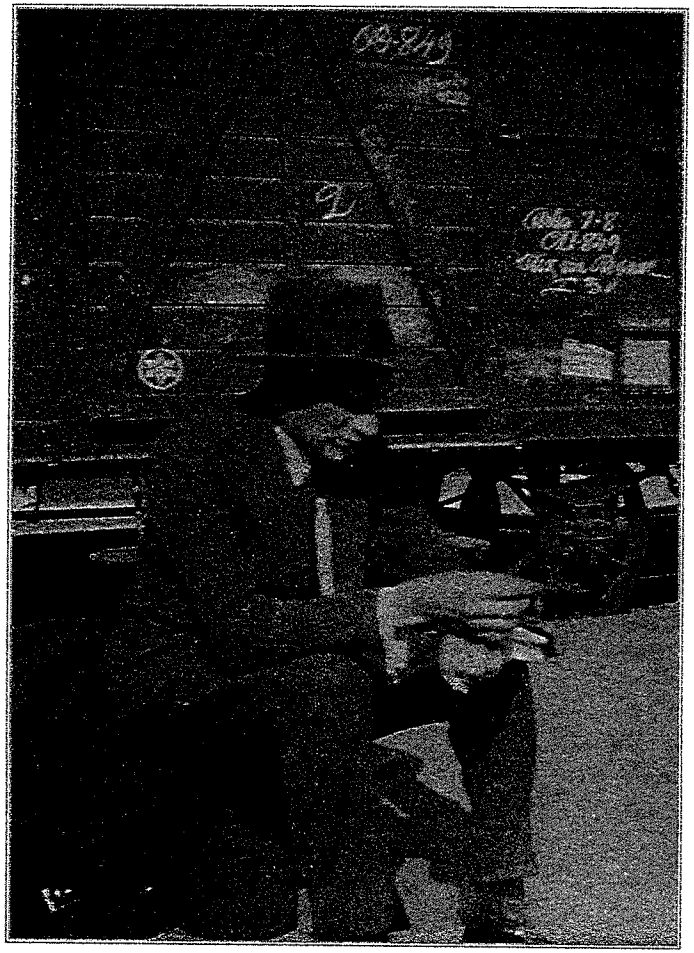

The Collected Stories of JOSEPH ROTH

Translated
with an Introduction by
MICHAEL HOFMANN

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STRAWBERRIES*

(1929)

THE TOWN I WAS BORN IN was situated in Eastern Europe, on a great and sparsely inhabited plain. To the east, it stretched on forever. To the west, it was bounded by a line of blue hills that were only visible on clear summer days.

My birthplace was home to about ten thousand people. Three thousand of them were insane, if not dangerously so. A mild insanity wafted around them like a golden cloud. They carried on their businesses, and earned money. They married and had children. They read books and newspapers. They concerned themselves with the things of this world. They conversed with one another in all the languages that were used by the very diverse population of this part of the world.

My fellow citizens were gifted people. Many of them now reside in the great cities of the Old World and the New. All of them are important, and some of them are famous. It is from my homeland that the Paris doctor comes, who rejuvenates rich old men and recovers the virginities of old ladies; the Amsterdam astronomer who discovered the comet Gallias; Cardinal P., who for the past two decades has been making policy for the Vatican; the Scottish archbishop Lord L.; the Milan rabbi K., whose mother tongue was Coptic; the great shipping agent S., whose business sign may be read in every railway station in the world and in every port on five continents. I will not give their names. Any of my readers who subscribe to a newspaper will be familiar with them. My own name is immaterial. No one knows it, as I live under an assumed one. For what it's worth, I'm called Naphtali Kroy.

*This piece forms the opening of an uncompleted novel.

I'm what's called a conman. That's what they call people in Europe who claim to be something other than what they really are. It's no different from what every Western European does. Only, they aren't conmen, because they have papers, passports, identity cards, birth certificates. Some even have family trees. Whereas I have a false passport, no birth certificate, and no family tree. So it's fair to say: Naphtali Kroy is a conman.

