Chapter I

"Hallo, Pat!"

"Hot enough for you, Solly?"

"Hot enough, hot enough!"

Pat was a small, wiry man with bright blue eyes and a mop of red hair. A hat with a small brim did its best to keep sun off his freckled face. On one shoulder was a bundle of newspapers, tied with coarse white twine. Easily, as one accustomed to the task, Pat swung the load from his shoulder to the pavement at Solly's feet. He glanced at the headline across the width of the *New York World:* "PRESIDENT HARDING DEAD!" And in smaller type: "Vice President Coolidge Takes Oath Of Office At His Father's Home In Vermont."

"Hey Solly, we got a new president!"

"It von't make much difference to me!"

Pat hurried to the truck parked at the curb. Other news dealers were waiting for their afternoon editions.

Park Row, in 1923, was a noisy, crowded thoroughfare. At its eastern terminus Brooklyn Bridge began its span of the East River, having joined Brooklyn and New York, then separate cities, forty years earlier. Plagued with engineering and political problems, it was finally completed in 1883, the year of Solly's birth. It was called "the eighth wonder of the world." Joined by the longest suspension bridge on earth, New York and Brooklyn shared the economic growth which accompanied massive immigration from eastern and southern Europe. Along Park Row passed thousands of men and women who worked in finance or government, publishing or shipping, manufacturing or sales, wholesale or retail. The sights and sounds and smells of autos, trucks, busses began early in the morning and didn't end until the close of the business day. In the midst of the traffic an open wagon, loaded with scrap iron or brass or bales of rags or paper would pass slowly, pulled by sweating horses, the driver sitting hunched in front of his cargo holding slack reins. And everyone relied on the only source for news of the city, the nation and the world: The newspaper. Men and women lined the sidewalks of Park Row to offer the news to those who hurried by. They shouted, "Wadiya read!! Wadiya read!! Getcha paper here!!" Elya Zalman Nuchamovitch was one of them. To other newspaper dealers, to merchants along Park Row, to his customers, he was known, simply, as "Solly."

Behind the small space he occupied on this busy sidewalk stood the Pulitzer Building, a lower Manhattan landmark since before the turn of the century, headquarters of the world-famous *New York World* and its publisher, Joseph Pulitzer, the man who had created the banner headline and sensationalist press. If asked where he sold his newspapers, Solly would reply with pride, "on Park Row, in front of the Pulitzer Building."

Solly was a man of ordinary height, but little else about his appearance was ordinary. He had worked this corner for eight years, six days a week, fifty-two weeks a year, rain or shine, in the sultry heat of summer and the icy cold of winter. The skin of his face and neck and hands was the color of brown leather. Below the short visor of his cap a lock of black hair pointed to bushy eyebrows and dark brown eyes. Below his prominent nose was a thick black mustache. Friends said he could have played a Bedouin chieftain or a Mexican bandolero in the silent movies of the time.

From his shoulders hung leather straps which carried two huge canvas aprons. Several pockets held New York's many newspapers. With one hand he'd flip a folded newspaper into a customer's palm. With the other he'd accept the penny or two, or make change. Under his left arm a sack of coins was strapped to his waist. Under his right arm was a crutch.

His right leg had been amputated above the knee fourteen years earlier to prevent the spread of a malignant tumor. That had ended his career as a cabinet maker. He was

twenty-six then, with a wife and two little girls to support. The agony of the decision to proceed, the pain in body and mind after the surgery, he discussed only with his devoted wife, Rebecca. Since then, every morning, as he placed his one foot on the floor and reached for his crutch, he felt a twinge of bitterness and resignation. He knew fate had made its cruel decision, and no power could reverse it. Sometimes, in quiet moments alone, he thought of the time when he could walk like everyone else, and then he would remember that day in the doctor's office.

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Rebecca sat silently with others in the foyer, waiting. Her thoughts took her back to the moment she had first met her husband, in London. How handsome he was, she remembered. Black hair, black mustache, flashing brown eyes, so polite, and so clever! He's a fine catch, her family had said, and a good provider—a skilled cabinet maker! And it was all true, although, she thought, when it comes to religion, he's not interested. Never mind, he's a good man. And nobody loves his children more than he does.

It seemed to Rebecca that she had been waiting a very long time when her husband came out of the doctor's consulting room and sat down next to her. He hesitated, staring into her eyes, for a moment unable to speak. Silently she prayed, *"Give me good news, God, give me good news!"*

He misread the meaning of her pleading eyes and thought, *"She knows, she knows!"*

Finally he spoke, softly, and in Yiddish, his native language, and hers. He glanced at others in the room, aware that he would be overheard.

"Becky, he said my leg has to come off."

She lowered her eyes. She felt a chill come over her.

"When?" she asked.

"He told me, 'the sooner, the better'."

For a few seconds both were silent. His head began to spin.

"I'm going to be a cripple," he thought.

Rebecca was almost overcome with pity for her husband. She struggled very hard to control her tears, but one managed to escape and wet her cheek.

"We'll be alright, Elya Zalman, we'll be alright," she said.

*****

From where he stood on that hot August day Solly could see the clock atop City Hall across the park. Although the summer sun had not yet set, by six o'clock the passing crowd had thinned to a trickle, and his last regular customer had bought his paper. Solly removed the remaining newspapers from the pockets of his apron, folding everything, including the sack of coins, into one heavy bundle. He stooped to pick up his second crutch, and prepared to go home. Very close was Frankfort Street, forming an intersection with Park Row. A narrow street, it led to the docks and wharves below Brooklyn Bridge. A man stood at the curb, holding a white cane, waiting. Solly shouted, "Vahyt a vile, vahyt a vile!" His years in London had added a cockney flavor to his eastern European accent. A noisy truck lumbered by. "It's okay, now go!" and the man slowly crossed, tapping his cane on the cobblestones.

