

THE SCAR

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Yai for the Komiker Troupe!

From the moment I hear of their coming performance, I can think of little else.

And now, with their concert about to begin, I crunch gravel underfoot as I weave my way across the square between dense clumps of legs to get as near the stage as I can. Father and Mother have remained towards the rear, there looming behind them a high mound of coiled barbed wire. But even without them beside me I am safe. They will be watching out for me, I know, Mother having already said, "When the concert's over, remember, this is where we'll be."

At five, I do not know much yet about seasons, months or even the sequence of days. Nor does it matter. Enough that it is a warm, puff-clouded, blue-skied day combed through with the scent of field-grass nearby and acorn-laden oaks, a day so right for people not to be working and for a concert - yai again! - by the Komiker Troupe, whom I have already seen before, when that marvellous threesome, Jasmina Jewel, Who Knows One and Tickle and Laugh, visited my school, two weeks, maybe three, before.

The stage is but a raised makeshift platform planked across six-foot crates on a frugal skimp of grainy ground called Ziegenhain Square. But how bright and lively the Troupe has made it! Crimson, gold and orange crepe and other gaily variegated materials decorate the front, the sides and the tables, chairs and other props they have strewn about the stage - all of it so captivating a flush of happy warming colour doing wonders in brightening that otherwise grey, grinding drabbery through which Mother escorts me twice each day between our barracks and the school. It would be more appealing still if they had covered the coarse stone and marble tablet behind the stage on which the words

Yizkor : Remember
Die 6 Million : The Six Million
and *Al Kiddush HaShem* : In Sanctification of the Name

stand out - for the occasion, certainly - in too-bold relief.

I may not have noticed it but for the Graneks and Simcha Fremder behind me, all three of whom share our barracks.

"What a disgrace!" I hear Yetta Granek say. "To hold a concert so slap in the face of a memorial!"

"A disgrace?" replies Samek Granek. "I should rather say a triumph! A way of saying to the world, 'You wanted to crush us? Then look! See how we still go on!'"

To which Simcha Fremder adds his bit.

"In a transit camp," he says, "behind is behind, and ahead is ahead. We have lost many, we have lost much. From hereon, it is forward, to relearn to live, to work and enjoy as before."

In any case, I do not linger long either on that slab in front or on the Graneks behind. Nor do I stray overlong on any other in that mass packing the square, although among those nearest to me, I do recognise tall Yosl Kraftik and his Rachel Sonnenschein, Nehemiah Flink the camp's odd-job man, Felix Klepfisz a watchmaker from Cracow, Shula Estreicher whom everyone calls "The Gypsy", the Lowicz journalist Mietek Pruzanski, Fishl and Perla Dumsky both teachers from Lublin, and Beinish Gotteskind, an orphan not more than nineteen, they say, whom I have never seen except alone and always with a notebook and pencil in hand. And, of course, along with Bluma Blustein, Matylda Frimmer and the tailor Jacob Kleinman among others nearby, there is photographer Maximilien Schneiderman, *Pan* Max - thirty-five, thirty-six - who keeps weaving a way through whatever breach he can, continuously click, click, clicking his *Leica* - for posterity, he says. In the main, the men wear creased sombre much-worn jackets, the women are out in bland cotton dresses, matt overcoats and shawls. There are other children too there, of course, some of them, like myself, almost hugging the stage, others standing further back by their parents' side, and others still perched on their fathers' shoulders.

That there is also an ebbing-falling hubbub against a background indecipherable murmur of cross-cutting voices all about, this I cannot help but hear. But, all at once, everyone there and all noise, too, totally disappear for me as, from some entrance that I am hard put to find and to a frisky laughing cacophony of fiddle, clarinet, rattle and drum, Jasmina Jewel, Who Knows One and Tickle and Laugh materialise, one, two, three, upon the stage, strut forward and backward, and backward and forward, then to the left, then to the right, then in a circle at least seven times around and, in a pause as long as a blinking, lay aside their instruments, clap hands and set to hand-standing and somersaulting, cartwheeling and leap-frogging, singing the while,

"A thousand delights will Jasmina Jewel bring,

With Who Knows One will you sing,
 With Tickle and Laugh will you truly laugh,
 For the Komiker Troupe does nothing by half."

after which they march high-kneed to the front of the stage and swiftly launch into a one-two quickfire give-and-take routine:

"If I were to lend a thousand *zloty* to Who Knows One, Tickle and Laugh, what would you say?"