In my homeland, I didn't need any papers. Everyone knew who I was. I cleaned the burgermaster's boots when I was six years old. When I was twelve, I was apprenticed to a barber. There I soaped the burgermaster's chops. At fifteen, I became a coachman, and I took the burgermaster for drives on Sundays. We had thirteen policemen. I drank schnapps with every one of them. What did I need papers for?

The countryside was run by the gendarmerie. Their sergeant slept with my aunt on Thursday afternoons. I sometimes smuggled schnapps from the country into the town—which was unlawful and liable for duty. The gendarmerie sergeant winked at the customs men, and they never bothered me.

In short, I was on a good footing with the authorities when I was young. Later on, things changed. Times changed, authorities changed.

I DON'T THINK ANYONE had papers where I came from. There was a law court, a prison, lawyers, tax offices—but there wasn't anywhere where you had to identify yourself. What did it matter who you were arrested as, if they arrested you? If you paid taxes or not—whom did it drive to ruin, and who derived any benefit from it? The main thing was that the officials had to live. They lived off bribes. That's why no one went to prison. That's why no one paid taxes. That's why no one had papers.

Occasionally, there were grave crimes; trivial crimes were not investigated.

Arson was overlooked, that was an act of personal retribution. Vagrancy, begging, and hawking were all long-established local practices. Forest fires were dealt with by foresters. Affray and manslaughter were put down to excessive consumption of alcohol. Robbers and muggers were not pursued, on the grounds that they punished themselves sufficiently by renouncing ordinary human society, trade, and

conversation. Counterfeiters put in an appearance from time to time. They were left in peace, because they damaged the government more than they did their fellow citizens. The courts and lawyers were kept busy, if only because they worked so terribly slowly. They made it their business to settle conflicts and arbitrate in disagreements. Payments were invariably in arrears.

Where I came from, we lived at peace. Only near neighbors were enemies. People got drunk together and made it up. Commercial rivals did nothing to hurt one another. They took it out on the customer and the client. They all owed money to each other. None had anything to hold against any of the others.

There was no tolerance of political parties. No distinctions were drawn between people of different nationalities, because everyone spoke every language. Only the Jews stood out on account of their kaftans and their hats and their superiority. There were the occasional little pogroms. In the general hurly-burly, they were soon forgotten. The murdered Jews were put in the ground, and the plundered ones denied that they had lost anything.

ALL MY COMPATRIOTS loved Nature, not for her own sake, but because they had a taste for certain of her fruits.

In the autumn, they went into the fields to roast potatoes. In the spring, they trekked into the forests to pick strawberries.

Our autumn consisted of molten gold and molten silver, of wind, swarms of ravens and mild frosts. Autumn lasted almost as long as winter. In August, the leaves turned yellow; in the first days of September already they lay on the ground. No one bothered to sweep them up. It wasn't until I came to Western Europe that I saw people sweeping up the autumn into a proper dungheap. No wind blew on our clear autumn days. The sun was still very hot, and already very slant and very yellow. It went down in a red West, and rose every morning from a bed of silver and mist. It took a long time for the sky to become a deep blue, but then it stayed like that for the whole of the short day.

The fields were yellow and rough and prickly, and they hurt your feet. Their smell was stronger than it was in spring, more acrid and intractable. The forests at their edges remained green—they were

conifers. In autumn, they got silver crests on their tops. We roasted potatoes. There was a smell of fire, coal, burnt potato skins, and scorched earth. The swamps, which were all around, bore a light sparkling glaze of frost. They smelled as dank as fishermen's nets. In many places, smoke rose steeply and teasingly into the sky. From nearby and distant farmyards came the crowing of cocks who had caught a whiff of the smoke.

