

The curtain was drawn with a metallic creak, the worn white door swung open, and all at once the organ boomed, droning through my belly to the core. The organ is good later, too, once it's been going a while, but when it suddenly comes awake from the silence, there's nothing like that.

A dusty, musty smell. A mood of velvet and patent-leather shoes. A dirty yellow wall, a rotting floor, a dusty chandelier. The pages of the prayer book are crumbling; paper flutters about in the air. Weeping old ladies. Old men in hats. Kids can't run about. Not even I got breakfast. It's not allowed during Yom Kippur. That's when God writes you into the Book of Life. Those he doesn't write into the Book, those people will die. Maybe they'll live another few months yet, but they'll die for sure by the next Yom Kippur. Like Old Miss Mici. Cancer took her, said Grandmother. Grandmother says things like that. That her warm heart ruined her, and her mind left her, and that trousers drove her crazy. She says this stuff mostly about Miss Mara, Mother's friend, who is always

going after trousers. According to Grandmother, this means that if she sees a man, her mind comes undone.

The organ booms, the door flies open, and behind the door it's like the starry sky, but even more beautiful. Everything is blue and gold. Then they take out the Torah, which has beautiful golden lions on it, and Father helps put it down. Father is wearing a big, black, high cap, whose prettiest part is its fringes. It's made of thin silk threads we're not allowed to touch. But I know it's soft and nice to stroke. Father's black outfit reaches the floor, but if I crouch down, I can see his pants. They hang out just a little, so other folks must not even notice. All day long Father stands there in front of the Torah closet, singing. Everyone is watching him. Too bad I can't talk about this in school.

"My child had an upset stomach." That's what Mother writes in my report book. The same thing Grandmother wrote for her when Mother went to school. At such times the Jews don't go to work, and mainly they don't eat. Grandmother says this is serious. Back *then*, she didn't eat a bite. She went to work, because that was mandatory, but she didn't eat. She too always said she had an upset stomach. In my class, 1/b, three kids probably had bad bellies today. Fehér, Váradi, and I. Because Mother said they, too, are Jewish. But she also told me not to bother about that, because they're not *that* sort of Jew. What sort? The observing sort. They're not afraid about being left out of the Book of Life. I'm scared.

Grandmother and us have been going on for days now about the sins we've committed and asking forgiveness for them. We've been

pounding our chests with our fists. Not that I remember rejoicing over the troubles of my fellow man or making false oaths. But it's true that I did covet the possessions of others. Kelemen's pink dolls and that camper she got from America, I really did covet those. A lot. And it's also true that I'm sometimes a pigheaded schmuck. But according to Grandmother, this isn't even such a problem, and that I can be certain of being written into the Book of Life. She's not so sure about herself, anymore. Not as if she'd done a lot of bad stuff, but because at her age, you can never tell. And when that happens, Mother will go off and cry somewhere where no one will see her. Grandmother says Mother will cry for her return, for Grandmother, who sacrificed her life for Mother, but by then it'll be too late. I ask God to write everyone into the Book of Life: my dear mother, my dear father, my dear grandmother, and my dear Dodó. He isn't here, now. Dodó is my *other* father. I've got to call him my stepfather, but that's a rotten word. I'm the one who nicknamed him *Dodó*, but by now even Mother and Grandmother call him only that.

The chandeliers are beautiful. Too bad they're so dirty. And those closets in the benches. They're never washed. But church is like home. Father says this is because at Catholic churches it's dead quiet, while at our church, the synagogue, everyone is jabbering away, because when we go to church, we're going home. Okay, but then why don't they clean it up? Someone tell me that! Mother puts a finger to her lips. I'm not allowed to talk, only whisper. Pretty boring if you ask me. Never have I seen so many fat ladies. They've got huge bosoms. Big heads, too. That's all I can see of them. "Piano legs!" Father would say with a

wave of the hand. Good thing Mother's not so fat and doesn't have piano legs. And she has a shawl, thank God, and doesn't have a hat as huge as Miss Mimi's. Miss Mimi is as big as a mountain. She has the hugest hat in church. Purple this year. And the littlest husband. But her husband doesn't come, because he goes to another church. He's not the same sort of Jew as us. But he's not even the sort that Fehér and Váradi are. No, he goes to a church where there's no organ.

“Mother, why is it good for them not to have an organ?”

Mother again puts a finger to her lips, and whispers that she'll tell me at home. But at least she gives me her handbag. Other times I'm never allowed to rummage through it. And how I love her eyeliner! It's like the police car in my box of paints: blue. Teeny-weeny. You can't draw with it, but you *can* look at it all over and pull off its top. Mother's handbag has lipstick in it, too; a little smelly, but that's all that the Poles sell at the flea-market. Grandmother says it's gone bad. Back when she was a girl, lipstick had a different smell. But what sort, she doesn't say. Maybe like toilet water. Clean and fresh, like what real ladies use, and not as syrupy-sweet and seductive as Miss Mara's. That's not proper.

*Yade, yaaaade, yaaaaaaade, yaaaaaaade.* Everyone is singing. I am, too. This song has a really nice melody. Father notices me looking at him. He motions for me to go up to him. Mother smiles and gives me a nudge to go ahead. I'm scared. But then this older gentleman comes down to get me and takes me up. Father points about. He doesn't say a thing. He's just singing. The gentleman sits me down at the organ beside Era. Era really knows her stuff. Her hands are moving and so are her

legs, and the organ sings. Like in that storybook I have at home about musical instruments. The organ really is the queen of all instruments. It has little blue buttons all over it, and Era is always pulling one out or pushing one back in. They have gold edges. If only I had a button like that! I'd add it to my collection of silver five-forint coins, which I get from Miss Mimi for my birthday. Or not. Instead I'd put it in that red wallet I never take with me anywhere, so it won't get lost. Because it's so pretty. Era says that when she gives a big nod, I can pull out one of the buttons. And in no time she does nod, and I pull out a button, and that huge organ gives a completely different sound. And she nods again, and I push the button back. I, from class 1/b, am here playing the organ! If only the others could see! But they don't see, and I can't tell them, either, because I'm supposed to have a tummyache right now.

The Ten Commandments say not to lie. And I even swore to never tell a lie. And if you do lie, you're supposed to ask forgiveness for your sin. Before Yom Kippur. But if you lie on Yom Kippur, when are you supposed to ask forgiveness then? Now, or next year at Yom Kippur? When you're six years old, you don't know the answers to questions like this. How good it would be if I was big already! I'd have red fingernails, and I'd paint my eyelashes. Like at carnival time. Gabriella wanted to be a fairy, Annette wanted to be a lion, and I wanted to be a grown-up woman. Mother painted on my make-up, and I had a purse, a real purse. That's not all. I had gloves up to my elbows, and Mother even put false eyelashes on me. But no one saw it, because they had us nursery school

kids go single-file across the cultural center's stage so fast that not even the picture worked out.

I have to pee. Era gives a wave of her hand. An older gentleman in a hat comes to get me. His hands are warm and smell like they've never been dusted. He takes me over to Mother. She takes me to pee. The hallway is smelly and cold. "Musty," says Mother.

Mother's hair is coal-black, her dress is red, and she has a little gold cat on her neck. She always has folded-up toilet paper with her that you can put on the seat if you want, but you shouldn't sit there even so. Of course I wouldn't want to, anyway. It's cold in here, cold and grimy. "Come along, dear," says Mother, "I'll take you home for lunch." I want to stay, but Mother doesn't want to hear of it. "A growing young person must eat! And anyway, they're going to do the Yiskor." That means the grown-ups will pray for their dead parents, and then the children, except for orphans, must leave. "Come along, now. We'll return in the afternoon for the Neilah." Mother scruffs up my hair. By then, she explains, even the grown-ups will be in a better mood, because they'll be able to eat before long. Supper will be just around the corner. At home that evening, Grandmother is waiting for us with cocoa-flavored brioches—no, not the same as regular pound cake, and not like the sort of brioche you get on birthdays. Grandmother calls them milky, and she uses a kitchen cloth to roll them up. The long, narrow brioches are spread all over the place inside the oven, and cracks form on their tops. Every year Grandmother gripes that this year they didn't hold together like last year. But there never was a last year when they did hold

together. Not as if it matters. That's just how Yom Kippur brioches are. The chocolate flows through every slice, like in cocoa spiral-rolls. We even get whipped cream on the cocoa, as if this was a birthday party. "After fasting all day you shouldn't burden your belly with anything else, anyway," says Grandmother. Her mother always baked milky brioches, too. In her husband's family—meaning my grandfather, whom I didn't know—they made cocoa spiral-rolls to mark the passing of the holiday. But Grandmother refused to give in to fashion. For all she cared, her mother-in-law—who, by the way, was a wonderful woman—could feel free keep up with the times by making cocoa spiral-rolls, but Grandmother, she didn't eat of *that*.

"So we're going away," says Grandmother, and Dodó takes the big checkered suitcase down from the top of the closet in the foyer.

"Every year we take it down, and then I put it back up. Why all this junk, ma'am?"

"You can never know, dear Dodó," says Grandmother, and then goes about unpacking the suitcase in Mother's room. Inside is Mother's sequined semi-evening dress. "For afternoon tea," says Grandmother, and throws the dress on the armchair. By now, afternoon teas are ancient history. As for her dress that glittered of gold, she picks it right up and holds it against herself.

"Gold lamé." Grandmother looks at me and waits for my reaction. She keeps moving the dress about slightly this way and that in front of her to check if she's outgrown its waist. She has.

