ate with great relish, Eva tried to wipe out memories of deprivations suffered in the past.

The breakfasts were particularly abundant and lighthearted: the girls came down to the breakfast table with curlers in their hair, the boys with ruffled hair and half closed eyes – it was very early in the morning – still in their pajamas.

Only father was completely dressed; mother, hiding her curlers under a kerchief, stood at the wood-burning stove heating the tea kettle, flipping expertly pancakes. On the table there were jugs of fresh milk, next to baskets filled with slices of home-baked, whole-wheat bread, waiting to be buttered and sweetened with home-made jam from berries gathered in the brush. The boys favored crisply fried bacon and eggs: the tantalizing aroma reached Eva's nostrils, but, though tempted, she did not violate the rules of her religion.

After breakfast everyone would rush to their assigned duties: the boys worked in the fields or tended to the animals; the girls worked in the house, doing laundry and cleaning. Time permitting they would harvest produce from the vegetable garden and from the orchard, in preparation for canning for the winter months. The local store had little to offer.

Eva enjoyed the company of Jamie's sisters, so different from the more rigid, secretive German girls. They were playful, carefree, friendly, speaking their minds openly, playing jokes on one another, braiding Eva's long hair into tresses fashioned in fanciful arrangements.

The boys did not spend much time with Eva, but they were starting to look at her much the same way Jamie did. All were ignorant of events in far away Europe. They knew more about the war in the Pacific. They rarely listened to the crackling and malfunctioning radio. Eva was glad of their ignorance, so they did not pester her with questions, bringing up a past she wanted to forget.

But on the last swim of the season in the water hole, one of the girls noticed the numbers tattooed on Eva's arm. She was forced to explain. The secret was out, and what followed was not pleasant. The mood changed completely: the sudden silences when Eva was within ear shot, the whisperings behind her back, the exclusion from the free-time activities; the jokes were not good natured anymore, rather they were intended to make her look bad: a mantle of gloom and coolness had descended upon the household and was eroding its peaceful and joyful existence. But Eva was also a source of curiosity, nobody had known a Jew till then. Were they different? How come they hadn't noticed before?

Eva paid more attention now to radio broadcasts, reminiscent of the virulent anti-Semitic programs by Father Coughlin in the thirties; she noticed signs, previously ignored, posted at motels, restaurants, and country clubs: Jews not welcome here. Before she had only noticed: Negroes not welcome here.

Jamie was shocked - as much as Eva - at the attitude of his family. How could he tell them now that he wanted to marry Eva? Would he have to choose between her and his family? They accused him of deliberately hiding the truth from them. They would not have

welcomed her into their home. Eva was profoundly shocked to learn that even in America, in the peaceful, insignificant community where she lived, there was prejudice against her peolpe. It didn't run as deep as in Europe, fortunately, but it was totally unexpected. She spent many a night crying and wondering about her future.

The news, gossip really, spread through the small town like wildfire, and people viewed her differently now. They kept their distance avoiding her gaze. She withdrew within herself, became silent and despondent. On Saturday nights, she preferred staying at home, alone. Jamie's support was her only comfort: after all, during his time in the military in Europe, he had acquired an open mind and a wider vision of the world.

However, Jamie was at a loss at how he could reverse the turn of events. After much thought, he came upon the solution: take Eva away from this hostile environment and show her another America. She agreed readily.

They left on the next Greyhound bus, without long goodbyes, without a precise destination and without much money.

Memories of home

After days on the road on a shoestring, sleeping in youth hostels ten to a room (very reassuring for Eva), tired of eating sandwiches out of brown paper bags and drinking water at public fountains, nearly out of money, they finally reached New York City, where Jamie's uncle Pete and aunt Liz Lived. Jamie hoped they would give them hospitality in their home.