In November, we had our first snow. It was thin, brittle, and durable. It didn't melt. At that point we stopped roasting potatoes. We stayed at home. We had bad stoves, cracks in the doors, and gaps in the flooring. Our window frames were made of light, unseasoned fir; they had warped during the summer and now they didn't close properly. We stuffed cotton wool into the joins. We laid newspaper under the doors. We chopped wood for the winter.

In March, when the icicles dripped from the eaves, we could already hear spring galloping up. We disregarded the snowdrops in the forests. We waited till May. We were going picking strawberries.

The woodpeckers were already hammering at the trees. It rained a lot. The rains were soft, water in its most velvety form. It might rain for a day, two days, a week. A wind blew, but the clouds didn't budge, they stood in the sky, immovable, like fixed stars. It rained diligently and thoroughly. The paths softened. The swamps encroached into the forests, frogs swam in the underbrush. The wheels of the peasants' carts no longer crunched. All vehicles moved as though on rubber tires. The hooves of the horses were silent. Everybody took off their boots, hung them over their shoulders, and waded barefoot.

It cleared overnight. One morning, the rain stopped. The sun came out, as though back from holiday.

That was the day we had been waiting for. On that day the strawberries had to be ripe.

SO WE PASSED down the road that led out of our town into the forest. Our town was predictable and basic in its layout. Its two main streets met in the middle. Around that center, there was a little square, where the market took place twice a week. One of the streets led from the station to the cemetery. The other from the prison to the forest.

The forest was to the west. We walked with the sun. The forest

enjoyed the longest days. If you stood at its extreme western edge, you could see the sun disappear below the rim of the horizon, and you could taste its dying beams.

That was where the best strawberries grew. They didn't shyly hide themselves, as they tend to do otherwise. They showed themselves to whoever was looking for them. They teetered on the end of frail-looking but tough stalks. They were full in size, and they didn't grow out of the ground from humility, but from pride. We had to bend down to pick them. Whereas, to reach apples or cherries or pears we had to get up on tiptoe or climb.

The strawberries had little clumps of dirt sticking to them, that you didn't readily see with the naked eye, so we popped them in our mouths too. The dirt crunched between our teeth, but then the juice of the strawberries washed it away, and their soft flesh soothed our gums.

Everyone picked strawberries, though it was forbidden. If the forester caught the women at it, he would confiscate their baskets, tip out the beautiful red strawberries, and trample them into the ground.

But what could he do to us, who ate them right away? He looked at us crossly, and whistled up his dog. The dog wore a brass placket round its neck. It had a greeny, steely shimmer to it, a rare metal object in a world of leaves, wood, and earth.

The forester didn't frighten anyone. The more strawberries he trampled, the more grew in the forest.

NEWSPAPERS REACHED US LATE. The train stopped just three times a week at our station. It brought a few travelers, mainly hop dealers, who did business in the area.

Lots of people made a living from hops. The coachmen, for instance. They drove the strangers out into the villages and the farms. My father was a coachman.

His name was Manes Kroy. We kept two horses, a cart for weekdays, a cart for Sundays, and a sleigh for winter. I barely knew my father. He was a drinker. He only came home once a week, went to bed, and snored and talked in his sleep. He cursed us, his children.

We were eight sons. He got our names wrong. Our mother was dead. Our father had a flame red beard that covered his face, and a big

fur cap that he wore all the year round. It was made out of cat fur. I can't forget its smell. It smelled of sweat, dead animal, raw leather, and tallow.

My father's beard didn't grow out in straight hairs, like ordinary beards did, but in tufts of red wool. All that could be seen of his face was his thick, fleshy nose, whose swollen skin was made up of little lumps, soft, juicy, and uneven like orange peel. I can still remember my father's snow white eyebrows. They hung over the wilderness below like a couple of crescent moons over a tangled forest.

He didn't talk to us. He slept. Everything he said to us was unconscious and in his cups. It came out of him, both tender and terrible.

He treated his horses well. He had a hundred endearments for them, good, fresh oats, and well water from clean buckets of yellow wood. He didn't beat them. He used a whip with a leather handle and eight knots. He used to crack it. It sounded like a gunshot when he cracked his whip.