“Is that what you wore to balls?” I finally manage to ask, because all the stories Grandmother has told me about balls outdo fairytales and folktales too. Who cares about all those tales when Grandmother can talk on and on about tall military officers, dapper doctors, die-cast attorneys, and neat young ladies, not to mention lawyers’ and doctors’ balls, dazzling dance floors, taffeta-woven evening dresses, huge chandeliers, dancing that lasted until the wee hours, and those girls who just sat there twiddling their thumbs because they never got asked to dance? Yes, grandmother’s stories about girls being escorted to dances by their duennas back in her days were a whole lot more interesting than when she tried teaching me all about art and culture and stuff.

Dodó finally gets the Skoda started, and we all breathe easy that he didn’t have to crank it up. Grandmother begins listing everything that’s got to be done while she and I are away in the hills at that retreat owned by the state-run foreign trade association, which a girlfriend of hers got her a pass to, on account of us not being in foreign trade. Dodó has got to swear to turn off the gas every evening in the foyer, she tells him, yes, he simply mustn’t forget that, that would be really dangerous, all it takes is just a little leak plus a single spark, and the whole thing will *plotz*.<sup>1</sup> She’s heard of such things more than once. Dodó doesn’t want to swear to anything. That’s childish, he says, besides, it’s against his beliefs. But he does promise to shut off the gas every night with the big wrench, and to open it up every morning, if that’ll calm down Grandmother. But he respectfully asks her to be satisfied with that.

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<sup>1</sup> *Plotz* (Yiddish): burst



Zümi, one room over, can eat three cheese scones a day. True, Zümi is nine years old.

At that retreat up in the tiny village of Dobokő nestled in the hills north of the city, Zümi and I sit around all day long out back at the edge of the woods, on the swing, which is our airplane, and we make up all sorts of stories. In every story, someone is killed, and we always figure out who did it. Zümi says, Let's pretend a wife kills her husband, because he was going at her all the time, and she can't take it any more. Men attack women in bed when they want to make kids. Because on TV, when a guy and a gal make a kid, the guy always strokes the gal's breast. Obviously it's because that hurts her, and so it won't hurt so much. The only thing I don't get is why women in movies always seem so surprised when they then announce that they're going to have a kid. Did they forget the time they were in all that pain?

We have a really nice room up in the hills. Our window looks out on two huge pines. You can see them at night, too, especially in the moonlight. Grandmother is already asleep. I look out at those sky-high trees and say my evening prayer, and I mention Dodó, too.

*My dear Lord, my good Lord, my eyes are closing but yours stay open. Father in Heaven, watch over me as I sleep. Watch over my mother, watch over my father, watch over my grandmother, and watch over my Dodó.*

On Saturday, Mother arrives in her nylon pantsuit, the one with the fishnet legs. Everyone just about faints—Grandmother, from being surprised that they got there early. Grandmother hurries off right away to ask the retreat's woman caretaker to see to it that Mother and Dodó get supper, too. Grandmother always did get along well with everyone. Here

at the retreat, she always sits down to have a coffee at noon with the caretaker lady. So she knows that the caretaker's kids live on those tall housing projects on the outskirts of Budapest, and that the caretaker lady hardly ever sees them, because her kids are always working. And that she left her drunkard of a husband. Smoking is the one bad habit she can't kick, but why, and for who? According to Grandmother, it's good to be on good terms with such simple folk. Just look at this lady, she says, look at how decent she is, not to mention that she's grateful that someone like Grandmother stops to shmooze with her. Not like the others folks staying here, no, look at them looking all *ongehblozzen*<sup>2</sup>, holding their noses up high, just because they work in foreign trade and get to stay at this retreat.

Suppertime comes—for Mother and Dodó, too, just like Grandmother asked—and half the folks in the dining room just about fall off their seats on seeing Mother in her fishnet nylon pantsuit. We have Miss Katrin off in America to thank for that. Lucky for us. Yes, Miss Katrin sends amazing packages. Anyway, there in the dining room Mother is really lovely, and she's extra proud of being my mother, too. She likes being that ever laughing mother with long black hair.

Mother sits in the dining room by the window next to a red, embroidered curtain that looks exactly like the cloth on Miss Erzsi's desk up on that platform in our classroom in first grade. That's where us kids had to read out loud from storybooks, yes, at that table. The truth is, that piece of cloth on her desk was too thick to be a tablecloth, and it

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<sup>2</sup> *Ongehblozzen* (Yiddish): conceited, stuffy, proud

wasn't pretty enough to be an ornamental cloth. "It's just a runner," said Grandmother at home. Miss Erzsi was a fool, but I didn't tell her. She didn't let me flow the words together while reading, no, I had to enunciate the syllables loud and clear like everyone else. But you couldn't get angry at her. After all, she didn't even know that you shouldn't put just any old cloth on a desk.

Mother arrived at the retreat only yesterday, and already everyone knows she's here. And when she comes down to breakfast in the morning with short, spiky hair, this time the rest of the folks nearly drop right out of their seats.

"Why did you cut your hair?" they asked.

"You had such lovely, natural curls!" come the words from a mouth that's chomping away.

Mother chuckles, but she doesn't say a word. That morning I tell Zümi the truth, which is that Mother is wearing a super-short wig she got from America. He doesn't believe it. He says that sometimes people do wear artificial things, but then that person doesn't have the real thing. Like a glass eye or dentures. You either have the real thing or not, but you can't have both in one place. So if I'm telling the truth, then my Mother is bald.

I'm afraid. That morning Mother gave me that look which meant it's a secret. What if it turns out I gave it away? Will she cry or shout? The worst thing would be if she says I let her down. I keep kicking at the pebbles in the yard until I finally confess to Mother that I gave away her secret. Mother only laughs. She calls over Zümi and tells him to pull her

hair, as hard as he can. Zümi pulls. Mother urges him on, saying to pull more, with a really strong grip! Zümi gives such a yank that the wig comes right off in his hand. He's so scared he chucks it away like that, as if he caught a fish. Mother's long hair falls to her shoulders. She shakes her head and laughs. All of that wavy hair on her shoulders—which she must have taken care pinning up with those fat, prickly pins before heading out of her room—is ruffled, but it *is* there.

Mother and Dodó go home. The weekend is over. That's when Father arrives. He comes by car—his first ever car. A Moskvich. Brand new. I never sat in a new car before. Our Skoda is exactly two times as old as me. It's smelly, and we have to stop all the time, or else I'll throw up. Well, this Moskvich is gorgeous. Father takes me for an outing. He tells me to get ready to hold on tight. He'll show me what a car like this can do! But first I should tell my grandmother that we'll be back only after lunch, because I'm having lunch with him. Grandmother isn't happy about that. She tells me that a fresh driver's license is dangerous, and tells Father not to drive fast, and that lunch is out of the question, she isn't into stealing *gelt*<sup>3</sup>, but our lunch here is paid for already. Father is in a bad mood. He lets me beep the horn, but he isn't laughing anymore. He says he'll teach me to switch gears, but I'm afraid. What if I mess it up? If only it were done already! I want to go home. I don't say a thing; I take big breaths. The road is twisty. Father doesn't ask if we should stop. It's not throwing up that I'm afraid of, but throwing up all over his nice new car. But if Father had asked me, I would have said to

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<sup>3</sup> *Gelt* (Yiddish): money

get a red car. But he never asks me anything. Mother says that's because what is Father's is not mine. If I have to throw up, I'm not going to open my mouth. Heck no. And if the whole thing goes back down, then ... then I'll never again kick off the tip of my shoe when kicking pebbles around.

Poor Father. He came to visit me, and I'm as tongue-tied as a fish. I can't help it. My belly is up in my throat, and my tongue must be all white. And I don't want to switch gears, either, though Father really wants me to. That's so boyish. First gear is easy enough, but how to edge forward and then back up? Father's already told me three times that it's all written on the lever, but I mix it up all the same. He shouts that every grinding sound is a broken gear, so I'd do well to pay attention once and for all before making a total wreck of his new car. Instead of making faces, he says, I should be grateful that he's teaching me to drive. What can I do? I'm clumsy. I always let him down. I do try. But not enough? I won't cry, no way. That's so girlish.

Father is in a bad mood when he says bye. He's right. I behaved terribly. So Grandmother won't notice, I cry in the bathroom. If she saw me cry, she wouldn't let me go next time.

I did keep from throwing up, though.

It's good being on vacation with Grandmother. It's good up there in that pretty little village high up in the woods, Dobogókő. The retreat smells of drenched, rotting leaves and hot salt-scones. Grandmother spends lots of time sitting on the terrace of the retreat surrounded by books and

crosswords or, says Grandmother, shmoozing it up with a widow who has seen better days—you can tell a lady from a mile away, she adds. While she is sitting there on the terrace, I can always find some kid whose family is going for a hike in the woods and hook up with them, or someone willing to pretend that the swing is an airplane, that the Ping-Pong table is a boulder, and that I'm an Indian. The cheese scones in the snack bar across from the retreat are always so fresh and hot you could pull them right apart, and if I held one under my nose the smell would go right through to the nape of my neck. But the whole hill we're on is good, too. And this wood cabin we're in. It belongs to the foreign trade association, and we can go there for next to nothing. The wall is made of thick logs, and the whole cabin is just one room. I can sleep there together with Grandmother. In the morning the sun shines right on my bed. The best thing is when Grandmother knits clothes for Bimbi, my doll. It used to be that I didn't even know that Grandmother could knit. I thought she could only sew. Mother said that when they were really poor after the war, all she had was a light-blue, knit coat, and that's it. One evening Grandmother sewed on these big, dark-blue buttons so it would be a knit coat the next day, and the next evening she cut off the buttons and sewed the whole thing together and, simple as that, she had a sweater. Then she started from scratch. I already know how to sew buttons, too, but I still can't knit. Grandmother knits even a cap for Bimbi. It even has a string you can tie under the chin in case of wind. I'd better not lose it.