Solly glanced to the west and saw the towering gothic spires of the Woolworth Building, its sixty stories soaring eight hundred feet toward the clouds, a symbol of New York's rising skyline and economic power. He was aware of the enormous commercial and cultural ferment which had placed New York among the foremost cities of the world. He felt he was part of it,

a very small part, yes, but still enough to be a source of satisfaction. He recalled his boyhood in a small city in White Russia, from which he had fled when he was seventeen.

"Elya Zalman Nuchamovitch," he thought, "You're sure a long way from Slonim."

He turned and made his way toward the entrance to the subway. All around were the steel girders and bricks which supported the bridge's pavement overhead. He could hear the hum and rhythmic clicking of traffic above. A man stood behind a large table in the shadow below the bridge. He was surrounded by disordered stacks of newspapers.

Solly approached him and untied the heavy bundle he carried, placing it on the table before him.

"Hallo, Dominic!"

Dominic was short and almost as wide as he was tall. Except for a few thin gray hairs above his ears he was bald. Solly had never seen him without a cigar butt in his mouth. Tonight was no exception.

"Sol!!!" Time to go home?!!" Dominick exclaimed,, rather than spoke.

"Vy not?!" It's enough for vun day!" Solly always responded in Dominic's style.

They'd known each other since Solly began selling newspapers on Park Row and Dominic first accepted his unsold returns. They were both aware that a peasant farmer from Taranto, in the heel of southern Italy, and a refugee from White Russia, fleeing from the czar's secret police, could never have met and become friends except for the miracle of America.

"Tell me, Dominic, how's your boy doing?" They had discussed Dominic's son before.

Dominic removed the cigar from his mouth and, for once, lowered his voice.

"Mario? he's-a gonna gota City College. He says-a he's-a gonna be a lawyuh. Not-a so bad for this dago, eh Solly?"

"Good for you, and good for him," said Solly, with a wide grin.

He extended his hand and gripped Dominic's, with genuine warmth. Then he turned to leave.

"Good night, Dominic."

"So long, Solly! See yuh t'morruh!"

Solly turned and headed for the subway entrance. Tomorrow would be Saturday, a short work day. Then he'd be home in the family's little tenement flat in Harlem by mid-afternoon, and he'd have a long rest until Monday morning. His heart beat a little faster as he descended the stairway. He knew that one misstep, a slight loss of balance, an inadvertent bump by a hurrying traveler, and he'd tumble to the bottom, wounded and helpless, his bundle, its contents and his crutches scattered across the concrete. Until now it had never occurred, but he lived with the fear of it.

When his train came he boarded and sat down. It felt good to get weight off his leg. The train clattered and roared through its tunnels as some passengers read newspapers or magazines by the light of bare incandescent bulbs. Most stared vacantly or dozed until they reached their stations.

This is Friday, Solly recalled. All four children would be present for dinner. There would be things to talk about, especially tonight. Harding was dead, there's a new president, and who knows what else is in the papers? On Friday nights, after Rebecca lit the Sabbath candles, with a white cloth and a special meal on the table, conversation would begin. The subject could be politics or religion or baseball, entertainment or art, plans for the next day or the next year. Sometimes a difference of opinion would emerge, and sometimes raised voices would become shouts. Then Rebecca would plead for peace.

Once he had said to Rebecca, as an argument reached a high pitch, "Let them argue, let them argue. At least they have opinions."

Rebecca held her hands over her ears. "Why do they have to yell so loud? The neighbors can hear everything!"

"Let them hear it," he laughed, "maybe they'll learn something!" And with that Rebecca and the children laughed too.

On that August evening in 1923, as Elya Zalman Nuchamovich climbed the subway steps to the street, he recalled that he had turned his back on religion a very long time ago, but he acknowledged to himself that Friday night was still Friday night, even without religion.

Chapter II

A light snow fell on St. Petersburg, covering layers of ice and snow which had begun to blanket the Russian capital months earlier. It was, by that winter morning in 1881, the only city so far north with a population of over a million. Founded by Peter the Great, the city had grown to match the other great capitals of Europe in size and grandeur. Behind the massive baroque walls of the Winter Palace servants began to stir early. In the royal chambers his Imperial Majesty, Alexander II, Emperor of All Russia, arose, bathed and dressed, assisted by his personal valet. He ordered breakfast brought to his study and asked that the czarina be informed that he wished her to join him.

The czar was seated at a small table, sipping tea as his wife entered. A small woman, she wore a red velvet dressing gown embossed with gold floral designs. Her long dark hair hung loose down her back. She sat next to her husband as a servant poured tea for her. Another servant approached with small cakes and more tea.

"Good morning, Maria."

"Good morning to you, Alex. And what is so important that you must send for me?"

"I'm sorry if I disturbed you, Maria, but I have a few matters to attend to today, and I would like you to accompany me to at least one of them."

"And that is...?"

He waited until the servants left the room, closing the door behind them.

"Well, you know what I've been discussing with my ministers. Today I'm signing a manifesto to establish a national assembly."

The czarina's smile changed to a frown. Her hand reached across the table and rested on her husband's arm.

"Please, Alexei, please. We've talked about this before. Over the years you have done enough, Alex, freeing the serfs, permitting local councils, God knows what else. This is Russia, Alex. Powerful people oppose what you do. It's enough!"

"Maria, it would have been more than enough for my father, certainly for his father, but I've brought Russia into nineteenth century Europe. I can't stop now."