Eva was dazed after so many days on the road. She had never seen a city similar to New York City, its grandiose architecture, the endless straight boulevards - running north-south, east-west - the hectic traffic, the luminous street signs, the crowds frantically rushing in and out of stores along the wide sidewalks with their purchases. She could see her image reflected in the tall shop windows and wondered: where am I, who am I? She could hardly see the sky above the tall skyscrapers or the sun filtering through occasional openings between the massive buildings. She could see no trees, no grass, no flower, only pavement.

But what impressed her most, were the many different faces and the cacophony of sounds and languages, most of which she could not identify, but here and there she heard a Yiddish word. Her heart began to beat joyfully. Jamie had not prepared her for the complexity of the city with its many multiethnic immigrants, fleeing from poverty and persecution, especially during and after the war: he himself had never visited New York City before, so how could he? He was as disoriented and speechless as Eva. At heart he was still a farm-boy.

For the next few weeks, they explored the city mostly on foot, with enthusiasm and energy, and visited the various NYC neighborhoods: the Lower East Side, poor economically but rich in history and tradition, first home to many brilliant composers, famous for its "corned beef on rye and Reuben sandwiches" and its knishes, served at Katz's Deli; little Italy and China town; the Irish Hell's Kitchen. They also came across more pleasant neighborhoods, such as the charming Greenwich Village; the wealthy and elegant Upper East Side, the many parks, Times Square and Riverside Drive with its view of the majestic Hudson River and George Washington Bridge.

However, Jamie soon became troubled by feelings of guilt for having left home so abruptly during the busy harvest season, and felt it was time to return to his family and his farm duties. Eva, on the other hand, was troubled by the thought that, among the many Jews she had came across, there might be a relative or a friend who made it to safety, but she did not know how to go about looking for them.

Jamie found a phone booth with a working telephone: he wanted to call his family to announce their imminent return home. Eva squeezed in with him and noticed the telephone directories of the various boroughs. On a lark, she opened the much-used Manhattan directory hanging on a chain and banging against the glass, and searched for her last name, Gottlieb. She was surprised to find so many Gottliebs: David, Emanuel, Joel, Moritz, Trude, Viktor…

Eva wanted to get in touch with one of the names she had found, but, in spite of the many experiences in her young life, she was still somewhat shy. She felt more comfortable to speak with a woman, so she dialed Trude's number. By luck, Trude was at home and answered the phone. She was surprised at Eva's words in poor English with a German accent, and, sensing a young girl in need, invited her to her home in the mid eighties on Central Park West. Jamie accompanied her, but left her at the door, preferring to return to his uncle's to pack their few belongings for the trip home. He would pick her up later.

Trude was born in Dresden, Germany, at the beginning of the century. Her music studies had taken her to New York City in the mid thirties, where, with financial support from her European relatives, she attended and graduated from what will later become the Juilliard School of Music. She was looking forward to returning home in 1939 on the newly launched Queen Elizabeth, but her relatives advised her to ride out the war in America. They did not tell her of the many family members who had already been deported. There was nobody left to send her money. Fortunately she had completed her studies and could rely on her diploma to begin a teaching career. She was well liked and successful. Being in daily contact with young students, she had developed an unusual sensitivity to their problems and needs. It was therefore not out of character for her to invite Eva into her home.

When Eva rang the bell, the door was opened by a fortyish, attractive, slender lady, with thick black hair graying at the temples, intense green blue eyes, dressed in a long, flowing dark dress, somewhat austere, in contrast with her smiling face and sunny disposition. Her feet rested comfortably in shapeless slippers, denoting a down to earth person: no pretense, just warm welcome. Trude saw an attractive young lady, too young for the sorrow and apprehension that marked her serious face.

They shook hands for quite a long time, studying each other, both unsure of what to expect. Then Eva introduced herself in broken English: "I am Eva. Jamie and I are visiting New York, and before going back home, I was dreaming of finding someone named Gottlieb, my family's name. So I called you, hoping you would welcome a stranger bursting into your home. I am grateful you did. I lost all my relatives in the war. On the streets, I heard many Yiddish words, so I thought, I hoped …" "There are about 2 millions of us in the City", reassured her Trude and invited her into the living room, a sunny room facing the park.