At night we listen to the radio. Grandmother lays in bed and turns the radio to get rid of the static.

“I really could use something to eat,” I say. “Something salty and hot.” Grandmother gets up and cooks soup—out of Vegeta<sup>4</sup>—on the hot plate. She doesn’t say it’s awful, and that it’s not nutritious enough, and that it’s late already. I can drink the soup in bed from the cocoa mug. It’s salty and hot. The cabin smells of dust. You can’t even smell that sourness Grandmother calls musty. Still intact bits of Vegeta in my soup crackle between my teeth. It’s good being on vacation!

But being at camp is terrible. It’s the worst thing that ever happened to me.

Father says to Mother that it’s not normal for a seven-year-old kid not to climb off her mother’s and grandmother’s necks. I need a bit of independence, and he’ll see to it that I get it. Let him handle it. I can go to a children’s camp, one where I’ll be alone with lots of kids, and there I can show everyone just how independent I am.

I should tell him that I *don’t* want to show this to everyone, and that I don’t want to be alone with lots of kids at all. I should just say it.

Grandmother thinks I’m already asleep. I hear her complaining about Köves. When she’s angry, she calls Father by his family name. Dodó says he has an opinion on the matter, but he won’t get involved in this.

Mother and Father are fighting. I can hear it. Mother takes the phone into the bathroom, but I can hear everything. Grandmother has

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<sup>4</sup> A salty powder popular in Hungary and environs, typically used as a soup flavoring.

turned off the radio. She must be listening in. I stand behind the foyer closet. All I can hear is the squeaking of the tram outside as it makes a turn, and Mother. She says she won't let me go to camp. She'll prevent it. Father should get it through his *kup*<sup>5</sup> that I'm still little, and he shouldn't expect more of me than I have in me. Maybe next year, or the one after that. I sigh with relief. I'll get out of this, I will. I must.

Outside it's hot. The hallway is cool and empty. There are no office hours in the afternoon. But we're there paying our own way. That means Father will pay the psychologist. It's like when the ticket-seller at the circus says there are no tickets left. Father then gives that smile of his that he uses when he needs it, but not because it's there all the time. Everyone understands it, so he doesn't need to say a thing. And when they give him the tickets, he pays, but much more than the ticket price. There are always tickets for us, balcony seats, extra seats, or that extra special seat only a few people know about, where firefighters are supposed to sit but never do. I don't like seeing him get those tickets. I'm ashamed when he gets something they don't have. Something they have, that is, but just for *us*. Father laughs.

“We, the Köveses, are special people. The others, they're the commoners, the *proster oilem*. Remember: there's nothing that can't be done, only people that can't do it!”

I'd rather never go to the circus again, but I don't want to sit here in this empty hallway. My underwear is stuck to me, and I feel like taking off my socks, but I won't! Because Father says socks are

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<sup>5</sup> *Kup* (Yiddish): head



disgusting in heat like this, and he swears that people will laugh at me because of it, and he asks me not to wear socks next time I go somewhere with him if it's so hot out. I don't tell him these are my favorite socks. Red. I wore them because of Father. So he'd think I'm pretty.

Father comes out of the room and tells me to go in alone and answer all questions honestly. We're here only so it turns out what's good for me, what I want deep down, in my heart of hearts.

In my heart of hearts, I want to go home to Mother.

The psychologist has a white gown. He's smiling, but serious. He doesn't look like someone who'd make fun of me on account of my socks. He talks to me. Just like I've seen in drawings of psychologists and patients. There's a test, and you have to give answers so it turns out what sort of father, wife, or friend you are. But there, you can tell from the questions, which of the answers are worth the most points. Not here. This won't take long. At the end all I have to tell him, honest to goodness, he says, is whether or not I want to go to camp. Because my father thinks I do want to go, except I don't want to admit it. But I can tell *him*, the psychologist, honestly, and I shouldn't be afraid. That's why Father brought me here. I feel a lump in my throat. It's now up to me. All I need to do is tell him the truth, and then it'll be over. I'm *not* going, and that's that! He's smiling at me, but he's giving me this prickly stare. And he looks at his watch.

“So, do you want to go or not?”

“I do.”

Mother and Grandmother are standing by the fence. They can't come in. For days now, I've been keeping my eyes out to see when they'll walk this way. Because they were going to come for sure. This time it's the two of them who are staying at the little cabin on street away, with Mother in my place. And I'm locked up in here. For a week already. The fence is tall and meshed thick. Grandmother brought a chocolate bar, but it doesn't fit through the fence. Just as well. The camp supervisors wouldn't allow it, anyway. Or if they would, they'd yell. Everyone here yells at us. There are only a few of them, that's what they say. And there are *a lot* of us kids. They don't know anyone's name. And they talk really strange. Like: Wash your hands! Stand in line! And they clap their hands. They're smelly. And they're always smoking. They wear high shoes laced tight halfway up their calves, and their toenails show through. The paint's mostly come off those nails, which they never wash, and which are all yellow and cracked.

None of the camp supervisors likes me. But they don't like anyone, not just me. They're always angry. I hate them. Especially their voices. It's like they want to pick a fight. I'm afraid of them. Even though they haven't really done anything to me. But still. I can't stand their yelling. They're like when the knob fell off our radio at home, and we could neither turn the radio off nor turn it down.

I don't need their chocolate bar! They can't take care of me that easy. Plus I'd throw it up, anyway. I threw up last night, too. Into the sink, because I didn't reach the toilet in time. It didn't go down. The whole

thing just stayed there in the sink and didn't flow down. It was all in bits and just disgusting. Mainly smelly. Mother always holds my head when I throw up. And Dodó washes it up. He washed it up the afternoon of Christmas Day, too, even though I threw up in my room that time. They said it happened because I was all wound up waiting for my gifts. But I really did have to throw up. I didn't do it just because. True, last year, too, I threw up the same afternoon, on Christmas Day. How can it be that Mother doesn't get sick when that smelly stuff comes out of me? Not even Dodó. I just don't get it. Even the smell is enough to make me throw up. But last night in camp, I didn't dare leave it there in the sink. I was afraid they'd come and see. There's nothing that can't be done, only people who can't do it. Well, I'm not one of those people. I did the same thing with my hands as when we have to drink from a well during a hike: one person pumps away and the other has to cup their hands to hold the water. Clenching my teeth, I cupped my throw-up into the toilet. The funny thing is, the toilet was right there next to the sink. I really should have made it that far. There was no one to help.

The fence pricks my nose. It's got a metal smell. It hurts. I cry. Mother and Grandmother cry, too. But they leave me here all the same. They go back to the log cabin. Mother lays down in my bed. Their backs get smaller and smaller as they walk away. I hate them. No, no, no, it's not true. It's my fault. Only mine. I didn't dare tell the psychologist the truth. I *couldn't*.

Grandmother hates the way her old friend Károly—I call him Mister Károly—strokes the armchair’s arm. Every time he leaves, she checks to see how oily it got. Because you can’t get this sort of silk anymore. *Satin*. Which means if you look at it from one side, it’s green, but when you look from the other side, it’s more like black. At least there, where Mister Károly doesn’t sit. Grandmother examines the armchair twice a week, on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and she always says she’ll put a cover on it, but then she doesn’t, after all. Because that’s so lower class, so *proster*. But she only whispers this. You can’t say things like that in front of other people. The armchair is frayed all over the place, anyway, but that doesn’t bother Grandmother. No, the truth is, it’s not even the armchair’s arm that gets to her, but Mister Károly. Why does he let his daughter bilk him and take away his pension? And why doesn’t his daughter walk over here with him, seeing as how his eyesight is so bad? Or give him a shave, so he doesn’t look so unkempt? But Grandmother is also angry that Mister Károly chomps away while eating, that he is always telling the same jokes, and that he pees to the side of the toilet.

Mister Károly gives my toochie a little squeeze and calls it a clove of garlic. He calls me Cleopatra, even though I don’t laugh at that anymore. His beard is prickly and he doesn’t have a good smell. But if I sit in his lap, he doesn’t jump up. Sometimes he tells long stories, sometimes he just sits there without a word. We can sit there for a long time all quiet. Meantime Grandmother does crosswords. After a while, the way his beard prickles feels good. Actually, his beard isn’t a beard,

it's just not shaven. My husband will also be unshaven, but without having a beard.

Except when he calls me Cleopatra, and says my toochie is a garlic clove, and tells his own jokes, Mister Károly never does laugh. He comes in the morning, before lunch, and he leaves by evening. Before dark. Because he can hardly see. Grandmother is worried every night about whether he got home. But she doesn't phone him, because she's angry at his daughter. Mister Károly was never cheerier than when he came by one day with his new cane. He was laughing even in the door.

"Get a load of this, everyone!" He flourished that white stick like Zorro brandishing his sword. His neighbor mixed him some paint, he explained, and he then used that paint to spruce up the no-frills cane he bought with public health insurance.

"So, what do you say? From now on you've got to watch out!"

The excitement didn't last long. Mister Károly is always worried about something. Now, for example, Grandmother had to reassure him that his cane wasn't snow white. Officially speaking, Mister Károly isn't eligible for a white cane. Officially speaking, he can still see. According to some table with percentages on it. He asked his neighbor to mix him beige-tinted white paint that pedestrians would recognize as a blind man's cane, but that he could explain away as beige in case anyone stopped to check. And let someone show him a law that prohibits you from getting about with a red or a purple cane, or for that matter, a beige one.