"I would say that you were a fool!"

"And if he returned it?"

"Then he'd be the fool!"

"As a reward, Baron Rothschild offers you anything of his you want. What, Who Knows One, and you, Tickle and Laugh, what would you choose?"

"His summer home"

"His silver."

"How foolish you are, both of you. Me, if I were you, I would take his daughter."

"His daughter?"

"Why his daughter?"

"Because then, as his son-in-law, I would one day have both his summer home and his silver."

"Every night, my rabbi transforms himself into the prophet Elijah."

"How do you know?"

"The rabbi himself told me."

"Might he not have told you a lie?"

"A lie? Would a man who can turn into the prophet Elijah ever lie?"

"Jasmina Jewel, Who Knows One, let me tell you. In my barrack, I didn't sleep a wink last night. There was a dead louse in my bed."

"A dead louse? So what?"

"Did it bite you?"

"No, it didn't bite me! But what a funeral his relatives gave him!"

The crisp brisk repartee draws forth a rolling swell of chuckles, giggles, tittering and open animated laughter. Even vinegary Yetta Granek behind me whom I see on looking around at the tickled crowd permits herself a smile of sorts - of sorts only, though, betrayed by a fleeting flicker about the corners of her mouth, an excess of blinking and a softening of her earlier demeanour. She hails from Grabow, and her husband Samek from nearby Leczyna - so I have learned at table in the camp's communal kitchen (where I get to know most of the people's stories, except those that Father, on returning from the garage where he works, brings home). Together, they spent the last three years of the war in a cellar of a storehouse which a Polish farmer converted into a cowshed. One evening - the only time of day they could emerge for more salubrious air - she impaled an ankle on a prong of a pitchfork and developed a poisoned leg. The farmer's wife staunched the bleeding, applied poultices each night and wrapped the foot with material stripped from old aprons, blouses and skirts. The wound healed, but Yetta Granek walks with a limp, even now.

On her other side stands big Yoel Kraftik who, always unstinting with his laughter whenever he's amused, wipes an eye with a hand short of forefinger and thumb - shot away, I heard him say, by partisans who had no place for *Yids* in their elite. Leaning against his shoulder is Rachel Sonnenschein. They are to be married soon. Where he is sun-browned through working as a courier and is a mine of stories, Rachel is porcelain pale and speaks very little. She is too serious, too sad for Yoel, I've heard Mother say - "but who can blame her," Mother went on to add, "when she's already lost one husband and a baby she was carrying and saw both her parents and two sisters rounded up in Wlodawa and deported, as far as she knows, to Sobibor?"

Meanwhile, the Komiker Troupe quickfire on.

"Oi, Jasmina Jewel, dear friend, what a simpleton is my son-in-law. Neither can he drink nor play cards."

"So, that is a misfortune?"

"What else is it, when, not knowing how to drink, he drinks nonetheless, and not knowing the first thing about cards, he insists on playing."

"Rabbi Who Knows One. I've had enough already! I want to divorce my wife."
 "You, Tickle and Laugh, so fine and pious a man, want a divorce, you who surely knows that not only the angels but even stones weep when they hear such things?"
 "Rabbi, the angels and stones they want to weep? Let them weep. Me, for once I want to rejoice."

"Jasmina Jewel, the town council has elected you to watch out for *Mashiach* ."
 "But the pay is next to nothing."
 "True, true, but think how secure is the position."

"If only *Mashiach* had come when we needed him!"