Eva's eyes immediately fell on the menorah - its candles emanating a sweet bee wax scent throughout the room - sitting on the mantelpiece above the fire place; the chandelier, whose lead crystals refracted the afternoon sun giving it brilliance and elegance, and above all the Biedermeier furniture she knew so well from home - quite different in its simplicity and harmonious lines from the overwrought, oppressive oak wood furniture in Jamie's home - the comfortable sofa, the Persian carpets and the many purple flowers in the windowsills!

in one corner stood the baby grand which reminded her of her mother's playing, stacked with sheet music gently swaying to the ground in the breeze coming through the half-open window. Clearly, music was Trude's passion, not only her livelihood.

She could no longer control her emotions and broke down. For the first time since she could remember she really felt at home. At last! She regained composure and began to narrate, searching for words in her imperfect English: "You can speak to me in German", said Trude. Her recollections started like a peaceful rivulet of words, soon becoming a tumultuous river breaking through its banks!

Her immediate family came to her mind first: her humorous father Emanuel, always ready with a joke or a funny story; her sweet mother Esther who taught herJewish traditions through her bedside readings of biblical stories and called her affectionately Lila; her elderly grand-mother, who taught her knitting and was the pillar of strength and wisdom for the whole family, in whose arms she always found comprehension and comfort, and her little brother Jacob, whom she was not allowed to mention, ever. He was taken to safety early on, and she still didn't know where he was or whether he had survived.

She told Trude, glancing at the window sill, of her love for the color purple, which was abundant in the flowers of her garden: the violets, the purple irises, the campanulas and periwinkles, which she enjoyed looking at while sitting under the lilac tree next to the sweet-smelling lavender. Even her wool winter coat, which she loved above all other garments, was the color of periwinkle.

Looking at the baby grand she told Trude of the awful day when her parents had disappeared, just a few days after her mother's piano had been confiscated: she had refused to play for some important person who visited her village. "If you don't want to play for us, you will not play for anyone else", they had said, hitting her cruelly on her hands, and taking away her piano carelessly. Fortunately Eva was not at home; she found a hiding place in the attic of her parents' courageous and generous neighbors.

Eva was getting tired and could hardly find the proper words to continue. Trude decided it was a good moment to let her rest and have some tea. While they were drinking it, the door bell rang insistently, startling the two women. Eva jumped up and so did Trude: on a whim she took Eva's hands and said: "Darling, stay with me a few more days".

It was Jamie who rang the bell, as Eva had feared: he came by with her bag waving the bus tickets for their trip home. Trude did not know what kind of relationship existed between the two youngsters, but Eva did not hesitate one instant and told Jamie of her decision to stay with Trude a few more days.

Jamie did not like what he heard, but he felt that, if he made a scene, he would jeopardize his future with Eva forever. He took a hesitating step towards her, dropped her bag inside the door and gave her a hurried passionless hug, turning quickly to hide the tearful eyes. It was obvious that he was hurt. With a lump in his throat he managed to say: "See you", and was gone. Trude was puzzled, she wanted Eva to explain. After all, they had travelled together and she was living with his family. What was their relationship?

But it was getting late. Trude took Eva to the guest room and they prepared her bed together, laughing heartily when they got in each other's way. The tension had been broken! The sheets had a lovely wild flower pattern and lavender scent. It was a very feminine looking room, it could have belonged to a girl. It was perfect for Eva, but it was her turn now to be puzzled. Had Trude been married, did she have a daughter?

"Let's have something to eat" said Trude and brought out some slices of dark bread and cheese and some fruit, enough for their supper. It had been a long and very trying day for both. Eva went to bed soon after having helped with the dishes. She hugged and thanked Trude and retired to her comfortable room and bed. She fell asleep immediately before having thought about what had happened that day, while Trude could not fall asleep, thinking of the consequences of her decision regarding Eva.