Mister Károly is worried that he'll be stopped because of his cane, but he is also worried that he won't get his monthly pension, and that he'll lose his ID, and if a car then hit him, they wouldn't know who he is. He's worried that his daughter will get angry at him and put him in a home, and also that there won't be anyone to bury him.

Grandmother says he hasn't always been such a nervous wreck, so *fardeiget*.<sup>6</sup> During the war she lived with Mister Károly in a cellar when everyone had to stay down there on account of the bombing. Back then Mister Károly was still brave, and indeed he managed to find carrots they then used to bake a cake. And they boiled water from snow. Mister Károly took sick children to the doctor when no one else dared to go out, because of the shooting, and for that matter he took care of everything, because he didn't have to sew a yellow star on his shoulder of the sort that Grandmother still keeps in that little blue bag she has old photos in. She says that bag is meant to keep from forgetting, and when she is no longer around, I'll have to watch over it. Because I must never forget what they did to us. She keeps it in the bottom drawer of her bureau, but that's a secret, and I don't tell anyone. I could use a bag like that, too. So I never forget bad things like summer camp.

Grandmother says the reason she didn't remarry is because she sacrificed her life for her family. Mister Károly wouldn't make a good husband, anyway. She'll always be grateful to him, but she doesn't need another drag around her neck to schlep around with. But Mister Károly

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<sup>6</sup> *Fardeiget* (Yiddish): worried, distressed

loves Grandmother, he does. You know it every time you hear him say, “My dear little Alíz.”

*Chop, chop, chop, chop.* Grandmother is cutting dough for soup noodles. She slams down the big knife, then draws her fingers back a tad on top of the dough and is already chopping once again. *Chop, chop, chop,* really fast. The hair-thin pasta is forming into a bigger and bigger heap. I’ll never learn how to do this. She hands me a clump of dough to knead at my play stove, but in vain. She lets me sprinkle the kneaded dough with flour, but it’s no use. I’ll never get anywhere with this.

Grandmother says all you need for cooking is to have a feel for it, and to pay a little attention. Because you can’t learn that from a cookbook. So I pay attention. That’s how she learned, too, from her mother. And *my* mother? Why doesn’t she ever make soup noodles? Maybe she doesn’t know how? True, back when we lived with Father, she did the cooking. We went home, Mother got on her apron, and by the time I went out to the kitchen, she was standing above a big, brown bowl, and with a sharp knife she cut in half the potato in her hand, and then cut it into quarters, and the pieces never slipped out of her hand. She chopped parsley really fast, and she never smelled so much of onions as Grandmother does. True, she chopped the onions in a round glass, so the smell wouldn’t go into her hair. After all, she can’t wash her hair every day, because it takes her a long time to roll it up on those prickly pins. Even now, she spends lots of time every morning in the bathroom. Mother is really beautiful. *Always.*

It doesn't matter if she's getting ready for her own wedding or just to head downtown in the morning, Mother won't step out on the street without her makeup on. It's so good sitting there on the edge of the bathtub while she's busy daubing herself with the foundation cream she got from America. Leaning down, she then sticks her face really close to mine and asks, "So, do I have a mask?" If a sharp line of cream separates her face from her neck and ears, then I have to say she does, and then Mother uses a little sponge to daub herself more. Once that's done and her hair is all combed, she fluffs up her hair, making little ruffles all over the place, which takes a really long time. Then, with a thin paintbrush, she paints a tiny curl above the corner of her eye; and while biting her lips she uses a little scrubber to paint her eyelashes. It's really scary the way her eyeballs turn all around in the meantime, and how she almost falls right over the bathroom sink as she tries getting close to the mirror—which is hard, because while one hand is painting away, the other is holding a glass bottle full of paint that mustn't spill, because then everything will turn coal-black.

Grandmother has always walked into the bathroom without knocking or saying a thing. And this is our apartment's only bathroom. No one except for Dodó has ever actually locked the door, but if the door is shut completely, that has always meant there's someone in there. But if Grandmother wanted to get her lipstick or a sock, or even if she just wanted to ask what she should make for lunch, she opened the door, like that. Mother and I protested, but it did no good.



“Mother!” called Mother. “Do be so kind as to wait a couple minutes by the door, and not to open it up if it’s shut.”

“Why? I don’t want to *utz*<sup>7</sup> you, I just want to ask ...”

“Don’t ask anything, okay?”

“You’re snubbing your mother? Is that chutzpah or what? How dare you?”

“Please leave me in peace. Can’t you tell I’m sitting on the toilet?”

“And? I’ll decide whether to leave you in peace.”

“Mother! Why do you always have to be the big boss in this small flat of ours?”

“Me? *Meeeeeeeeee*? Me, a boss? Oy! I’ll just go crawl right back into my shell, yes, I don’t dare say a word anymore in my own home!”

“All I ask is that you don’t open the door during the five minutes I’m in here with the door shut.”

“Do you think I care so much about you sitting there? All I wanted to ask is what I should make for lunch.”

“All right, Mother, but ask me in two minutes, and now I beg you: get out of here!”

“How dare you? You’re telling *me* what to do, and when?”

“No, all I’m asking is that you wait outside a bit.”

“You’re slamming the door in my face? Is that what I deserve from you? I, who washed your soiled toochie when you were a little *maidel*?”

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<sup>7</sup> *Utz* (Yiddish): needle, bother

“That was thirty years ago, Mother.”

“And? A mother always remains your mother. Oy! I didn’t think I’d live to see the day that my daughter would slam the door shut on me and order me out of my own home.”

“Mother, it’s not your home I’ve sent you out of, just the bathroom. Okay, if you like, *your* bathroom, but just as long as I’m sitting on ...”

“I’ll go where I want in my own home!”

“As you remind me every chance you get.”

“And it’s good I do. Because if things go on like this, I’ll live to see you send me packing. First you’ll shut me out of the bathroom, then the room. I’ll be an *oysvorf* in my own home. If I’m lucky, I can find refuge in the kitchen, but if not, then you can lock me away in some old people’s home, and then you can live it up to your heart’s content.”

Grandmother would still be yelling when Mother stepped out the door. She’d follow Mother right into the hall, screaming away. Mother would leave the apartment in tears, and I then had to put a wet compress over Grandmother’s heart. After a few mornings like this, Mother resigned herself to being unable to have peace and quiet even in the bathroom. Sometimes she locked the door from the inside with the sliding bolt, which I couldn’t reach. But after a couple more fights she told me to remember that everything in life has a price, but that not everything is worth everything. So Grandmother steps right into the bathroom, but at least there’s no uproar. Even from the most distant points of the apartment, Grandmother could hear the snap of the

aluminum bolt being slid shut, and when she did, she'd run right over to the bathroom and start screaming away like mad.

“You're not *krenk*, my dear?” she'd say, rattling the doorknob. In response to Mother's furious “no” Grandmother would always begin to lecture her about what a great danger it is if you lock the door on yourself, and God forbid you then get *krenk*. How can their loved ones then help them? They'd have to call a locksmith first, for she just isn't hefty enough to break down the door, and so on and on. Mother reasoned, too. About how often you go to the bathroom, and how rarely you become *krenk*. But Grandmother didn't want to hear of such reasoning.

“Yes? All it takes is one time. You can never know in advance when trouble is coming. Better to live in fear than to have a sudden scare. And anyway, it was never custom in our family to ...”

“Oh, Mother....”

“Don't give me that, ‘Oh, Mother’ stuff! Even when you married Köves, I said don't do it. But you didn't listen to me. Even then, all you said was, ‘Oh, Mother!’”

“Mother! I was talking about locking the door, so don't go talking about Köves!”

“So the little missus is telling *me* what to say, and when? Oy! Well, we're not quite there yet, I'll have you know! For the time being I don't need tending to, and if I have enough brains to take care of the family, why then, I've got enough also to judge what to say, and when. And if you hadn't gotten hitched to Köves and left your mother to fend

for herself, you wouldn't be where you are now. So open that rotten bathroom door when I say so!"

Mother kept it up a bit, her eyeliner smeared, and she ran off toward the tram stop to keep from being late. After three or four such mornings, she stopped locking the door.

Dough makes your hands all sticky. But that doesn't bother Grandmother. Such is housework, she says. One big mess. Cleaning fish, that's the biggest pain. Grandmother holds a fish between her legs, that's how she goes about it. Scales fly all over the place, and once she slices the belly, the whole kitchen is awash in fish. Spots of blood on glasses, on the stove, and on her face. Compared to that, raw dough isn't even so bad. Plus you can nibble away on bits of dough.

"I'm really not going to put this little bit away," Grandmother likes to say, pointing those last few spoonfuls of stewed vegetables or whatever that you can barely make out at the bottom of a pot, as she sticks it in front of your nose. This gets Dodó angry. He doesn't get upset when the elevator is out of order, when the fuel station attendant tries to cheat him, or when I blast the music. But he just can't get used to hearing Grandmother say she really can't "put this little bit away." Not because he wants to save on food, no, that's not what concerns him, but because he doesn't see the point, even with good intentions, of forcing someone to eat more than they feel comfortable eating. "Irrational," he says. Almost everything in this household is "irrational." Which apparently

means not normal. And so I, for one, don't know what a normal household is like.

"I'm a housewife," says Grandmother, offended. "And I will indeed keep serving my loved ones as long as there's anything left on the table. That's how my mother and my grandmother also did it."

"Please don't mind my saying so, but that can't justify every illogical act!"