This, from Bluma Blustein, who nearly bled to death during an experiment on twins.

To which Nehemiah Flink replies "Amen!" - Nehemiah, every bit a sharp-nosed, stark-eyed bird, with calloused hands and rough nails, once worn down to chafed and bleeding flesh - so he told me on fixing a window at our barrack - coming from breaking stone in a quarry.

But, Bluma Blustein and Nehemiah Flink aside, what a treat!

Just to look at them, at Jasmina Jewel, Tickle and Laugh and Who Knows One, is a treat. As on that first and recent occasion when they turned up at my school, with Jasmina Jewel in her exquisite white-laced vermilion blouse and shining black tights, Tickle and Laugh in much-patched, short-legged pants and oversized jacket, mismatched socks and flapping shoes, and Who Knows One in green shirt, yellow vest, speckled bow-tie and rolled-up sleeves.

How I cling to them!

To Jasmina Jewel above all - so petite is she, and so lithe, so dazzling in her outfit, and how coquettish those big black eyes always on the move, her every nuance, even her otherwise so-boyish cropped black hair.

Jasmina Jewel!

Truly, a thousand delights!

So is she on stage; but at other times, Shaindele Weisinger, a cutter at the same factory where Mother stitches blouses behind a sewing machine.

The evening after the Troupe visits my school, I burn to tell Father, tell Mother about her over dinner in the communal kitchen.

"Jasmina Jewel?" Mother says. "Shaindele Weisinger?"

She cuts another slice of rye loaf which she passes to me.

"Ach, what a life!" she says. "How anyone could want to hurt her!... Such a treasure you will not find anywhere, and just to look at her... A picture! But..."

"But?" Father prompts.

"But how in Ravensbruck they beat her, whipped her, kicked her, now for not standing straight, now for marching too slow, and now because Frau Kommandant she wanted someone to beat. They broke her nose, she lost a tooth, they opened wounds on her back. But one thing they didn't break. And that, my little son, is what you saw today."

What I saw that day, I see again now; and watching her along with Who Knows One and Tickle and Laugh, I wonder if they will perform this time too that number, *The Boat* , that I loved so much that first time.

I dare to hope so.

And they do! They do!

Jasmina Jewel, Who Knows One and Tickle and Laugh sit down on the stage one behind the other like rowers in a rowboat.

Tickle and Laugh opens the commentary.

"Three friends, a rabbi, who is myself," - he covers his head with a hand and sways a moment with eyes closed as if in prayer - "and a lawyer" - Who Knows One puffs out his chest and hooks his thumbs in the armpits of his vest - "and a mime" - Jasmina Jewel, raising one hand to her brow, the other behind her back in the pose of a ship's captain on the watch - one day go rowing in a boat.

"The day is warm. The sun shines in the sky. Birds leap about the branches, butterflies flutter their wings.

Tickle and Laugh remains the narrator; Who Knows One maintains the pose of the lawyer; while Jasmina Jewel turns her hands, flaps her arms, flutters her fingers and rolls her big lively expressive eyes. .

"But as they row, the boat strikes a tree-trunk that tears a hole in its bottom.

"Water begins to enter. Shock and alarm!"

Jasmina Jewel enacts the panic - head up, head down; hands to her temples, arms to the sky; her body trembling, her face in most fearsome fright!

"What are they to do? There is no-one around who may see them. All they have are oars of no use to them, there in the middle of the river as the boat fills more fully with water?"

"The rabbi begins to plead.

Who Knows One, covering his head again and raising both his free hand and his eyes heavenward, cries out, "Blessed art thou, O Lord of the universe! Both for our sakes and for yours, O Lord, save us! And believe that if this day you do so deliver us from calamity, I pledge that I will sing your praises and spread word of your goodness and mercy everywhere on earth to the end of my days!"

Jasmina Jewel, who has been swaying along with him in accompanying silent prayer, looks again at the bottom of the boat, covers her face and now rocks her shoulders with weeping.