Eva slept in: she awoke to the sound of a Chopin mazurka, played by Trude for one of her students. Eva lingered in bed, savoring this sweet moment, which she felt was a turning point in her life. She got up silently, searched her bag for her prettiest dress (the one Jamie had bought her on Fifth Avenue, as a farewell to NYC), got dressed and went to the kitchen, where she found breakfast waiting for her.

Trude was really a very thoughtful person. "I have been really lucky to meet her", she thought. After the student left, Trude came to the kitchen and joined Eva for coffee. She was usually free in the afternoons, so they made plans for the day, that is, Trude did. That evening there was going to be a big concert at Carnegie Hall by the revered and beloved Maestro.

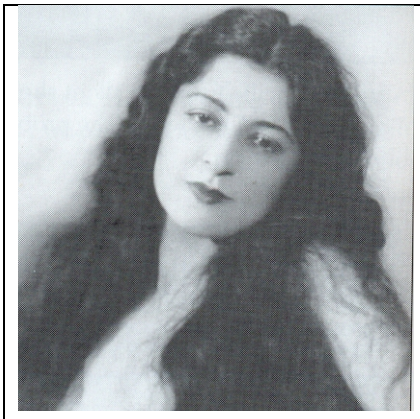
To get tickets on such short notice was practically impossible. Long lines had formed outside Carnegie Hall as soon as the concert had been announced. Trude had her ticket, but through her acquaintances in the music community, she was able to get another one for Eva, who was in seventh heaven, needless to mention. She had never attended such an event. Trude knew the Maestro personally, having met him at concerts and at the restaurants he and his wife patronized. She called him "my friend", he introduced her as "my colleague", a great honor, and sent her students which he didn't have time to teach.

The Maestro played Rachmaninoff's third and Chopin. Eva was mesmerized and applauded heartily. The concert was her introduction to music at the highest level. She loved Chopin, who will become her favorite composer for life. After many standing ovations, the concert ended. The crowds milled about outside Carnegie Hall hoping for the Maestro to emerge and sign autographs, but that was not in his nature.

There was a secret passage linking Carnegie Hall directly to the Russian Tea Room, where, it was understood, his entourage and friends from the entertaining world, would meet after concerts. And so it was also that evening. Jascha, Leopold, Fritz, Arthur, Wanda and their best friend David were already there. David, a very knowledgeable and talented young man, had a privileged relationship with the Maestro, he visited him regularly in the evenings for a serious exchange of ideas about music, musicians and composers, but also for the latest gossip!

The chatter, mostly in Russian, was very intense, and so were the orders for food and drink. It was tradition to have blinis with caviar, (sour cream on the side), washed down with cold vodka. Heavy platters were passed around, but Eva passed. There had been enough novelties for one day!

Later on Lucille, a regular, came by for a night cap, after her evening at the theatre. She was dropped off by her chauffer. After introductions and greetings, the former actress, elegant, glamorous and in her professional prime, invited Trude and Eva to visit her newest European production at her De Lys Theatre. She was quite intrigued by the young unsophisticated European girl, and imagined her a good match for her single brother. Being late and being difficult to catch a cab at that hour, her chauffer took them home.



This remarkable woman was born on the Lower East Side, like so many children of European Jewish immigrants. Her parents had arrived from Poland. Through their hard work and skills, especially her mother's, they soon left the poorer East Side and moved north to better and better neighborhoods. After the end of her acting career, given up at the request of her husband, she became a producer and artistic director. Throughout her long life, she received many honors and awards.

Trude and Eva spent the next few days getting acquainted with each other. Trude discovered a sunny girl with a dry sense of humor, intelligent and curious. Her "joie de vivre" had returned. The wall of darkness Eva had built around herself began to crumble. In a sense, Trude's invisible wall also began to crumble, as she realized that her life had been for too long devoid of human warmth and companionship. Music, all of a sudden, did not seem to be all important.

One afternoon, while sipping tea, Eva resumed her recollections. She talked about the day when her shelter had been discovered and she was taken prisoner; how her beautiful periwinkle coat – in which she had hidden her Star of David - was pulled off her and she was left shivering and bruised. She continued with the deportation to Terezin and then to Auschwitz by interminable and inhuman train rides.