"But for me, it does," says Grandmother, because she doesn't argue with Dodó. Only under her breath does murmur, "Instead he should be grateful that we have something to put on the table. Indeed!"

Dodó catches that, too, but he lets it pass.

Grandmother has a weak heart, and sometimes she needs a tune-up at a clinic. At such times Mother takes me with her downtown to where she works. And then I get milk chocolate in the milk bar next door. You have to drink it in a disgusting, orange-red or light-blue, plastic mug, but it's still better than what Grandmother heats up at home. But they say what Grandmother makes is the real thing. From Holland. Really hard to get. What I get at the dairy shop, that's *not* the real thing, because all it has ground into it is the cocoa peel, which you can also eat, but what a difference! Anyway, I like it. You can ask to have the milk either hot or cold. Dodó likes it, too, but he says the mug is just awful, because it doesn't let you forget for a minute that you're supposed to have the same rotten opportunities in life as everyone else, as if they're saying to you with that cheap mug, "You are all the same, you are all wretched."

True, at the end of the line all you can wonder is whether your mug will be light-blue or orange-red. But one time when we were standing there, this man wearing a traditional fur-cap said that these mugs come in lemon-yellow, too. He said they have mugs like that out where he lives, way out in Kelenföld, on the city outskirts. Of course, not everyone was taken in by the news, but it spread like wildfire all the same, and even months later you'd hear folks mention it at the cash register, yes, everyone remembered that man in the fur cap, though some insisted that he wasn't from Kelenföld at all, but from even further out, in Cinkota.

When Mother takes me downtown, sometimes I can stay there where she works. I walk around her workplace, between those shelves all full of medications, and I watch the girls pluck boxes from the shelves and put them into these huge baskets. They check big sheets of paper to see which pharmacy ordered what. To keep them from messing up you're not allowed to say a word to them. But they're chattering away between themselves nonstop when they think Mother isn't watching them. And then at that big table where Mother checks everything, it always turns out all the same who messed up what.

Mother's desk is right up against the window. Behind the desk is the pharmaceutical center with its huge shelves and all those medications for living folks. But the window looks out on the hospital's back entrance, where they bring out the dead people on gray pans.

I'm really scared of death. I can't imagine what it's like if you don't exist, anymore, if you don't have a clue about anything, anymore, and yet everything goes on around you all the same. When I think of this, I

imagine darkness, but I can't imagine not thinking anything. Only that it must be like sleeping, except that I'd never wake up. It would be good to get ready for it. Even at the dentist, the drilling was easier to take after they showed me on my hand what the drill does. But whenever I want to try imagining what *nothing* is like, then I always happen to be asleep. And when I wake up, that's *not* nothing anymore. But when I get down to thinking all the same about being there in the darkness with other folks still living all around me, I get so scared that I run right over to Grandmother and slip into her bed so she can squeeze me tight. Grandmother understands me being scared of death, because she's really scared of it, too. Mother says it's cockamamie and not to think of it. She doesn't understand that if I'm already thinking *not* to think of it, why then, I'm already thinking of it.

From the pharmaceutical center, we go to have lunch at the milk bar. Even at noon you have to stand in line. But by then, the scratched-up, greasy, gray milk kettles are gone.

"How *kalamutneh*," said Mother with a nod toward the glum-faced clerks. Behind them, chickens twirled round and round behind glass. The women clerks in light-blue smocks meantime handed out the half chickens. "What would you like? Half a chicken, a pickle, and a slice of bread? You can get the bread at the cashier." The grilled chicken is heavenly. Mother says they eat this in America, too. Those clerks in the light-blue smocks are wearing tall, dirty white, laced-up canvas shoes that come halfway up their calves; their big toes and ankles hang out. Their big toes are thick, and their ankles are gray with calluses. The

sparkling pinkish, Polish nail polish is chipped halfway off round, stubby nails. Dreary faces and sleepy eyes stare back at us from the cracked mirror hanging from a length of twine behind the counter. Back at Mother's workplace, we put the grilled chicken on her desk. The girls eat bologna, which is cheaper. Other times Mother eats that, too, but when I'm here, I can always get chicken.

Grandmother's saying, "A developing child needs hot food," comes to mind. In the afternoon we'll go visit her at the hospital, and she'll ask me what I ate. We'll take her fruit and meatloaf, which Mother made last night.

"We're going to Dr. Wéber," Mother tells the porter as we pass by the hospital's entrance booth, and already we're running up the stairs.

"The important thing is to look determined," Mother coached me on the tram on the way to the hospital. "If they notice that you're being hesitant, they'll start asking questions at once, and then you might as well forget about getting in outside of visiting hours. Not to mention that they don't let children up to the ward. But don't be scared. Come along with me and don't look around at anything."

"And if it doesn't work?"

"Then we'll give the porter a twenty-forint coin." And she got one ready.

Grandmother was feeling marvelous in the hospital. She was the doctors' favorite. Not only did she not complain, but she also entertained the other patients and the staff alike all day long.



“My dear!” she called to a nurse. “Tell me, dear, aren’t you tired? You work so much. Sit down for a minute to rest on the edge of my bed here. No one will notice.” And in two minutes she’d learned how many children she had, what her husband was like, how far along they were with building their house, and how many personal loans she’d taken.

Grandmother’s bed sheets were changed every day, and a nurse’s aid took her down to therapy in a wheelchair so she wouldn’t have to wait. All day long she listened to the radio, read, and did crosswords, and in the afternoon she waited for us. She bloomed.

On noticing that a dermatologist was visiting the patient in the bed next to hers, Grandmother took the opportunity to have this dermatologist write her a prescription for a special facial cream; a cream that, said Grandmother, was better than the sort you could buy over the counter. She’d share it with Mother. The rheumatologist wanted to send her to a traction bath, but Grandmother told her that she wouldn’t hear of it, because warm water breeds funguses. No way was she going in there. Instead she got herself a pass to physical therapy, which they don’t do in a place as *finster un glitshik* as that cellar bath. Physical therapy is in a sunlit room with a nice big window onto the yard, the therapist is a pleasant young gal, and if Grandmother gives her ten forints, she’ll always get a clean sheet. After all, that beats lying down on a sheet that was used before by who knows who.... The cleaning lady is really nice, too. In the morning she brews coffee for the doctors, but she brings coffee for the better patients, too. And imagine what’s happening around

here, yes, see that woman lying opposite me? (Grandmother puckered up her lips and squinted stealthily toward the woman, who couldn't hear what Grandmother was saying, but did indeed see that she was the subject of conversation, except that she wasn't supposed to hear.) Well, they plundered her good. No, that doesn't mean they stole from her, but that that they took her womb right out, which she could have children with, and though the poor woman is already fifty years old and even has grandchildren, her husband immediately filed for divorce, because he said he isn't about to *you-know-what* with an empty vessel.

“*Nichtfordemkind*<sup>8</sup>,” Mother hisses.

“And what's with you two?” asks Grandmother quickly, but she isn't really interested. No, she doesn't want to know what I had for lunch or what Mother cooks for supper. She doesn't ask a single question of the sort she wouldn't miss asking at home.

“Let me introduce you to Icuka,” Grandmother says, pushing me over to the old lady lying on the bed next to hers. “Say hello to her.”

“Miss Icuka has a yard and lots of chickens, and a vegetable garden. You'll give one of those sweet, tasty tomatoes to my granddaughter, *huh?*” Miss Icuka, who has a big wart on her face, and is so fat that she hangs over both sides of her bed, says *uh-huh* and hands me a tomato. “And if you only knew how her big sister cooks!” It turns out that on her first day in the hospital, Grandmother got to taste the stuffed cabbage Icuka's big sister brought in. Not that they eat that at home, no, it's bad for Icuka's gall bladder. Grandmother then explains

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<sup>8</sup> *Nichtfordemkind*: A close approximation of the German words *Not for the child*, which the narrator hears as one word.

that she got these yummy, really *geshmak* home-made pickled vegetables from Marika, lying in the corner. “Marika, sweetheart, let me introduce you to my daughter and granddaughter, whom I told you about.” Luckily I don’t have to eat any of those pickled vegetables. But just then, they bring in supper, and Grandmother gives me the poppy-seed pasta—mixed with a pulpy mass of sugary poppy seeds and sprinkled all over with sugar. Mother’s meatloaf will be enough for her, she says.

“Bring a bit more tomorrow,” Grandmother whispers to Mother, motioning her head just so toward the others. “These ladies here are so generous, you know, I can’t just simply accept what they offer me, if you know what I mean. They’re really simple folk, peasants, but you see how warm-hearted they are. And how clean! Their nightgowns are spotless every day.... Which reminds me, do bring me a coat I can wear in bed. The afternoons are cold. Not that napped blue one, though, but the one Katrin sent, the quilted pink one.”

Then Grandmother wraps up the bologna and the roll they got for breakfast. Pointing at the roll, she says, “Even if we can’t use it for anything else, you can always make bread crumbs out of it. Anyway, it would be a waste to throw it away.”

She then walks with us out to the landing, and along the way she says that Márta the nurse, who was so fat last year, has really lost lots of weight, the poor thing must have cancer, and that in the room next door, a urologist had to be called at night to an old man, because an

inflammation backed up his catheter, which they set up for him the wrong way, and for a whole hour he was screaming away....

Grandmother makes us cross our hearts that we'll come tomorrow, too, because this hospital is terrible, and if she's so sick as to be locked up in here, the only thing that cheers her up is knowing that in the afternoon we'll look in on her a bit, and fill her in on what's happening out there.