"And what will this 'assembly' do? Will it really have any power?" There was a hint of sarcasm in her voice.

"A little--to recommend, of course, but only to recommend. I am still the czar, Maria. As you say, this is Russia, but maybe this will satisfy some complainers."

Her eyes examined his handsome face, the tunic of his military uniform which suited him so well. His charm, his good nature, his good looks were not unknown among European royalty. She had come to love the man who had been chosen for her.

"Alexei," she pleaded, "you have enemies. If you must do this, do it here, in the palace."

"Maria, I have already arranged for a brief ceremony at the Admiralty. Please come with me. I know that many are against this, even some of my own ministers. It will help if you're there too."

In fact, Alexander's policies of liberalization were opposed by those who believed he had gone too far, and by those who believed he had not gone far enough. He had narrowly escaped assassination fifteen years earlier. There had been other clumsy failed attempts since then. There were always those whose goal was assassination of the czar--any czar--as the

necessary first step in liberating their people, as they saw it, from the oppression of Russian nobility.

Alexander knew this, of course. He said to the czarina, as he had said many times before, "my dear Maria, it is the burden of a ruler to live with this. I have no choice."

Maria Alexandrovna Romanov had been born Maria Hessen-Darmstadt, a daughter of the Prussian privileged class. She had been trained since childhood to accept the inevitability of a royal marriage of convenience, but the move from high German culture to feudal Russia as a young bride had been a wrenching one. Nevertheless, she had risen to the task. She had become a gracious czarina, German accent and all, and had borne her husband seven children.

Now she had to explain why she must disappoint him.

"My dear Alex, I have promised Alexeivich that I would accompany him to an inspection of the Military Museum."

The sudden lines in his forehead, she had come to know, meant anger or frustration. Before he could speak, she did.

"Alexei, my dear, I know our son has disappointed you. He doesn't share your interest in state matters, so when he expressed a desire to visit the Military Museum I quickly agreed to go with him."

He stood up and put a smile on his face.

"Of course, Maria, of course. Perhaps, if the timing is right, I'll join you and our czarevich at the museum, and we'll have lunch."

Later in the morning, with snow still falling in the great courtyard of the Winter Palace, the czar boarded the royal sleigh alone. The sleigh, finished in gleaming black lacquer, bore the ornate gold crest of the Romanov family on its sides. A driver, whip in hand, and a footman sat high on a bench behind four black stallions. Ahead, on horseback, were four armed guards, resplendent in the uniforms of their special office. Four more were at the rear, and two at each side. At the czar's command, the royal entourage passed through the gates of the palace and turned down Nevsky Prospect. Orders shouted by the forward guards warned anyone on the broad white boulevard to give way.

At the Admiralty there was a meeting with the czar's ministers, and a discussion of the wisdom of Alexander's decision to form a national assembly, regardless of its limited power. Although objections were raised, the czar's will prevailed, and he signed the decree. As he prepared to leave he told a clerk to inform the captain of his guard that he wished to proceed to the Military Museum.

He had just settled into his sleigh when he noticed the snow had stopped falling. The winter sun, still low in the sky, peeked through gray clouds. "Ah," he thought, "this is a good sign. Maria and Alexeivich will be at the museum, and we'll have some refreshments."

The four guards leading the sleigh had begun to cross the bridge over the Neva River to Vasilevsky Island. A small gathering, heads bowed, stood on the walk nearby, quietly observing the passage of the procession. Someone in the back of the crowd threw a dark object into the air. It rose in a high arc and dropped onto the sleigh, exploding with a deafening roar as it landed at the czar's feet. Despite the shock and confusion the guards captured the culprit, a young student. Within hours Alexander was dead.

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The Dormition Cathedral of the Moscow Kremlin, built in the fifteenth century, was the site of all major Russian state ceremonies. It was there that, less than a month after the assassination of his father, as his grieving mother looked on, the czarevich was crowned Alexander III, Emperor of All Russia, The late czar had been handsome, charming, sophisticated, everything his son was not.

Thus began, a month or so later, the great pogrom of 1881. The order was issued from the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg and was passed through countless levels of authority to every province, every city, every village: "Avenge the death of the czar. Attack those who are not with us, or like us. Find the democrats, the socialists, the Roman Catholics, the Baptists, and especially the Jews who were missed in the last pogrom. Are we not reminded by the priests in our holy churches that they are the Christ-killers, and yet they survive? Rid Russia of the curse of their existence!"

Chapter III

Pincus Aaron Nuchamovitch liked to think he was a patient man. Now, however, he knew his patience was at an end, but he said, as calmly as he could, "Rachel, we must go, *now* !"

"I know," his wife said, "I sent Yudl for wood. He'll be here in a minute. We need a bigger fire to last through the Sabbath."

With that, the door flew open, and in staggered Yudl, a boy of twelve, carrying a load of cut logs which were covered with a light coat of snow. He pushed the door shut with one foot, hurried to the center of the room, dropped to his knees and placed the logs next to the iron stove.

He looked at his father as he brushed bits of tree bark and dead leaves from his leather coat. "I'm sorry I'm not ready, Papa, but..."

"Look what you're doing to my clean floor!" Rachel shouted.

"Enough!" roared Pincus Aaron. "Yudl, it's not your fault. Come, Elya, Yudl, let's go to the synagogue."

"Go, and in good health," said Rachel, forgiving the matter of the floor. She hugged Yudl and kissed his forehead as she steered him to the door.

Bashka, their six-year-old daughter, had observed the events of the past few minutes in silence from the safety of a corner of the room. As Pincus Aaron was about to leave with his sons he noticed her.

"Little Bashka," he said, "you'll help Mama with the dinner?" His daughter was the joy of his life.