Trude had read about these horrors and felt real admiration and love for this survivor. Eva blushed when she mentioned having met again at Terezin Freddy, the boy who wanted to become a great artist and a witness to the world of the horrors of war through his drawings.

Her flushed cheeks and uneasiness revealed much about her relationship with Jamie. It became clearer when Eva told her of her rescue by the Americans and the particular attention and care she had received from Jamie, who managed to bring her to America. She was grateful to him, loved him in a brotherly way, but her true love feelings were for Freddy.

She resisted Jamie's advances, although giving in would have been an easy way out. She did not survive hell, no, many hells, she thought, for a passionless, convenience marriage with a conventional future somewhere in Middle America. She wanted to embrace fully this wonderful world, which came close to being denied to her.

Then there was the question of prejudice in the Midwest. She shed a few tears when she had to admit not knowing whether Freddy had survived the war. "Maybe I was foolish to leave Europe" she thought aloud, "here I will never be able to find out what happened to him". She remained silent for a while.

The pause gave Trude time to think: suppose I ask Eva to live with me? I could arrange for her to complete her studies and teach her music, which she seemed to be attracted to. She would bring excitement into my world, give purpose to my life and fill the void left by my European relatives, which I have been unable to find. Letter after letter had come back, undelivered.

Trude was mulling over these thoughts during another sleepless night. As the first lights of dawn and the chirping of wakening birds cleared her thoughts, the idea took foot and became more and more attractive and feasible. She could handle the extra expense: she had some savings and could teach more intensely, since Eva would take over some of the domestic chores.

She decided to take Eva shopping in the afternoon, and then invite her out to dinner. She badly needed a new wardrobe, after the peasant hand-me-downs from Jamie's sisters. She wanted to show her some of the good things that New York City had to offer. If the moment was right, she would ask Eva to remain with her.

Trude made a reservation at the "Tavern on the Green" which was within walking distance from her home. It was located just inside Central Park at Sheep's Meadow, was known for its romantic ambience and good food. "Eva, darling, it is time to go", she called across the hall, when it was time to go, and was pleased to see Eva appear in her new clothes: a pleated, dark blue knee-length skirt, a pale purple blouse with puffed sleeves and conservative collar, a tweed jacket to complete the outfit, moccasins – Eva was quite tall - and a small leather purse dangling over her shoulder. A real city girl!

Both women were a bit anxious about the evening: Eva was afraid that Trude would tell her that it was time for her to move on, and Trude was afraid that Eva would not accept her offer. The short walk to the restaurant along the park was pleasantly cool and invigorating, increasing their appetite. They met people rushing home from work, exercising or walking their dogs. They were seated and ordered their meals, starting with borscht.

Eva surveyed the dining room and gaped at the well-dressed affluent New Yorkers enjoying their evening out, just as she intended to do. They ate with gusto and commented on the quality of the food, but it was a rather strained conversation. Trude noticed that Eva's table manners were perfect. Throughout her ordeal, she never forgot her good upbringing. When desserts came around, and after a relaxing glass of red wine, Trude took the plunge.

She need not have worried: when Eva realized what Trude was proposing, tears of gratitude came to her eyes. She took one of Trude's hands and kissed it. Fortunately they had a corner table facing the park, allowing Trude to hide her embarrassment. She quickly withdrew her hand.

With the release of tension, came light-heartedness and laughter, lots of it, and the conversation became meaningful, with Trude explaining what she had in mind: first and foremost to improve Eva's English and to catch up with her high school education, with the help of a private tutor. She was too old and mature to attend classes with silly teenagers. "Eva dear, what would you like to do in life? I can only guide you and offer you opportunities, but the choice must be yours". The whole unreal situation began to sink in: "But Trude, I have no money, no skills; how can I ever repay you? I only have the determination to try my best and the will to succeed. I will find out along the way what my mission in life will be. I get along well with children; I may become a nurse, even a doctor who saves lives, or a writer who documents the war with words, much as Freddy had wanted to document it with pictures".