I asked Grandmother if we can stop making dough for soup noodles already, but in vain: she says we must finish, because tomorrow is Saturday, and on Saturday you can't knead dough. It's written in the Torah. But you are allowed to boil the strips of dough into noodles. And Grandmother cooks fresh noodles on Saturday, too, because there's nothing like fresh noodles. You can't clean on Saturday, either, but in the morning Mother asks me all the same to go over the rug with the carpet-broom. And it's no use me saying that on Saturdays you're not allowed to clean, Mother replies that this isn't cleaning. This is just carpet-brooming. You're not supposed to sew, and you can't wash or iron clothes, either. But it's okay to do homework. Not to cut your nails, though. If I get out my manicure set on a Saturday, I'm yelled at. But you can wash your hair, and iron and curl it, too.

Father says I should attend Talmud Torah, for there they'd teach me everything, but Mother says they mustn't confuse the child. Not long ago, when Father came to get me, the two of them went into the kitchen, and I heard them argue. Father said I'll be seven years old soon, and that

in America even three-year old Jewish kids can read fluently. To which Mother says: That may be so, but over there they didn't annihilate six million Jews, and people aren't afraid. No, at Yom Kippur children don't have to lie in school that they had bellyaches. But she doesn't want to hold him back, either: if he wants to teach me to read Hebrew, why then, he should go for it.

Oh boy. Mother shouldn't have said that. The following Sunday, Father shows up with a yellowish, spotted book. He sits down with me to study in a corner of the lobby at the Palace Hotel. We always used to have lunch at the Palace. A beautiful, porcelain, colorfully painted coffee-maker is hissing away there in the lobby, and you can see into the big restaurant, which has balconies like the theater's. I always wanted to sit up there, but I never dared say so. Because Father is a regular, so he sits at the same table every time, there by the column. Mr. Bun, that head waiter with huge hands, always comes to our table first.

"Greetings, Mr. Köves! A fine day we're having. The usual?" He leans over as if there's a rod in his back that goes from his waist all the way to his neck.

"Of course, Mr. Bun," says Father. "This big girl here will have breaded liver and stewed spinach. Sound good?"

I nod, because I like breaded liver. True, I'm a bit bored with it, but just like about the balcony, I don't dare say this, either.

"So, you've got the new car?" Mr. Bun knows everything. He knows that since his Moskvich, Father got himself a real Western car. A Renault. We named it Malvin.

Mr. Bun is delighted. He says he can count on two hands the number of his guests who have Western cars, but Father should be careful, because a Renault is really hard to miss, and the devil doesn't sleep. Father gives a dismissive wave of the hand, saying not to worry. No problem, he says, it's a gift from a relative (he squints), they sent it from Sweden, and he even has papers to prove it. (That's not what he said to me.) But I can't ask him about this, because he'd just say I don't understand these things.

While Mr. Bun disappears to get the usual menu, Father explains what an unusual situation I'm in, because I can learn things *fonhauzaus*<sup>9</sup> that others can learn only as adults, if at all. And how many kids get to come here for lunch? I begin going through the names of my classmates.

“Well, maybe Csiki, he goes to places like this.”

“Like I told you a million times, there are *restaurants* and there are *places*,” Father snarls at me. I take a big gulp. Next time I'll call every place you can eat a restaurant. Trouble can't come of that. But Mr. Bun is coming already. He has this really stiff, kitchen-cloth folded over his arm, and the way he pours the ragout soup into Father's bowl from a silver cup, not a single drop goes to the side. To do this he's got to touch the edge of the cup to the bottom of the bowl, but without clinking. I get *consommé*. According to Father, few children these days know that it's okay to drink soup out of a bowl with two handles, so long as you've already spooned out the substance.... Someday I'll be grateful at having learned such things without noticing.... Then that gentleman arrives

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<sup>9</sup> A close approximation of the German for *right out of the home*, which the narrator understands as one word pronounced quickly by her father.

whose name I don't know, but who always sits here with us. Father talks with him about silver and porcelain, consignment shops, and auctions.

The gentleman always has something to sell that has to be looked at, or else he knows someone who has an original whatever, I don't understand what he's talking about but Father does, indeed Father says has a similar one, except his is incomparably better, with a faultless signature, and you can see a lot even on the back of the painting, and the price is less than the auction catalog price from the other day. And the gentleman knows a man who'd take it for twice as much, but it's also worth holding onto, and you don't even have to hold onto it for long, because the artist is an old man, yep, he doesn't have much time left.

And the only thing better than a living master is a dead master. At such times I can look about as much as I want, because no one is paying attention to me, except when Father says something like what he says now: "You can push the potatoes aside, but at least eat the liver." I'm scared he'll yell at me again, so I stuff the liver into myself even though I already feel what it'll be like when we pull away from the Palace onto the first street. My stomach is pressing up against my throat, and I'm only thinking, Oh no, don't go throwing this up now. And Father is proudly proclaiming: "My daughter knows how to live. She doesn't eat a thing at her mother's. Why, I don't even know what she lives on. But here in the restaurant she's just wolfing down that breaded liver, she is."

The reading book is smelly. Its yellowed pages are crumbling. You've got to take extra good care of it, because you can't get books like this these days. Even this is just borrowed from someone.

“*Alef, Bet, Gimel, Dalet, He,*” says Father, pointing to the Hebrew letters. He talks more softly than usual. This alphabet is long. It’s enough if today I learn only the first five. I try remembering and saying the letters over and over to myself, like when Father sends me down to the newsstand for some papers and magazines. I run down from the fifth floor and keep repeating: *Mirror Magazine, Theater, Hungarian Daily, Literature Weekly, Nightly News, Mirror Magazine, Theater, Hungarian Daily, Literature Weekly, Nightly News, Mirror Magazine, Theater, Hungarian Daily, Literature Weekly, Nightly News.*

“*Alef, Bet, Gimel, Dalet, He.*” Alef is on the top left, Bet is down below, Gimmel is on the top right, Dalet is at the bottom, and Hev just happens to be by the spot. It’s sinking in. It’ll be over soon; I’m clever. Then Father turns the pages back, and tells me to choose familiar letters out of a text. The spot, the curls, and the tiny tails are now in different places, yes, there are thick black lines and spots and thin black lines and spots all over the place. A lump is rising in my throat.

“I told your Mother that you should go to Talmud Torah. There they’d beat it into you.”

**[Next excerpt from p. 173 to the end, p. 187, of the original]**

Mother doesn’t want me to go with Dodó. But Dodó waves her off. “Let her come along! He understands that I want to be there at the exam.

Grandmother calls me back from the door. She is clutching something in her hand. Mother has to give this thing a kiss. Grandmother hugs it tight.



“Don’t cry, dear. Everything will be all right. This isn’t just any *mezuzah*.<sup>10</sup> This helped in ’44, too. My poor dear Mother sewed it into my slip. And I did return from the brick factory.<sup>11</sup> Twice, no less. If it saved me from Auschwitz, then God will help now, too. Go ahead, don’t keep the poor thing waiting. And wipe your eyes, your eyeliner’s smeared.”

Grandmother is groping a yellowish-white little bone. She gives it little kisses, she holds it tight. She doesn’t hand it to me, no, she only shows it. It’s thinner than my finger, and it’s got a little window inside of which you can see a few Hebrew characters. Grandmother squeezes Mother’s hand tight, as if they were at a train station and Mother is all set to leave on a long trip, but Grandmother doesn’t want her to go. They almost fall. From the door I can see her waddling back to her bureau. Her nightgown shows under her robe. She puts the *mezuzah* back in her blue bag beside the yellow star.

Until now, we never noticed just how many roads in town are cobblestoned. But with Dodó being sick, it’s hard not to notice. The Trabant shakes like crazy on those big square stones. And with every bump, the pain shoots through Dodo’s arm. Mother is all nervous. She just can’t manage to get the car going the usual way, by slowly letting the emergency brake down with one hand. From the front passenger seat, Dodó helps her out with his right hand.

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<sup>10</sup> *Mezuzah*: The case affixed to the right side of the doorway of Jewish homes containing a small portion of Deuteronomy in 22 lines, handwritten on parchment.

<sup>11</sup> Jews were gathered at Budapest’s brick factory before being taken to Auschwitz.

Talk about having to know someone to get things done: there's just one machine in the whole country like the one in this hospital—the machine they'll use to do *computer tomography* on Dodó, which is like cutting thin slices out of his body, except that it's only pictures they cut, not real slices. Father arranged it. Like the way he acquires circus tickets, and bricks for building things. (Bricks are the hardest thing to get nowadays.) Mother winces. Other times Dodó would do the talking, but now he only listens.

“Mr. Köves sent us. Here's our referral.”

They let us in right away. They've been waiting for us.

When I was little, I thought that little crab in drawings of the tropic of cancer—that crab was the cancer—could climb right into a person's mouth. Unnoticed, because at first it's as small as drops of infection in the air, like in a sneeze. Which is why you can't know in advance who will get cancer and who won't. Then the cancer eats its way into a person's body, and as it grows, it uses its claws to bite more and more out of the person it's in. That is why, when someone with cancer loses weight, the cancer in them gets bigger and bigger. The person dies and gets buried. But the cancer keeps eating away at the person even in the grave, as long as something remains of the body. And then, at the end, the person is gone altogether, and in the person's place is a giant crab. But what happens to that? I had no idea.