"Yes, Papa," came the answer, in the tiniest of voices.

Pincus Aaron closed the door behind him, and the three began their walk to the synagogue, ten minutes away. At first there were only the sounds of their boots on the new snow and the movement of heavy coats and trousers. Pincus Aaron was not a small man. When he walked he took the long, confident steps of one who was respected in the community for his knowledge of Bible and Talmud. The boys had to walk quickly to keep up with their father. After a minute or two Elya spoke, his breath condensing into frosty clouds which quickly evaporated into the frigid air.

"Papa, why don't they like us?"

"Who?"

"The Russians."

"Because we're Jews!," exclaimed Yudl, in a tone deriding his younger brother's ignorance.

Pincus Aaron stopped and faced Yudl, his eyes glaring disapproval.

"This is what the rabbi teaches you? This is what *I* have taught you?"

The effort to keep his voice low seemed to emphasize the point of his question.

"To family, to friends, to strangers you are to be respectful, but you ridicule your own brother?"

To incur his father's anger was the last thing Yudl desired.

"I'm sorry, Papa," he said.

Pincus Aaron said nothing, continuing to stare at his older son. Yudl turned to Elya Zalman.

"I apologize," he said.

Their father resumed his walk, and the boys followed. Pincus Aaron was aware that he had not answered his younger son, but he was not sure how to begin. "It's a reasonable question," he thought, "and he deserves an answer."

"Elya," he said at last, "we're coming to the synagogue soon. We'll talk about it later, while we eat."

Friends and acquaintances exchanged greetings as they converged at the synagogue, a magnificent stone structure over two hundred years old.

"Good Sabbath, Reb Yacovitz."

"Good Sabbath, Reb Nuchamovitch. Good Sabbath, boys."

"Good Sabbath."

*****

Rachel had changed to her more formal Sabbath dress when her husband and sons returned. She was not an unattractive woman, small but well-proportioned. She wore the traditional wig of observant women, the brown hair tied back severely. Little Bashka, also in holiday clothes, was completing the setting of the table. Her dark hair, falling in curls around her face, was tied in back with a blue ribbon. The table was covered with a white cloth and held the separate plates, bowls and silverware reserved for meals at which meat would be served, in accordance with the ancient law followed by observant Jews. Pincus Aaron and his sons washed their hands, reciting the appropriate blessing, and sat at the table.

Just before the setting of the sun, Rachel stood before the brass candelabra which she had placed at one end of the table. It had been presented to her by her mother as a wedding gift, as it had been passed before from generation to generation. She struck a match, lit each of three candles slowly and deliberately and, shielding her eyes from their light, recited the blessing reserved for women by tradition.

Pincus Aaron poured a little sweet red wine for each member of the family, even a very little for Bashka, and chanted the Sabbath prayer which thanked God for the "fruit of the vine." Then he nodded to Yudl, who placed his hands on the loaf of egg bread before him and chanted the prayer of thanks for the miracle of "bread from the earth." Rachel served chicken soup with a ladle, and talk began about synagogue matters. As Pincus Aaron finished his soup he wiped his lips, patted his graying beard with a cloth napkin and cleared his throat.

"Elya Zalman," he said, "you asked a question while we walked to the synagogue."

Rachel gave Pincus Aaron an inquisitive glance, which he ignored.

"Yudl, you didn't speak properly but what you said was correct.. They do hate us because we're Jews. Why? Who knows? They live their way, we live our way. That what bothers them. They want us to be like them, and that we cannot do."

He glanced at Rachel. "Sometimes it seems all they want to do is drink vodka and get drunk, and then it's trouble for us. And the worst one is the czar!"

Yudl leaned forward. "Tell us about the pogrom."

He had heard of it often, but this was an opportunity to hear the details from his own father. Yudl was a serious, studious boy, as his father had been, but he had his mother's small frame and soft green eyes. Elya Zalman had his father's black hair and bright dark brown eyes, but there was something of the rebel in him when it came to his studies. He questioned everything.

Rachel distributed plates of pot-roasted beef and potatoes. "Pincus," she said, "another time, please. Don't spoil the Sabbath."

"Rachel, Yudl will be bar mitzvah next spring. He should know what he needs to know."

But the pleading in Rachel's voice was enough. He knew how painful the memory of the great pogrom was to his wife.

"Dear children," he said, "I promise I will tell you about the pogrom. But, this Sabbath, the dinner your mother has prepared is too delicious to spoil with talk of unpleasant things."

With silent gratitude for her husband's understanding, Rachel sat at the table to enjoy, as best she could, the Sabbath meal she had prepared for her family. But the memory of events which had occurred the year Yudl was born had been stirred, and would not permit her to savor the joy of this Sabbath eve.

The death of the old czar had brought a new czar. In less than a month the new regime had ordered violent attacks against Jewish communities throughout Russia. In Slonim, as in many towns and villages, homes and businesses were burned. Many were beaten, and some were killed. Rachel and Pincus Aaron and little Yudl were fortunate. They had escaped injury and damage to their home, and the synagogue of Slonim was somehow spared. In Lublin, where the pogrom was terrible, Rachel's brother-in-law was murdered and her sister was raped.

As Rachel struggled to put the memory of that time from her mind, at least for now, Bashka spoke.

"Papa?"

"Yes, Bashka?"

"I was playing with Ruthie yesterday. She told me her family is going to America, where her uncle lives. She said her mother told her there are no pogroms in America."

"Yes, little one, I know the Mendelsohns are going to America as soon as they receive money from Isaac's brother. Now, as I said, no more talk about pogroms."