Who Knows One resumes the commentary.

"But the boat keeps sinking. The water in its bottom is now ankle-deep. Can no-one else help?"

Tickle and Laugh, as the lawyer, puffs his chest out still further than before and, with his thumbs again hooked around in the armpits of his vest, adds his own voice now.

"Whatever God, judge or other being there be out there!" he appeals. "Listen! Hear! And believe that if this day you rescue us from calamity, then in this world that is without justice, I will pledge always and everywhere to fight for justice, before every court, before every judge, even before the courts and judges in heaven if I must!"

Jasmina Jewel mimics him while he talks, then, when he finishes, brandishes raises her elbows and fists like a fighter bent for justice.

She then looks again at the bottom of the boat, faces the audience, reaches out her arms.

"Help us! Help us! Help us!" she mimes.

"And still the boat is sinking. The water is rising. It is up to our shins. It is beginning to tilt back."

Jasmina Jewel, Tickle and Laugh and Who Knows One themselves tilt forward.

And suddenly, Jasmina Jewel clicks finger and thumb.

An idea!

Bending still further forward, she reaches into the boat, conjures up a rope, ties a knot in it, twirls it into a circle and, standing up, takes aim, releases the knotted end towards the shore where it gains purchase on solidity. With all the strain showing in her face, her breath, her shoulders, arms and legs, bit by bit, with hand overlapping hand, she pulls the boat ashore, just in time for all three - Who Knows One, Tickle and Laugh and herself, rabbi, lawyer and mime - to stand and leap onto the bank before the boat fully sinks behind them.

To the applause and merriment all around - and to a remark made by dressmaker Matylda Frimmer near my left who has a deep dent above an ear, caused by the butt of a rifle (so I have heard), "True, true, how many of us survived by fantasy alone when nothing else remained?" - they break apart. Who Knows One cartwheels to the left, Tickle and Laugh somersaults to the right, and Jasmina Jewel in a whirr of vermilion and black, backflips once, twice, a third time to the rear, where she leaps on to a barrel which she rolls forward with her feet preparing herself, as I have already seen her so miraculously do, to be the centre point in a two-way flight of a succession of skittles and jugglers' rings that Who Knows One and Tickle and Laugh are now taking up from low tables at the sides.

How delicate her poise, how controlled her balance on that rocking-rolling barrel as she calls out, "Let the fun begin!" whereupon the stage yields to an ever-quickenening flurry of darting, spinning, circling objects. Ah, yes, Jasmina Jewel is sublime. But Who Knows One and Tickle and Laugh have their antics too. In catching and tossing on those skittles and rings, Who Knows One spins about his spot, catches them behind his back, and juggles some of them once, twice, three times before throwing them on under one thigh or another or under his arms. Tickle and Laugh, meanwhile, master of the other side, plays an old bent crotch of a man, a begging dog standing on hind legs, an ecstatic *Hasid* dancing and, for variety, kicks off first one outsized shoe and then the other into the cycle of missiles flying so faultlessly about the stage.

"Clever, no?" declares the former Cracow watchmaker Felix Klepfisz nearby, not so much to anyone in particular as to everyone (although, catching my eye, he winks at me), to which Shula Estreicher, "The Gypsy" answers, tapping a forefinger against her nose, "If you're not rich, a quick talker or clever in this world, then...!", which Perla Dumsky the teacher from Lublin interrupts by adding, "Or lucky, may none ever need such luck again."

Father, as a mechanic in the Ziegenhain garage and driver-deliverer around the camp, seems to know nearly everyone.

Felix Klepfisz, he says, is here in Ziegenhain only because he crawled out of one of those unspeakable pits one night when everyone else was already stiff and cold and their blood had congealed. He was only hit in the shoulder and lay still like the dead until the last of the *Hitlerists'* whoops and crowings of drunken laughter had passed out of hearing.