Dodó is laid down on a bed. The bed is all metal. My back shivers with cold at the thought. Then, slowly, very slowly, they start him off from this booth into a tunnel. To examine him. Because it's

really important to them to know exactly where inside him his illness is. So they can then give a nod and look important jotting down in Latin what the problem is. There isn't any problem! At least there won't be. A big nothing. But why Dodó, of all people? I know so many people who'd deserve it. Okay, it's not like I really know anyone who'd really deserve it, because if I said that, or even thought it, that would be murder. The person I thought of a moment ago came to my mind just by chance, not because I really thought he deserved it. He's still a kid, and could still change. And anyway, I didn't say his name. I didn't even think it. His face flashed before me for a moment, but that's all. And I might have done a better job of it choosing whom this should happen to. If it's got to happen to someone. Mother says that long ago in nature, there was natural selection, and that's how species strong enough to survive lived on. And if there were too many, then some disease came along and took care of that. It was like this among people, too. What war didn't solve, diseases did. But it hasn't been so long here since the war.

It's dark. Scary lights are glittering. They'll pull Dodó out of that tube in no time, I know. But still, as they roll him in there on those remote-controlled tiny metal wheels, it's like they're taking him away from us forever.

When I'm big, I'll have to go to Bergen-Belsen, too. Because, says Father, the only way to keep memory alive is to make trips like that. Every child should see the concentration camps. But the goyim, they won't go see them, anyway. So if we don't go, who else is

supposed to take care to be sure not to forget? That's the only way to make sure it won't happen again.

But why do the Jews have to guard the memories of what happened to them? Why not those who *did* what happened?

Father says it's not our business asking such questions. We've got to take responsibility for ourselves. When I turn eighteen, he'll take me to Bergen-Belsen, too. You have to see for yourself how they boiled soap out of his grandmother. At least then I'll know where I live, and among what sort of people. Because I shouldn't think for a minute that my classmates, my teachers, and my neighbors don't think the same thing about me as folks thought back *then*. It's best if I know that if I step in some door, people don't think to themselves, What a sweet little girl, or say to each other, Look what pretty long hair she has! Okay, maybe that's what they do say out loud, but don't go out of your way believing it. What they say to themselves is, Look, there's a Jew! And it doesn't matter what kind of Jew. We're all the same to them.

I don't want to believe this. Because I'm sure my friend Gabi doesn't think this, and neither does Kelemen. Maybe not even Miss Erzsi is like that. Father says there's no point philosophizing over this. And that just because someone has never stolen a thing before, that doesn't mean they won't steal tomorrow. Or that they won't steal later on, if a law is passed saying that beginning today it's okay to steal.

"But that's crazy, Father! Why would anyone pass a law as silly as that, saying it's okay to steal?"

“Don’t you worry, they could even pass a law saying you’re not allowed to steal, but that you must.”

Father says anyone is capable of doing anything if fate wants it that way, as history once proved it to be true. Stealing is just a figurative example. So I should watch out for myself. He then says that he got me orange-scented soap and really fancy deodorant during his trip to the West. The girls in the dressing room at gym class will turn green with envy! He got Dodó a box of Ovaltine. That’s like cocoa powder, but it’s a lot more nutritious. And he got vitamins, too, which you can only get in Vienna. Maybe that will do Dodó good. And, actually, this trip to Bergen-Belsen won’t be counted as his trip West once every three years. Because you can get a passport to visit the West only once that often. No, this trip was special. They let you go there as an exception, even though Bergen-Belsen is in the West, too. Father purses his lips.

“Clever, huh?” Only I’m not sure if he’s now smiling or not.

Everyone wants to stuff poor Dodó with food. One of our neighbors, Miss Ilonka, brought over some beef soup. And then there are the Gáls, who always go to the countryside, where they buy and butcher a hog, and then make blood pudding and other sausage and smoked meats out of it. That’s what they eat all winter long.

“Not a drop of fat on it,” says Mrs. Gál with pride. “Just take a look. Put this in the fridge at night, and the next morning it’ll turn to aspic all by itself.” No, goodness no, she’s not coming in, she doesn’t want to get in the way. She patters about for a little while on the doormat

in huge, men's slippers, wiping her hands on her apron even though they aren't dirty, and then she shuffles back to her own flat. Grandmother makes me promise not to tell that she isn't giving this spare-rib soup to Dodó, because he wouldn't really eat it, anyway. She's been making him soup for months now only with the second best pieces of chicken. Just so he'll have something warm in his belly. She's already given up hoping that he'll eat the noodles, too. Why, it's lucky if he even takes a few sips from the bowl. She's tried everything already. She's baked pound cake and also made dumplings rolled in sugar and ground walnuts. Those dumplings are Dodó's favorite. Grandmother hates making them, because you have to raise the raise the dough twice, and it takes a whole day. She used to say that she's willing to go into daylong voluntary exile in the kitchen only on really special occasions. Now she goes on her own even without a special occasion. So who ate that pound cake, in the end? Gabi and Kelemen and I, in school, during ten-o'clock break. Dodó took only a bite. Grandmother said the smell alone is enough to fill him. Mother, too, is hardly eating a thing these days.

Miss Ilike, who never used to come over our place before, brought over California peppers, which are full of vitamin C. Mother brings home a big block of Turkish Delight.<sup>12</sup> She took a commuter train all the way to Gödöllő, because she heard that there's an agricultural cooperative out there where they've begun making it again. Dodó used to talk a lot about how much he loved Turkish Delight when he was still a little lad. Poor

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<sup>12</sup> A popular, toffeelike sweet in Hungary that comes in spongy yellowish, rectangular blocks and is today widely available at outdoor food markets but was in short supply in the late 1960s, the setting of this novel.

Mother was hardly able to walk anymore when she got home that night from Gödöllő. She took the train because fuel is expensive, and we've got to watch out for our savings these days. I heard her say that to Grandmother. And that there's no telling what sort of expenses they might be facing, and how long they can survive on what they have.

Dodó felt sorry for Mother, too. He even ate some of the Turkish Delight. Too bad he threw it up at night.

Other times, Grandmother would have opened the front door at once, but now she peers through the little window in the door and asks the folks outside what they wanted. Then it takes her a while to figure out which one of the two keys opens the bottom lock. Once she does figure it out, she doesn't know how deep to stick the key into the lock. The big key chain jingles in her hand, and meantime I can hear her whispering *For God's sake* over and over again. It's a good thing Dodó can't hear her.

The men in trenchcoats storm right through the foyer, and then through Grandmother's room and Mother and Dodó's room. They don't even nod at Dodó, who is lying on the couch under his checkered blanket. What they're curious about is the balcony. Grandmother is breathing heavily by the time she catches up with them. The men just stand there by the railing, staring. They keep pointing toward the hill, and then begin giving orders: We can't go out on the balcony on the twenty-fifth. We should make good note of this, because they'll be checking. And we can't let strangers in our flat that day. Preferably we shouldn't have guests over, either. And we shouldn't even think of

hanging laundry out to dry. Strictly prohibited. Someone should be at home that day, because they would be stopping in. It's possible that a colleague of theirs will spend a bit of time on our balcony. Of course, only until the delegation passes by our building. What time of the day that will happen, they are unable to reveal just now, but we will notice in time.

“Grandmother, why can't we hang laundry out to dry on the twenty-fifth?” I ask once the men in trenchcoats are gone. As I've noticed before, adults don't answer kids' questions when strangers are there.

“Because you can shoot from behind a sheet. Theoretically.”

“But not really?”

“Really, too.”

“But really only on the twenty-fifth, and at other times only theoretically?”

“No, you can do so really anytime, but they're afraid only on the twenty-fifth.”

“Why?”

“Because that's when Brezhnev is coming.”

“Comrade Brezhnev?”

“Yes.”

“But who wants to shoot from here?”

“No one, but a system with a persecution complex thinks so.”

“That they'd shoot Comrade Brezhnev?”



“Like I said already, him. Are you asking only for the sake of asking, or because you want to know the answers too?”

“But if they think someone wants to shoot him, then why is he coming here?”

“Because he can’t go to hell just yet.”

Lowering the book that’s in his hands, Dodó speaks.

“Parking will be prohibited on the whole street for four days beforehand. And then they’ll ban traffic for hours; the whole city will come to a stop.”

For a while he and Grandmother go on chatting, and then all at once the book falls out of Dodó’s hands. He is snoring away with his mouth open. Like he does nowadays almost all day long.

The bushes on the hospital grounds are trimmed into neat little spheres, just like on that picture of the castle of Versailles I cut out of a newspaper when I was little. I glued it to a piece of cardboard and put it on my wall. Versailles. I can’t die until I go there in person.

Grandmother says things like this all the time. How she must stick around a while longer yet before *departing from this vale of tears*. Her way of putting it drives me up the wall. The only thing worse is when she’s washing the floor and suddenly shouts, “Bring me a glass of water, little one, because I’m *dying of thirst*. Ooh! I mean, what was I supposed to think? That she wanted that glass of water to wash the floor with?!

And she doesn’t ask me to take her in some chocolate, no, what she says is that she is *craving a little something sweet*. And she doesn’t fall asleep

while watching TV, but instead she *dozes off* for just a moment. And she is never cold, but has the *chills*.

Never have I seen bushes so round in real life. I don't dare tell Mother that they're pretty. Because it's between those bushes that Dodó is taken into the hospital hallway. They call that worn, smelly hallway a *lounge*. Yellow-faced men in striped pajamas and tattered slippers sit about, smoking away. They haven't shaved in days. Some hold their pajama bottoms to keep them from slipping off. Why do people with lung cancer smoke? Is it all the same to them? Maybe it's like saving money. Father always says that anyone who has just fifty forints left to their name might as well hop in a taxi. Because if he goes on foot and saves that little bit of *gelt*, they won't be any better off at all than if they'd gone ahead and spent it.