While Pincus Aaron's answer to his daughter was as tender as any man's could be, his meaning was clear. The subject was dropped, and the family continued its meal discussing who had become ill, who had recovered, and other mundane matters.

Later, after the blessings following the meal had been recited, after the table had been cleared and the dishes and other tableware had been washed, dried and put away, the portion of the Sabbath eve the children loved most began, the singing of traditional songs. Rachel had a clear, sweet ringing voice, and her smile, as she sang, encouraged the others to join her.

Finally, Pincus Aaron and Rachel wished their children a peaceful Sabbath and their children responded in kind, as had been the custom since they had become a family. Then the parents retired to the one bedroom while their sons moved two cots next to the stove in the room which served as kitchen, dining room, living room and library. Bashka slept in a tiny bed in one corner of the same room.

Pincus Aaron and Rachel, sharing a bed barely large enough for them, were covered against the night's cold with a heavy wool blanket. Despite her great fatigue, Rachel decided to start a discussion.

"Pincus..."

"Well?"

"Pincus, I was thinking. You know how many Jews have left Slonim since the pogrom? Even little Bashka notices. Maybe—"

"Maybe what? Maybe we should go too?

"Yes, Pincus, maybe we should."

"Rachel, where will we go? To America, to live like Gentiles, and without English? To England, also to live like Gentiles, and also without English? To South Africa, where the English and the Dutch are fighting? We'll be blamed by both sides, believe me."

"Pincus, people are leaving. They go someplace. Wherever they go they make a living, and there are no pogroms. Here we wait for the next one."

"Rachel, my dear wife, where there are Jews, there will be a pogrom, sooner or later. My father died here, and his father died here, and here I shall die too."

"We all die sometime, Pincus, but why die in a pogrom? And what about the children? Pincus, in London you could teach in a Jewish school and I could buy and sell fish, as I do here. As far as I know, there are no pogroms in London."

"Not yet, Rachel, not yet."

"Some people go to Palestine. There they speak Yiddish, and they observe the commandments."

"Yes, Rachel, but in Palestine you have to deal with the Turks. I heard that if you want something, you have to bribe somebody. And the Turks are not so good to the Jews either."

"You know, my husband, when you don't want to do something, one reason is as good as another."

He reached for her shoulder and brought her close to him.

"Good Sabbath, my dear Rachel."

"Good Sabbath, Pincus."

*****

Next to the stove, the brothers lay on their cots. Yudl spoke in a whisper.

"Elya, is Bashka sleeping?"

Both boys listened, and heard their sister's even breathing.

"Elya," still in a whisper, "if I tell you something, you must swear never to tell anyone."

"I swear," also in a whisper.

"Elya, Papa doesn't have to tell me about the pogrom. I hear plenty from the older boys. The Russians came and killed all the Jews they could find, and the police did nothing."

"I know they don't like us, Yudl."

"Don't *like* us! They killed Uncle Simcha, the husband of Mama's sister!"

Yudl paused before going on.

"Elya, you must not tell anyone what I'm gong to tell you."

"I told you, I swear."

"I won't wait for another pogrom. When I'm a little older, at the first sign of trouble I'm going to England. They may not like Jews there either, but there's no czar, and there's no pogrom."

"Yudl! Are you crazy?"

"Keep your voice down!"

"What about Mama and Papa—and Bashka?"

"I want them to go too. Do you think I want to leave them here?"

Elya had always thought of his older brother as obedient to his father's every wish. Elya was the one who questioned everything. This new Yudl was a brother he did not know. It was frightening

Yudl whispered the last comment.

"Elya, I hear what the older boys say. Russia's no place for Jews any more. Do you know how many have left Russia? Thousands! One day, I'll go too.

The boys lay in the dark, each thinking his own thoughts. Only little Bashka's even breathing, and the occasional sputtering of the fire in the stove, broke the stillness. The fire had been stoked and banked before the sun had set, so that it would last until the following sunset. For Pincus Aaron and Rachel and their children knew what every member of their community knew, that it is commanded to live by the Law, and the Law says, in Exodus, Chapter 35, Verse 3: "You shall kindle no fire throughout your settlements on the Sabbath day."

*****

The subject of emigration was not discussed again by Yudl and Elya until, at a Sabbath eve dinner seven years later, Yudl announced to his family that, as news of a pogrom in Grodno had reached Slonim the previous week, he and two other young men had decided to leave Slonim together and travel to England. He pleaded with his parents to join him, to leave before a pogrom occurred in Slonim. He offered to delay his departure until his family was ready to travel with him. But Pincus Aaron refused even to discuss it. Rachel, in tears, begged Yudl to stay, but in vain. On a cold, rainy day the following month, Yudl packed a few items of clothing into a sack, said good-bye to a family still stunned by what was happening, and joined his companions to begin the long journey to London.

In time, Elya and Bashka would follow, but Pincus Aaron was unable to abandon the only way of life he had ever known. Rachel, who would have preferred to join her children, remained with her husband. Eventually there was another pogrom in Slonim. Many homes and businesses were burned. Pincus Aaron and Rachel were spared, but many were beaten, and some were killed.

Chapter IV

Beryl Slomovitz was a skilled cabinet-maker. His father and grandfather had been lumber merchants, and had prospered. Young Beryl, however, preferred to create furniture out of the raw material in which his forbears had traded, and he did it well. As the years passed his business grew, until he occupied a large shop and employed seven men, including two apprentices. His was not the largest furniture factory in Grodno District, but people said no one made better furniture than Beryl Slomovitz. He was a generous supporter of the synagogue of Slonim, a student of Bible and Talmud, and a friend of Pincus Aaron Nuchamovich.