The next day Trude made some phone calls to locate a suitable tutor for the young girl. She wanted to introduce her to her friends and made a long list of all the places and events she wanted to take her to: museums, galleries, concerts, movies, the theatre, historical and city landmarks. In other words: New York City!

Eva too needed to make one important phone call. For many evenings she had sat next to the telephone, hesitating, but ultimately she did not have the courage to lift the receiver and dial. Days went by, then weeks and then it became irrelevant. The phone in the Midwest farm house never rang. Life moved on and so did Jamie, who had not called either. The end of a dream was the beginning of another.

Timeless

Trude and Eva were dining again at the "Tavern on the Green". They were celebrating the second anniversary of their successful "partnership". Each felt that the other had fulfilled her promises, so they had reason to celebrate.

The first event to which Trude had taken Eva, was the première at Lucille's downtown Theater De Lys of the new, critically acclaimed German Musical (it was to run for seven years!)	

Lucille met them at the door and, during intermission, suggested that Eva meet her brother in the near future. Eva bristled at the suggestion of a match, although, once again, it would have been very advantageous for her. Lucille's family, though not particularly religious, followed all the important Jewish traditions, which was important to Eva. The large family had become very influential in the city: Lucille's husband was a wealthy philanthropist, her older brother a musician, her only sister a painter, her brother-in-law, Xavier Cugat, was known as the king of mambo, and her unmarried brother…well, there was a reason for his being unmarried.

Although being highly intelligent, he never completed even one of his rather bizarre projects; although being busy all day, he never did an honest day's work; although loving dogs - none escaped his caresses - he was too unreliable and selfish to keep one; though living in a charming attic apartment with a beautiful view over Riverside Drive and the George Washington Bridge, he managed to ruin its charm by disorder and clutter, he was religious, but his religions were socialism and humanism.

But Lucille was very determined in her pursuit and glossed over these peculiarities. She did not give up on her dream of Eva becoming his wife.

Eva spoke almost flawless English by now, albeit with a charming accent which stuck for life. She had taken over many of the household chores: she mostly enjoyed cooking, being able to find a great variety and abundance of foods in the big city, foods she had been denied for so long or discovered for the first time.

Mostly she shopped at Gristede's, a small supermarket known for its personal service, gourmet items and high prices; and along Broadway's small stores, where the shopkeepers competed to give her the best and freshest produce. She never brought home a fish which was not of top quality and freshness. She was not aware of her charm, and that alone increased it.

But Eva concentrated intensely on her studies: her tutor came every morning, teaching all the subjects she needed to graduate from high school. He felt she was particularly suited for the sciences. She would do her home work in the afternoons, going frequently to the New York Public Library to read German newspapers or to borrow books. She was a voracious reader. She wanted to know all about the war years and about the reconstruction of her devastated country. They knew her well and saved the daily newspapers for her.

She found time to baby sit some children in her condominium, which provided her with pocket money for her very modest needs: stockings, lingerie and the like. She did not smoke or use make-up. Occasionally she was able to invite Trude to the movies or to a modest restaurant. On Sundays they would stroll through the park, watching New Yorkers on their free day: children playing, running after their ball or their dog, couples hugging affectionately, young parents rocking the cradle of their newly born, musicians rehearsing for an imaginary engagement, elderly couples enjoying the warm sun sitting quietly on rickety benches holding hands; in other words, ordinary activities of ordinary people.