The hallway is long. The sun shines in, painting window frames on the opposite wall. That makes it easier to see all the gray spots where the holes caused by bits of crumbling wall have been plastered in. You can see the brushstrokes of the white oil paint, yellowed with age. The whole wall looks dark gray, and the doors are brownish white. One or two men in striped bathrobes come past us. They're thin. Their hair is colorless, their skin is wrinkled and yellow, and their chests look all sunken in. They look like squeezed-out tubes of mustard. The hallway's hanging lightbulbs are coated thickly with dust. The cleaning lady folds a torn rag back around a mopstick, which is missing its head. As she draws a gray line on the tile floor, the smell in her wake signals that she

was there. I don't want to leave Dodó in this place. I squeeze Mother's hand. She looks at me and stops.

"We must, my dear." A bit later she whispers in my ear, "Why don't you entertain him a bit?" By then, Mother has scrubbed out the nightstand beside Dodó's bed three times already, and introduced herself to all the other patients in the room. And she's fed Dodó the beef soup she brought along in a thermos. Even though it's not even noon yet. She wants to speak with the doctor. To make it clear that he can expect a pretty little sum from us when they're done tending to Dodó.

With the wooden shutters rolled down over the windows, you can't even tell inside the room if it's morning or night.

Dodó stares at the dripping of the IV. *Drip, drip, drip*, like a drumbeat. I say to him, "That was a good movie on TV we saw that time, huh? And you managed to convince Mother to let me stay awake and watch it. At least the beginning. I'll sing you the theme song, okay?"

Little Greek, come with me to Tanganyika  
 We'll bring you plums, and you'll see  
 How priceless it'll be.  
 We'll come home tan all over,  
 And the others will be  
 All green with envy.  
 Little Greek, I'm *not* going to Tanganyika  
 You stay here, too, and you'll see  
 You won't remain an orphan.  
 You shouldn't always be going on a long journey,  
 Save your dreams for the night.

*Oh God! I just wanted to cheer you up, Dodó. Don't go telling me it worked. Don't lie to me! I'm not dumb. You can go ahead and tell me that I shouldn't have sung this here. And not to you. I'm not a baby anymore. Go ahead and yell at me if I deserve it! Don't whisper, and*

*don't say hush. Yell instead! Do you understand me? Say I've been bad and that I don't understand a thing! Do you hear me? And tell them not to pull you about like that. I'm not yelling! I'm just telling you. I didn't tug at your pajamas! Don't let them take me out of here. Tell them to let go of my wrist! It hurts. I want to stay here. I want to be with you. Help me, Dodóóó!*

I'm in bed, and Grandmother brings me a slice of toast spread with goose fat and garlic. She says it's nutritious, and that at the end of the month it's quite practical, too. Thank goodness she has experience with such things. Nothing phases her. She says it's best if I don't even get up, that I just sleep out this terrible day. I say I'm not sick, and that I don't need to be stuck in bed, but in vain. She doesn't listen. Instead she tells me a fairytale, like when I was really little. When I now ask her to lie down next to me, she doesn't protest like at other times. She tucks her long robe under the sheets. Her feet are cold, like usual. I can feel her calluses and corns. I don't want them touching me. She promises to stay here until I fall asleep, that everything will be all right. But I know she's lying: I saw her on the kitchen stool, in the corner, practicing her Russian conjugation. With Dodó being sick, there's no one to give me Russian lessons. Anyway, Grandmother sat there murmuring to herself in Russian.

Once Father says something, that's how it is. So ever since a decent meal at the Palace Hotel has been fifteen forints, we haven't gone there. Instead we eat cabbage with minced pork in a little cellar restaurant on

Fő Street, curd-filled sponge cake with vanilla custard and raisins at a cafeteria on Pozsonyi Street, and breaded veal at the Kiskakkuk Restaurant—which is where Mr. Bun turns up all the same one day when Father and Ilike take me there to eat. Only for a minute, before we get our soup. Standing there with a big box under an arm, he is smiling from ear to ear. He has on a red shirt. Strange.

“How d’ya do, Mr. Köves?” His back is every bit as stiff as he now bows before our table, as it was at the Palace Hotel when he had a cloth napkin on his arm and a bowl of soup in his hand.

It’s been a while since I’ve seen Father so happy. When he pulls the colored plastic bag out of the box, it’s already obvious that the bag contains a classy foreign product. A leather jacket, straight from Munich, with the BMW label showing that it really was issued by the BMW car factory. Father is in the clouds. He can count on two hands the number of these jackets running about downtown. Mr. Bun counts his take quickly, then hurries off.

“I don’t think a silly jacket is worth this much,” says Ilike, nudging me with her elbow, “but if he really wants it so much, why not let him be happy?”

“Your wedding dress won’t be much less expensive,” Father replies. “Or am I mistaken? And besides me and two witnesses, no one will even see it.”

Dodó is home again. Mother arranged it. An ambulance brought him home, and the two men in the front brought him upstairs. Dodó’s

pajamas slipped a bit, and I saw right in the open fly. Never will I tell anyone. But I can't forget the sight. It's night already, and I can still see what I didn't want to see. I want to hear the toilet door being bolted shut once more. In vain. But when he is awake, Dodó does his best to look busy by drawing and counting away like he always used to, like the engineer that he is, while conducting with his other hand to the classical music in the background.

Except that now he is asleep. I want to smell his hair. I sit down beside him. He opens his eyes.

"You're so lovely!" he whispers, and goes on sleeping. Maybe he's just pretending to sleep?

Grandmother sends me off to play. She sits down there on the bed next to Dodó, and as if she hasn't even noticed that he's asleep, she begins telling him stories. Meantime her hands are moving: she is knitting Dodó an arm-warmer. Ever since his arm swelled up so big, he hasn't been able to move it. But he says it's cold. Only his arm. Otherwise it's really, really hot. The arm-warmer Grandmother is knitting is from showy green, smooth yarn she took from an old sweater. But it's not like anyone will see it. Grandmother sends me out of the room, which is not too nice of her, but I don't want to argue. I stand behind the curtain. Where Grandmother used to stand look-out so I could watch TV. That was back when everyone still had it in them to go on yelling a lot, and it wasn't as quiet as now.

"Dodó, my dear, everything that's happening out there in the big wide world is outrageous, no? People are lounging about on the moon,

and meantime they can't even set my blood pressure right. And if I have a stroke? Nitromin under my tongue, Dalgo drops day in and day out. You tell me, is this life? Oy! Which reminds me! Listen up, Dodó, my dear. I simply can't get through to this girl. What with the maniacal way she cleans this place, one of these days she'll throw away my old beige shoes. You know, the pair with the holes in it, the shoes I had made, though they're now kaput. Well, I stuck them way in the back of the closet. With my other shoes. Including the blue sabots. Okay, those are a bit tattered, too, but it's not like anyone needs them for a beauty contest. And the brown shoes with the thick heels. You know, the ones that were made from kidskin from the prewar days. Those just never wore out, you see. I'm not saying they haven't been down at the cobbler's a dozen times, you know, the cobbler with the crazy wife, because that other cobbler, the one in the building next door, isn't worth a darn. Why, he uses synthetic leather for patching! Imagine! A leather shoe! Oy! Why is it that long ago, they knew how to make normal shoes? What's the magic in that? Nowadays what happens is that I head on over to the orthopedist's, yes, I'll sit in line for half a day, then I'll wait two months, and they end up giving me a shoe at least one size too big—and that's if I'm lucky, because it might have been one size too small. Do these cobblers even have lasts these days? Oh, don't even answer, not a word! Remember when we used to go to Pokornyi? You know, when he made not only arch-supports but also shoes? First he made the last, so when my father went back ten years later, he took out my father's last. From tissue paper, with a label on it. He looked in a notebook and then

reached for the shelf. That simple. Oy! Those people knew what they were doing. Anyway, that's why I don't throw away my old shoes. Let me ask you for something, Dodó, my dear. If I'm no longer around, by no means let her throw out those beige shoes. They have cotton stuffed into it, just like all my shoes. What can I do if my feet are so small that my shoes need filling out? But the cotton in one half of that particular pair isn't packed as tightly as in all those other shoes I've worn away, no, it's outright soft in that one shoe. Because I stuck something behind it, you see. And nothing to sneeze at! I saved it up out of the *gelt* for food, twenty forints at a time. Nor do I go to the hairdresser's like I used to. Did you notice? And my eyeglasses? Thirteen forints for the no-frills frames at state health service optical shops. That's good enough for me. For reading. As spares, I mean. Because I need a better pair, too. To look presentable around all of you, too. How would it look if the old lady looked like some *shlukh*? Just a little bit on the beautician and the manicurist, that's all I spend anymore. Just because I'm so old doesn't mean I need to be a *shlukh*. How much do you think I spend? Hmm? Well, just enough so that if something happens with me, it shouldn't cause all of you a big headache. Anyway, I said this only because this ornery young woman doesn't need to know everything. But I beg you, please don't just throw that pair of beige, hole-filled shoes in the trash. Promise you'll watch out for that. I know that when you make a promise, you keep it.... Anyway, it's good if you know this.

“Damn it, it's stuck again!”



“Hold on a sec, I’ll give you a hand.”

Still holding the stretcher, the two men in blue uniforms pull with all their might, but they can’t open the ambulance door.

They slam the stretcher down on the ground so their hands will be free, and they yank again at the ambulance door. They pull and they pound, but it just wouldn’t open. Dodó is lying there only a few centimeters above the wet cobblestone. His hand is hanging in a black puddle. He doesn’t even move. Instead of a suit, he is wearing pajamas; instead of a jacket, a blanket. Instead of sadness in his eyes, there is regret.