"You know that Shula Estreicher?" he says on another occasion. "What nerve, what nerve! A real *tziganerl* ! Comes out of a bunker outside Minsk where some fifteen others are sick or starving. Steals from somewhere a frilled white blouse, red skirt, boots and cap, and is every bit a peasant girl off to a celebration. A soldier in a jeep comes from behind, stops, offers to take her to the festivities. With a wink and a throw of her head towards a wood off the road, she makes another offer. The soldier follows. Under a tree, she kneels; he kneels in front of her, grasps her chin, comes nearer. But Shula, she is a true *tziganerl* , and one, two, she has his pistol, and he has a bullet in his intestines. He grabs her by an ankle as she rises, she falls and cuts a knee, but, another bullet, and there is one Amalekite less. He has money, now *she* has money; and with the money (and his watch), she buys bread, milk, cheese and fruit and, at nightfall, heads back to the bunker. She did not have to use the pistol again but still has it in her barrack for a keepsake."

As for Perla Dumsky, the luck she means - and prays that none will ever need such luck again - is having, with her husband Fishl, been out of their hometown Kolomyja when the massacres began there, and then having been, "as the saying goes," says Father, "in the right place at the right time" in being able to hide in the forests, smuggle into Hungary and then Austria through a resistance network operating in those parts. As a memorial, Father says, she is blind in one eye: a branch swinging back penetrated deep into its socket at the Austrian border.

The vigorous part of the performance over, at least for the moment, the rings and skittles are swiftly put away, Tickle and Laugh retrieves his shoes and steps forward. In his patched, too-short pants and oversized jacket, along with the greasepaint he wears that exaggerates the length of his face, his sharp-angled nose and strong jaws, it is hard to think of him as the camp barber Shlamek Weintraub, in private so quiet, whom Father visits regularly for a hair-cut.

This Shlamek Weintraub, Father tells - Father really does know so much about everybody - this Shlamek Weintraub (who was Tickle and Laugh in a little troupe in Paris before he becoming Tickle and Laugh again in Ziegenhain) went to Toulouse when Paris was taken. There, on false papers of his own, he led children dressed as scouts and campers into the Alps and out of France into Switzerland. He was caught and sent to a place called Mauthausen, where he nearly died from a bleeding ulcer and was in hospital when the Americans arrived.

The man up there on the stage before me, though, is not Shlamek Weintraub, but Tickle and Laugh who, approaching the stage, begins:

"A Hitlerist is about to give Szypinski, Kambanellos and Avremele Feffer fifty lashes.

"'You, Szypinski,' he says, 'you can protect your back with whatever you want. What will it be?'

"'Please, worthy Panie,' says Szypinski, 'on my back I want grease.'

"'Grease it is then. Now... lash one...'

"'Ooh!' cries out Szypinski, stiffening.

"'Lash two...'

"'Ooh... ooh!' Szypinski cries out again.

"'Lash three...'

"'Ooh... oooh....oooh...' he is now convulsing.

"The fifty lashes are over. Szypinski is carried away, bleeding, convulsing, his face wet with tears

"'Now, you, Kambanellos, what will you have on your back?'

"'Kambanellos is a Greek from Thessalonika.

"'Me,' he says, 'On my back I want nothing.'

"'Nothing? All right! Nothing, then. Lash one...'

"'Feeble,' says the Greek. 'See if you can do better with the next.'

"'Lash two...'

"'Ha! A butterfly!'

"'Lash three..'

"'Was that a flea or a feather?'

"After his fifty lashes, Kambanellos stands up and walks away, 'Feh!' he says, shrugging a shoulder at the Hitlerist.

"'Now, you, *Jude* ,' says the Hitlerist. 'What will you have on your back?'

"'On *my* back,' says Avremele Feffer, 'I want Kambanellos.'"

No sooner completed than he steps back to let Who Knows One bound forward: Who Knows One, the electrician, Yosel Gelbzucht from Czernowitz, who, "if he was not an electrician" - says the Lowicz journalist Mietek Pruzanski - "would surely have been the best among *folks-zinger* ." even the critics would be holding their sides.