It was on the basis of that friendship that Pincus Aaron approached Beryl one afternoon concerning his son, Elya Zalman. The two men had just completed a discussion of a certain tractate of the Talmud with Rabbi Benjamin Eliezer. They were seated at a table in the rabbi's study, a small room off the sanctuary of the synagogue. The walls of the room were lined with books, and more books almost covered the table, leaving just enough space for glasses of tea and little plates containing honey cakes. A silver samovar was on a nearby shelf. It was late afternoon, not yet dark enough to light the kerosene lamp which hung from the ceiling.

"Rabbi," said Beryl, "this was a challenging question of law, although I'm not sure I agree with Nachmanides' conclusion."

Rabbi Eliezer squinted at Beryl through his spectacles. Lines at the corners of his eyes signaled that his reply might have a touch of humor, which was often his style. He had traveled to Slonim many years earlier after study and ordination in Vilna, a center of Jewish scholarship in Europe, and in Slonim he had remained with his wife, to raise a family and lead a congregation which had come to love and respect him.

"Well," the rabbi said, "you are not the first to question something in the tradition. As long as it leads to more study it's a good thing. I think, Beryl, you've heard me say that more than once."

A smile broke through his black beard.

"And now, gentlemen," he said, "please excuse me, but my wife is waiting. As you know, we are planning our daughter's wedding. The mother of the bride is in charge, of course, but I'm required to make an appearance."

Beryl and Pincus Aaron rose and shook the hand of their rabbi, and remained standing as he left the room.

"Pincus," Beryl said, "I'll make the building secure. I have a key."

"Beryl, please give me a moment. There is something I wish to discuss."

"Of course, my friend," said Beryl. He placed his small, rotund body back in his chair. Pincus Aaron also resumed his seat.

"Beryl, I wish to talk to you about my son, Elya Zalman."

"Is he in trouble?"

"No, thank God, nothing like that!"

"Then tell me, please."

"Beryl, he has little interest in religious studies, but he's a bright boy, and he's good with his hands."

Beryl Slomovitz removed a kerchief from his pocket and wiped his brow and balding head. Now he knew what was coming, but he waited.

"I was thinking, Beryl, that perhaps, considering your great success, you might need a clever, hard-working apprentice."

"How old is he, Pincus?" He knew the boy, of course, including his age.

"Sixteen."

Beryl hesitated just enough to suggest he was considering the matter. Then he said, "Send him to me, Pincus. Your son is welcome in my shop."

Both men stood up, and Pincus Aaron offered his hand.

"Thank you, Beryl. You're a good friend. You will not regret your decision."

They shook hands, then walked through the sanctuary, and entered the darkening street. Beryl locked the heavy doors, and the men prepared to go their separate ways.

"A good evening to you, Pincus Aaron."

"The same to you, Beryl, the same to you, and thank you."

"You're welcome."

*****

Spring came early and quite suddenly to Slonim the year the century ended. Layers of snow and ice soon turned to little streams and pools of dirty water. Roads became lakes of mud in which heavily laden wagons became mired as horses and men struggled to move them. Refuse and waste, long frozen, were exposed, attracting insects and rodents under the premature sun. Residents of Slonim and other towns and villages in Grodno District welcomed the end of the long winter, although they realized a return of the cold, perhaps one last snowstorm, could still occur

But winter did not return, and the people at the shop owned by Beryl Slomovitz opened doors and windows. Their work, creating furniture by hand out of timber cut from nearby forests, left the earthen floor covered with sawdust. The old wooden structure smelled of oil and lacquer. The opportunity to bring fresh air into the building was welcome.

The setting sun cast long shadows across the landscape as workers began to end their labors by sweeping sawdust into neat mounds, then scooping it into huge containers. Small scraps of wood were placed in storage. Perhaps some use for them would appear one day. Saws and hammers were hung on hooks. Large tins of glue were sealed, and brushes were washed and placed to dry.

As he removed his heavy cloth apron, Moshe Berman spoke in a soft voice to his fellow apprentice, Elya Zalman Nuchamovich.

"Elya, will you come to the meeting tonight?"

"I think so. Where did you say it will be?"

"Take the road to the east, two kilometers into the forest. You'll come to a path on the right. Follow that until you reach a small clearing. That's where we'll be."

"The police know nothing of this?"

"Nothing. We post a lookout on the road, in case they happen to pass."

"I'll do my best."

"Elya, not a word to anyone, not even your family!"

"I understand."

*****

Although the Jews of Russia were the principal targets of oppression after the assassination of Alexander II, other elements of Russian society also felt the blows of the czar's authority. The National Will, an underground organization dedicated to the violent overthrow of the regime, had produced the student who had killed the previous czar. But Jewish membership in The National Will was rare because Jewish membership was not usually sought. Whatever form the new utopian society would take, there would not be much room for Jews in its leadership.

Hibat Ziyon was not quite an underground organization, but neither was it "approved." Its meetings were arranged to avoid police detection. Its members were Jews who felt there was no future for them in Russia. Emigration to a better place, preferably Palestine, was their goal. In Russia, or wherever they might eventually settle, socialism would be the ultimate solution to society's problems, and so it would be to theirs.

It was to his first Hibat Ziyon meeting in the forest near Slonim that Elya Zalman went that early spring evening. He went again, and again, until, in the summer of that year, he went to his last, and fateful, meeting.

*****

A light summer rain had left the sky clear, except for a few high clouds in the east which were now turning orange in the light of the setting sun. All the workers at Beryl Slomovitz's shop had left except Elya Zalman, who had remained to speak to his employer. Beryl was seated at a wooden table which served as his desk, in a corner of the shop. He was considering whether to light a lamp or take his accounts home, where he could review them after his dinner, when Elya Zalman approached.