On rainy Sundays, Trude would invite friends for brunch or afternoon coffee. She wanted Eva to enlarge her circle of friends. They sat around the piano to listen to Trude play, Eva watching her with adoring eyes. She had increased her work load, about which she was pleased, and even found time to teach Eva music. She was too old to become a concert pianist, but music would give her pleasure all her life, especially Chopin…

At Thanksgiving, they were invited for the long Thanksgiving weekend by Trude's relatives in Connecticut. They were picked up in New York on Wednesday by the chauffer/butler, and after a lovely drive in the autumn countryside with its colorful trees, heaps of fallen leaves over which squirrels would playfully hop and chase imaginary critters, and its bare persimmon trees with their orange fruit glowing like tiny Chinese lanterns, they arrived at destination: a lovely big home with view on Long Island Sound. At this time of year, it was misty and foggy, which gave the surroundings an unreal, fairy-tale atmosphere. There were no sailing boats on the water this late autumn morning. Occasionally sun rays peeked through the tall thicket around the house.

Eva was introduced to their hosts and their friends and shown around the house: its impressive, ultra-modern kitchen furnished with the latest electrical appliances which were becoming all the rage in affluent homes, large rooms with panoramic windows over the bay, Chinese furniture and precious Chinoiserie. She had not experienced such luxury before, but preferred the warm intimacy of Trude's apartment.

Thanksgiving dinner was a memorable and elegant affair with family and friends. The abundant and traditional food was served by the butler/chauffer, in his impeccable chef's uniform. Four turkeys for the 28 diners, had been roasted to perfection in the ovens by his wife. The table was beautifully set with precious white china, family silver and crystal glasses.

Trude, prodded by the guests who wanted to know more about Eva, announced proudly that she had passed her exams with flying colors and had received her high school diploma. Eva was somewhat cagey, because her examiners had been more interested in her past than in her acquired knowledge. Trude was asked to play the piano, and she obliged gladly, showing her unexpected humorous side with music by Gershwin, who had died recently.

On Monday morning, after cheerful goodbyes and promises to meet again soon, they were driven back to New York City. Trude needed to go back to her students and Eva wanted to start searching for a suitable college. She went back to the New York Public Library, with which she had become so familiar and was fond of, and examined brochures from several colleges and universities.

In her heart, however, she had made up her mind to attend Hunter College in NYC, a women's college just across the park on 68th street. She could commute on the new bicycle she had received as a graduation present from Trude, and would not be a financial burden to her.

While trying to decide about her course of studies, she inadvertently pushed her pencil off the desk into the waste paper basket. It fell softly and noiselessly, as the basket was full of balled up sheets of paper.

Rummaging through the basket to find her pencil, she picked up one crumpled sheet, smoothed it out and was dumb-struck: it was a very familiar-looking drawing, it was Freddy's, no doubt! Freddy! Alive! Terribly excited she rushed to the front desk: "Can you tell me, please, who was been sitting at the corner desk I just left?" The service clerk, surprised at the question and a bit suspicious, looked up at her and with deliberate reluctance and slowness, replied: "Usually it is the desk of a quiet, well-mannered young man who comes by late in the afternoons. I think he comes after work. He always asks for the same books and then draws and draws, using the eraser a lot, crunching the unsatisfactory sheets of paper and dropping them in the basket, never satisfied with what he is drawing. I like to watch him work, and of course I looked at a few of his drawings before emptying the basket, but could not make heads or tails of them. At the end though, he seems to achieve what he is after, because he puts a few sheets in a sketch book and takes them home".

With a mischievous twinkle in her eye, the desk clerk added: "Shall I leave a message for him next time he comes by? Who should I say…". She did not finish the sentence as Eva, too excited to think clearly, with her heart pounding with hope, but also with fear of disappointment, thanked the lady and rushed home.

Laura, the middle-aged desk clerk, was appropriately a bookish type, with thick lenses encased in a tortoise frame. Plain looking, pudgy, with nondescript straight hair, uninteresting clothing under her library frock, she was above and beyond temptation.

She had struck a conspiratorial liaison with Eva, sensing an unfolding love story, to which she would be a real life witness, which was much more exciting than the fictional love stories she was addicted to and read with passion, almost with craving as a substitute for her loveless life.

Subsequently Eva visited the library quite often on late afternoons: sometimes just long enough to see Laura shake her head, at other times stopping at the desk to get a "sighting" report from her. "He was here yesterday", Laura would lie, hoping not to discourage Eva from coming back again and again.