In green and yellow, and with his bow-tie, like Jasmina Jewel and Tickle and Laugh, he adds colour to the stage as the stage greatly enhances the colour of the Square. Like his companions, he is a livewire, a continually moving curly-headed dynamo strutting about the stage as he launches into song, into songs from home, he says in introducing them, favourites from home, adding, "wherever home has for each of you been", and beginning: :

My mother went to market to buy and bring some coal,
She brought me back a handsome lad visiting from Poland,
Oh what a lad he is, how manly and fine -
Ah how black his eyes, ah that kitten that is mine...

then:

Oh, take your fiddle, fiddler, in your hand
And play for me the song of the golden land,
My mother would sing me that song with heart and with feeling,
So play me that song that will forever for me remain so appealing.

and, as the last,

Maiden, maiden, tell me true, what can grow, grow without dew?
What can burn for years and years and what can cry and shed no tears?
Tumbala, tumbala, tumbalalaika, Tumbala, tumbala, tumbalalaika
Tumbalalaika, tumbalalaika, Tumbalalaika, tumbalalaika.

Silly boy, here's the answer true. A stone can grow, grow, grow without dew.
Love can burn for years and years and a heart can cry and shed no tears.

whereupon the audience, piecemeal, shyly, perhaps already long not used to singing, join in the chorus:

Tumbala, tumbala, tumbalalaika, Tumbala, tumbala, tumbalalaika
Tumbalalaika, tumbalalaika, Tumbalalaika, tumbalalaika.

While bounding about the stage, he comes forward to its edge where, leaning over, he rolls his eyes like a merry jester and flutters his fingers at me and the other children gathered there. The sleeves of his shirt are folded back to just below the elbows and as he leans over, I glimpse a short thin smudge of blue on a forearm. Just a glimpse, no more; but how like the tailor Jacob Kleinman's nearby, whose smudge I have also seen, and with whom he played in a little orchestra - Who Knows One, it is said, on an accordion and Kleinman on a fiddle - at the gate of a camp as new arrivals came off the trains and passed through.

A few more acrobatics, a bit more repartee, some more songs - and the concert nears its end. Never have I yet seen so many people laugh, as Maximilien Schneiderman weaves through wherever he can to keep click-click-clicking his camera, catching it all, the Komiker Troupe on the stage above, the massed audience in the square below.

And a moment comes when the Troupe before us, they all step forward - crop-haired Jasmina Jewel in her exquisite vermilion and black, Who Knows One in green and yellow and speckled tie and Tickle and Laugh in his patches and flapping shoes - and, joining hands, embark upon a song which gains in loudness, which rises in intensity as, in one voice, all join in - this time, all levity behind them, with choked voices, and freely-running tears, with sobbing and sniffing and in breaking quivering tones, in what I am in time to learn is a people's anthem born out of blood and preserved in the heart:

Never say that you have reached the very end,
Though leaden eyes a bitter future may portend.
Because the hour for which we yearned will yet arrive
And our marching steps will thunder: "We survive!"

The performance is over. The Komiker Troupe vanishes as suddenly and invisibly as it appeared. Before me, only the stage remains, still decorated front and sides in crimson, gold and orange crepe and with its tables, chairs and other props strewn about; behind which, at some remove behind it, stands the coarse stone and marble memorial tablet with its big and prominent words *Yizkor*, *6 Million* and *Kiddush HaShem* carved into it in bold relief.

And so, from here on, all disperse.

The day has cooled a jot. The sky's blueness is less uniform, having become more encroached upon by clouds grown denser and more confluent. The scent of field-grass and oaks has dampened. And on the gravelly grainy ground of Ziegenhain square, the shadows have lengthened.