"Reb Slomovitz."

Elya was standing, as always when addressing his employer. Beryl looked up at his apprentice.

"May I speak to you?"

"Of course, Elya."

"Reb Slomovitz, I have now been with you for a year."

"So you have."

"Do you approve of my work?"

Beryl Slomovitz began to wonder what Elya Zalman had in mind.

"Of course, of course. Your work is excellent, as I've told you. You have learned much, Elya Zalman."

"Well, then, as I have been with you for a year, and as you approve of my work, I thought that, based on our understanding, I could now be paid."

Beryl leaned back in his chair and released the ledgers he held in his hands. If this was to be a discussion of his worker's wages, he'd rather deal with it in the morning.

"Elya Zalman," he said, "tomorrow we'll discuss your pay, how much, and when it will begin."

Elya, still standing, did not reply immediately. He had a sense of confusion and alarm. After a moment he spoke.

"Reb Slomovitz," he said, "of course we can discuss my wages for the coming year tomorrow. But I was referring to my wages for the *past* year."

The eyes of Beryl Slomovitz opened wide. He was not sure he believed what he had just heard, so he asked.

"Did you say, 'for the *past* year?'"

"Yes, as we discussed when I first came to you."

Now Beryl had a sense of alarm.

"Elya Zalman," he said, "I think we have an unfortunate misunderstanding. You have learned a great deal in the year you have been with me. You have become a craftsman, a maker of furniture and cabinets, from design to cutting the wood to finishing. *That* is your payment."

"What?!"

"Elya Zalman, you've learned to become a fine cabinet-maker. This is the reward for your work during the past year. This is what it means to be an apprentice."

Beryl hoped this would settle the matter, but when Elya Zalman replied he knew better.

"Reb Slomovitz," said Elya, "our understanding was not as you describe it."

He felt anger rising in his body. "You have an honored seat in the synagogue, and you are a friend of my father. I am very disappointed."

Beryl stood up. "Young man," he said, "be careful how you speak to those older and wiser than you."

Elya Zalman's dark eyes were flashing with hostility. "Reb Slomovitz," he said, in a voice which did not conceal his contempt, "you will no longer have to suffer the sound of my voice!"

He turned and walked out of the shop, leaving Beryl Slomovitz standing in shocked silence.

*****

As Elya walked from Beryl's shop to his home he felt his anger slowly change to anxiety. How could so much change so quickly, he wondered, and how would his father react to what had just happened? This, he thought, would not be a pleasant evening.

Rachel was preparing the evening meal when he arrived. Pincus Aaron was seated at the family table. He looked up as Elya entered the house.

"Elya Zalman," Pincus Aaron said, "today we received a letter from Yudl.. I just read it to your mother. I'll read it to you."

"Where is Bashka?" Elya was surprised by the casual tone of his voice, despite the churning sensation in his stomach.

"She's next door, with Naomi," his mother said.

"Sit down," said Pincus, "and listen to your brother's letter."

On the table, at Pincus Aaron's left, was an envelope, addressed to the Nuchamovich family in English and in Russian. In Pincus Aaron's hands was Yudl's letter. He began to read.

"My dear family, I hope you are all well, and that everything is calm in Slonim. Here in London I am well, thank God. I am a plumber. I work with pipes that carry water and gas. I work long hours but the pay is good. I now have a rented room to myself with a Jewish family in the East End, in Bleeker Street. They are very good to me and help me learn English. Please notice the new address when you reply. There are many Jewish people in this part of London. Most of them came from Russia and Poland, so on the streets one hears Yiddish spoken by people walking, and in the shops. My boss, Mr. Elterman, is a Jewish man who employs Jews, Englishmen and Irishmen. Usually we get along because Mr. Elterman is a good boss and no one wants to lose his job. I want you to know I miss you but I have a good life here. I only need all of you, my mother, my father, my brother and my sister, to make my life complete. Your loving son, Yudl."

"Thank you, Papa," said Elya. "May I see the letter? I'd like to see what my brother says in his own hand."

As Pincus handed the letter to his son, Bashka entered. Now a girl in her adolescence, she had begun to acquire the shape and curves of a young woman. The black curls still framed her face, and, like Elya, she had her father's dark, flashing eyes.

"My sister," said Elya, "You are just in time. Papa has read Yudl's latest letter to me, and I'll do the same for you."

He had decided that the longer he could delay the matter of his conversation with Beryl Slomovitz, the better. When he had finished reading, Bashka spoke.

"Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could visit Yudl?"

"Wonderful?" Pincus asked. "Yes, a lot of things would be wonderful, Bashka, but it would cost more money than we have, although, come to think of it, Elya will soon be bringing in wages. Correct, Elya?"

Elya's heart skipped a beat. Now it couldn't be avoided. He swallowed hard.

"Papa, I have to tell you about a conversation I had with Reb Slomovitz today."

The tone of his voice revealed panic. Rachel placed a bowl of food on her kitchen shelf and joined the others at the table, wiping her hands on a small towel.

"Well," said Pincus Aaron, "tell us about your conversation."

"Papa," Elya said, "do you remember the arrangement with Reb Slomovitz when I first went to see him?" His voice was now a little stronger and more confident.

"I was not there," Pincus said. "I told you to see him, and you went alone."

"Papa, I remember. I was to work for Reb Slomovitz for a year, and then I would be paid for the work I had done. Today he said I would not be paid, that to learn to be a cabinet maker is payment enough."

"Well?"

"I told him that was not our original understanding. He became angry, and so did I. Now I cannot go back."

Pincus Aaron leaped to his feet. The rage and frustration building in him exploded as he shouted his son's name.