She tried to engage her in conversation, but Eva gave Laura few useful details to nourish her romantic imagination.

Her frequent, seemingly purposeless trips to the library were a puzzle to Trude and Eva felt obliged to explain. Trude was initially happy for her, although she did not believe much in fate, but soon realized with sadness that it could mean the end of their happy life together.

They would find out later what had happened to Freddy. He had been transferred from Auschwitz to Schwarzheide on a work mission; his sudden disappearance gave Eva cause to believe that he had perished.

The war was going badly for the Germans. After a year of grueling work he and the other surviving prisoners were forced to march toward the Czech border, sleeping in make-shift shelters, scrambling for something to eat. They were tired, hungry, exhausted, some so weak that they died on route. Their march took them towards Terezin, which the Germans had agreed to turn over to the Red Cross. They were safe now, though drastically reduced in numbers, only 175 out of 1000. The war was finally over. Freddy immediately went to Prague where he was reunited with his sister. From there he went to a displaced persons camp in Deggendorf, Germany, where he immediately began to draw out of memory. Almost 2 years later, in 1947, he was on his way to the United States.

CZECH PEOPLE FEED US AT EVERY PASSING VILLAGE, KISS US AND THROW FLOWERS ALL OVER THE HIGH WAY

On the ship he met Ilse, another young refugee, who was joining relatives in the States. They became friends and Freddy accepted her offer to move in with her relatives. But he found himself in much the same situation as Eva with Jamie: he was grateful to Ilse, but his heart was not free: he wanted to find out what had happened to Eva, the young girl he had met briefly in the park, then again in Terezin and finally in Auschwitz. He had feared for her life, then, as she too had vanished suddenly, in addition she was in poor health, which was practically a death sentence. The thought of her kept him prisoner of his feelings.

He resisted Ilse's advances and worked part-time as a commercial artist to allow him to complete his art studies. He did not forget his dream of becoming a famous artist and to document with his drawings the horrors of a war he had witnessed firsthand. He would realize this dream with "The Book of Alfred Kantor", which he secretly hoped would reach Eva and tell her he was alive: he had never given up, ignoring negative winds.

One day Laura, who kept looking anxiously at the entrance door, while serving the library's customers, beckoned frantically to Eva, as soon as she popped in the door. She whispered to her: "Eva, Eva, he is here, yes, sitting at his usual desk in the corner!"

The young man was leaning over his books, pencil and eraser in hand, and Eva only saw his back. "Are you sure, Laura, I am so afraid…" "Go, Eva, go, don't be afraid," and she practically pushed her towards the corner desk. She felt like the heroine in one of her beloved novels.

Eva hesitated but then tiptoed over and gently tapped the man on the shoulder. Laura stopped attending to customers, she didn't want to miss this moment for anything in the world! He turned around and…they fell into each other's arms, in a long, intense, timeless embrace.

Notes

I got the idea for this story from a newspaper article: I read that the Germans gave the clothing they stole from their prisoners at the time of their arrest, to German needy citizens.

Many episodes are auto-biographical: for example, Martha lives the experiences I had, when, in 1943 during the war, I was in Toblach with a farm family. The NYC episodes derive from my recollections of the sixties, when I lived in that city.

Eva was our cousin, born in 1922 who perished at Auschwitz. In my story I chose to let her survive. Freddy was a friend she had known in Prague. When she was transferred to Auschwitz, he followed her voluntarily, because he was in love with her. On the ship which took Freddy to the States, he met Ilse whom he later married. He knew that Eva had perished in the concentration camp.

Trude was Max's cousin, who saved herself because she was in NYC to study music, a fact described by Trude v. Walther in her autobiography. However she lived in poverty, died of cancer and is buried in the family tomb of our relatives, the Boehms.

In 2003 I participated in the Thanksgiving celebrations as described. Lucille was my sister-in-law, whose brother I had married.

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