Above the crunching of the gravel beneath the mass of feet moving here, moving there, the hubbub preceding the performance rises again. Mirth is recaptured; the Troupe's chat and backchat are repeated; buoyed up already, I am still further gladdened by the talk and patter and laughter of those around me, some of them neighbours, others Father's or Mother's friends, and, others still, strangers to us, come to this Ziegenhain camp from places with names like Hamburg, Praga, Dachau and Chelm, and like Zamosc, Drohobicz, Sosnowiec and Lodz, and, like us, Father, Mother and myself, from faraway Tashkent.

Caught by curiosity and hoping to find and catch a last glimpse of my Jasmina Jewel, Who Knows One and Tickle and Laugh, instead of moving with everyone and returning to where, I know, Father and Mother are waiting at the rear before the mound of coiled barbed wire, I make my way backstage. It won't take long; it shouldn't take long, and, as I make my way there, like Jasmina Jewel I shield my eyes, I turn my hands, flap my arms and flutter my fingers, being, like her, ship's captain, sun, bird, butterfly, tree.

To the right of the memorial, there is a lane, a short and narrow cobbled through way that leads, from what I can see, to surrounding rugged and stubbled countryside around.

Perhaps that is where they went.

So I run towards it.

But come to a stop there.

For, some way down the middle, an older straw-headed boy in jacket and leather breeches is taken up with lighting a cigarette. Perhaps he has heard my coming or simply sees me there. Whichever it is, he turns to face me. With cigarette in mouth, he raises his fists as if to fight, he twitches his nose, his lips angle into a sneer. But he doesn't come nearer. Instead, he now brandishes one of those fists, he shouts words I do not understand, and, searching a quick one-two about him, takes a step forward and bends down.

Where, moments before, I have been borne aloft in mime delicious and sublime, not the stuff of mime is the stone that, gaining release from a swiftly flicked wrist, glides in smooth, rapid and unhampered flight, giving upon a yelp of riveting pain and a confused turmoil of dazed darkness, warm liquid stickiness melding with tears down the runnels between cheeks and nose, a nearby loud and triumphant "Wahoo!", crowing laughter and sprinting feet, followed by other sounds - an escalating, ever-louder approaching rush of feet to a swelling accompaniment of cries:

"Even their little bastards they teach to hate!"

"Haven't they bled yet us enough and more than enough?"

"Will their murdering never stop?"

Father is beside me, and Mother, and others too - the Lowicz journalist, Mietek Pruzanski, Bluma Blustein, the Dumskys, Fishl and Perla, and - he is everywhere, everywhere - Maximilien Schneiderman, with his always-clicking *Leica*. A wet folded rag is pressed against my brow to stem the flow; another wipes the blood, the tears, the hurt away.

In their pallor, Mother's cheeks shames even the white marble of the memorial. Kneeling before me, with "Gypsy" Shula Estreicher on my other side, she clasps my head within the safe haven of her enfolding arms, herself near to weeping saying into my ear, "What are they doing to you, *mein hertzele*, my little heart? Must you too learn so young, so young, what it is to be despised?"

And then, someone bends down and lifts my chin in the cup of a hand.

I do not immediately see who it is, but the voice, the voice...

"It's nothing, *liebeniu*, just a little cut."

Jasmina Jewel!

Exquisite Jasmina Jewel - I do everything I can to see her - Jasmina Jewel, petite, lithe, boyish and still in her vermilion, her black and her greasepaint, saying, playing the part, "Pretend you're a soldier, a hero, a Maccabee. Will a Maccabee be upset by something so little as a stone?"

I love her! I love her!

Don't leave!

But "Gypsy" Shula, ever so practical, takes over the situation.

"*Nu!* Do we or don't we take him to the doctor?"

At the infirmary, it is Leni Traeger, a nurse signed up with the camp authorities - who sees us in.

She is small, lean and mousy-haired and wears a dreary uniform, not quite green, not quite grey. She leads us, Mother, Father and myself, into a white-walled room with a table, bed and chair that is also full of all kinds of instruments in a cupboard and smells of something so

acrid and bitter that it burns the eyes, the nose, the tongue. It is the taste that I am much, much later of despicable carbolic.