"Elya Zalman Nuchamovich," he roared, "did you insult my friend, a man old enough to be your father?!"

Rachel felt panic. She had lost one son to the threat of a pogrom. Would her husband drive her second son away?

"Pincus!" she said, in a voice rare for its tone and volume. "Listen to the boy! You are talking to your son!"

Pincus Aaron saw the firm lines in the face of his wife, her green eyes locked with his. Bashka, seated next to her brother, had placed her hand on Elya Zalman's arm. Against one or the other he would have held his ground. Against both, he drew a deep breath, let it out slowly and sat down.

"Alright, Rachel, alright. Now, Elya, please explain. We will handle this as a family."

The lines in Rachel's face relaxed. Her eyes softened and turned to her son. Elya stared at the table.

"Papa, I remember it well. Perhaps Reb Slomovitz has forgotten. Perhaps he has chosen to forget. I lost my temper, I know. That is not unknown in this family." He shot a quick glance at his father. "Now it's impossible for me to work for him."

"Elya, there will be other opportunities to practice your skill, now that you have one. But I want to talk to you about other things, as long as this has happened."

Elya was relieved to see this new, patient aspect of his father.

"Papa," he said, "what other things?" He tried to act as if this conversation were as normal, as casual, as countless conversations he'd had with his father since he was a child.

"Look," said Pincus Aaron, "the study of the Law, of Bible and Talmud do not interest you. We've talked about it before. Elya Zalman is Elya Zalman, and you will not be a religious scholar. But, my son, these meetings you go to, the crazy ideas of Hibat Ziyon, it will lead you nowhere."

"You know about it?!" Elya was astonished.

"Elya Zalman, you think it's such a secret? You think everyone doesn't know? . Forget that nonsense about socialism and Palestine. Maybe that's why you had the argument with Slomovitz. When I was a boy there were crazy ideas too. As I got older I realized the world doesn't change much."

Elya looked at Bashka. Her hand was still on his arm. He placed his hand on hers.

"What do think, my sister?"

"I think you should listen to Papa."

Rachel stood up. "I need to finish making supper. Bashka, give me a hand, please."

Bashka squeezed Elya's arm and joined her mother. She needed to see peace between her father and her brother because she loved them both.

Elya Zalman faced his father. Now that the subject had been opened, he decided to speak his mind.

"Papa," he said, "I hope I will not offend you. You are a good father and a good husband. I know that comes from our tradition. Perhaps, when you were young, you also thought the world was changing, and then you discovered it was really the same, after all. But because the world didn't change in the past doesn't mean it will *never* change. Now steamships cross the oceans, steam trains cross Europe and America. Yudl has written about underground electric trains in London. He has been a passenger on such a train! Who can imagine the world of the future? For me, there is more to life than studying old books."

That last comment, Elya knew, was getting dangerously close to forbidden territory. Rachel, who had heard every word, waited for her husband's reaction with apprehension.

Struggling to control his temper, Pincus Aaron lowered his voice and responded.

"Tell me, my knowledgeable son," he said, "in the coming world of socialism and science, what will happen to God? Will He change too?"

Elya Zalman hesitated to venture too far into the unknown.

"I don't have an answer, Papa." Then he decided to take another step.

"Tell me, Papa, where was God during the pogrom that killed Uncle Simcha?"

"Aha!" said Pincus Aaron, "You think you're the first one to ask that question? Why do you think we study with the rabbi? God is the ultimate wisdom, a mystery. That is why we search for answers all our lives. And in searching, we find a little wisdom. You would make a good student, Elya Zalman."

"Thank you, Papa," said Elya. "Has Reb Slomovitz found wisdom too?"

Pincus Aaron stood up, his anger rising again. Before he could speak Rachel and Bashka brought food to the table Rachel held up one hand, a signal to her husband to let her speak.

"My two philosophers," she said, "before you wash your hands and recite the blessings, let me say something. I know nothing of socialism and science. I am a plain Jewish wife and mother. God tells me what is right, and what is wrong. That is enough for me. I hope, Elya Zalman, you find what you are looking for. As for your meetings, if, God forbid, the secret police should find you there, only God himself will be able to help you."

*****

That evening, a short time after dinner was over, Elya Zalman left his family to attend another meeting of Hibat Ziyon in the forest. At the hour when he usually returned, there was a knock at the door of the Nuchamovitch home. Pincus Aaron called out.

"Who is there?"

"Mendel. Mendel Abramovitz."

Pincus went to the door and opened it. A thin, teen-age boy stood there.

"Good evening Mendel. Come in, please."

The boy entered, remaining close to the door as Pincus Aaron closed it. He began to speak quickly, in a hushed voice.

"Reb Nuchamovitch, I've come to tell you Elya Zalman won't be home tonight."

Rachel, who had joined her husband at the door, uttered a sharp gasp.

"What else can you tell me, Mendel?"

"The police knew about the meeting, the meeting of Hibat Ziyon. When they arrived, everyone scattered into the forest. They knew the names, they called out the names, but everyone escaped. Under the circumstances, Elya Zalman—and the others—cannot return to Slonim tonight."

Rachel sank into a chair and placed her head in her hands; quietly crying.

"Mendel," asked Pincus, "how do you know this?"

"My brother, he was there, he told me. He came to the back of our house, and then he ran away."

*****

The morning after the police raided the meeting of Hibat Ziyon, Pincus Aaron Nuchamovitch was arrested. He was questioned for two days and then released, having convinced the police that he had no knowledge of his son's whereabouts.

Elya Zalman Nuchamovitch did not return to his home that night, or any other night. As he fled from the secret police, first through Grodno District, then through White Russia, he formed a decision to join his brother in London. He never saw his parents again.