"Ach," says Leni Traeger the nurse, easing away the rag that has been kept pressed against my brow all this time. "Some cut. But also such healthy blood. Dr Blauman he is in his barrack. I will go call him."

Her voice comes from far back in her throat, her accent heavy and thick.

Mother holds my hand.

She does not trust the nurse.

"Why must we have one of them here?" she says "Not enough that they bleed us, now they mend us too."

Before reaching Ziegenhain, Father, Mother and I lived in Central Asia, I have heard Father tell his friends, in a small town outside Tashkent. Before I was born, they had a little girl. But she caught measles, then a cold on the chest and... and..."

When I first hear the story, Father cannot go on. He turns aside his face, takes deep breath and bites a lip, the better to hold back the moistness that gathers in his eyes.

It is Mother who, sitting beside him that time, goes on.

"And she died," she says. "And when she died and we bent over her body, the *feldscher* there, he pointed at a window, he kept pointing at a window and said, 'Out there millions are dying in this war, and over one child you are crying?'"

There are not many, even at the camp, whom Mother is yet ready to trust; and Leni Traeger here, certainly not.

What follows goes quickly by.

Leni Traeger brings squat, balding, bespectacled Dr Blauman. Over my beating and kicking, he puts me to sleep and when I waken, I see his round face beaming over me, I see Father, Mother and nurse Leni Traeger who is wheeling away a trolley covered bloodied cloths.

Soon after, Father carries me out of the infirmary, my brow, where forehead meets hairline, covered by a plaster.

It is twilight. Grey has replaced all the resplendency, and all the joy of the earlier daytime light. The barracks are matt and plain, the ground a toneless dusty brown and the sky now fully usurped by cloud. There are few people about: the teachers Fishl and Perla Dumsky from Lublin, the Cracow watchmaker Felix Klepfisz, and - there he is again! - *Pan* Photographer Maximilien Schneiderman, of whom "Gypsy" Shula Estraicher has said, of his two eyes, one is glued to the camera, the other to posterity.

Long, long after, in Australia, I chance to meet Maximilien Schneiderman (Maxi, as he now calls himself) in St Kilda's Village Belle. At seventy, he has filled out in face, shoulders and girth; his hair, in its plenitude, is the white of polished silver; and his eyes prance as they must always have done in his search for a telling shot.

He recognises me by my photograph on one of books .

He introduces himself, we share a half-hour over coffee at the *Scheherazade* , and, as he lives in nearby Barkly Street, invites me to look through his collection of photographs he has taken in Ziegenhain.

The volumes he removes from a long shelf of albums all painstakingly labelled are old. Held in place by photograph corners, many of the prints have not weathered well. But as we sit side by side at the kitchen table, he points now to one photograph, now to another with a "Do you at all remember Yetta Granek who walked with a limp... Or Shaindele Weisinger who was every young man's heartthrob as Jasmina Jewel?... Or the *tziganerl* Shula as wily like a fox?" and so on...

And, on looking through the photographs, a bolt-like recognition strikes me as never before.

In Ziegenhain, there is a memorial.

Into its marble are etched the words:

Yizkor
Die 6 Million
Al Kiddush HaShem

In Ziegenhain, too, everyone has a memorial: Yetta Granek and her damaged ankle; Yoel Kraftik with thumb and finger missing; Nehemiah Flink with nails worn down to bleeding flesh; Who Knows One Yosel Gelbzucht's and Jacob Kleinman's forearm numbers; Perla Dumky's blinded eye; Jasmina Jewel Shaindele Weisinger's broken nose and missing tooth; and, among all the others, Father's, Mother's perished Miriaml, a memorial eternal.

While I...?

In Ziegenhain, I too have acquired one.
I carry it on my hairline, I will carry it forever.
Telltale witness that I too spilt blood in Europe.

From the collection of stories *Voices from the Corner*.