One morning, in winter—the thermometer showed thirty-five degrees below—my father's frozen body was found by the side of the road. He had fallen off his sleigh in his drunkenness.

My seven brothers left home and country. One became a boxer in America, another a dockworker in Odessa, a third joined up—he died—a fourth was apprenticed to a village blacksmith, the fifth went to St. Petersburg, got involved in bombmaking, and was probably blown up, the sixth was shot by a firing squad in 1917, and the seventh is a dentist in Mexico. That's Gabriel, who's married and writes me letters twice a year.

I kept a horse, a cart, the sleigh, and the beautiful whip, I went home to bed once a week like my father, and I wore his fur cap.

I wasn't any good with the horse. It ran into a fence, grew lame, and developed a limp. One day it died in our stable, with its thin legs all stretched out and its clever eyes burst.

For six months, I was a trainee barber, even though I didn't know how to use the razor properly. I had heavy hands that were always cold. Anyway, I didn't like the faces.

Then I was taken on by Petrusz the tailor. He was poor. My people didn't need many clothes. They didn't follow fashion, either.

My master was unable to read or write, he couldn't even form num-

bers. He didn't use a tape measure, but a piece of string that he tied knots in. He kept little samples of every piece of cloth he was ever given. He looked after the family of his brother-in-law, who lived with him, that was Schapak the glazier.

It was the fault of the glazier that I lost my job.

He despised tailors. I despised glaziers. He offered no reasons. Nowadays, I have no prejudice against any kind of worker. But back then, I believed that a glazier was inferior to a tailor.

What's so clever about glaziers? There's all the difference in the world between measuring up a window frame and a man.

Schapak was able to read and write. He made a lot of play with that. Maybe he assumed that no tailor can read or write. He despised not only his brother-in-law, who kept him, but the entire guild of tailors.

My master would probably not have minded the personal slights. What he couldn't stand was to have aspersions cast upon his work. I can remember the tailor and the glazier arguing about the merits of their respective jobs. The quarrel, like all great catastrophes, arose out of an utterly trivial matter, the use of each other's crockery.

The glazier's children broke a couple of plates. The glazier's wife used my master's plates. They were gold-rimmed and had little landscapes painted on them. "Have you not yet told your wife," cried my master, "thou shalt not steal?"

"My wife doesn't steal," replied the glazier, "she's not a tailor's wife!"

That was an allusion to the scraps of material which Petrusz kept, and which were strictly speaking the property of his customers.

"I don't keep back little leftover pieces of window," said the glazier.

"Glaziers are beggars," replied the tailor.

"I refuse to talk to an uncultured man," said the glazier. "You can't even read numbers. You don't know what time it is."

"You sold my silver watch, you thief!" shouted Petrusz.

"What do you want with a silver watch, you donkey?" asked Schapak the glazier.

The tailor Petrusz grabbed the iron and threw it at the box where the glazier kept his sheets of glass. He missed. He had a kind heart. He deliberately missed with the iron.

Then it was quiet.

The glazier sent me out for schnapps. I asked the tailor: "Master, should I go? Your brother-in-law asked me."

I was duty-bound to ask the tailor. The glazier was offended.

Like all glaziers, he had a diamond for cutting the panes of glass. It cuts through them like butter, he said. At the time, I was persuaded that any diamond—even one that was used for cutting glass—was worth a fortune. I couldn't understand why the glazier didn't sell his stone to become a wealthy man and live in a palace.

When I asked him: "Why don't you sell your diamond?" he would reply: "Then what would I live on?" Even though what he was living on all along was his brother-in-law.

One day, the diamond vanished.

"Kroy has stolen it!" said the glazier.

It was a winter evening. I was lying on the bench by the stove that I used for a bed. The oil lamp was almost out. It stank of smoke and grease and the piss of the children. You could hear the wind outside. It made a sound like steel being whetted on stone. That was how hard it blew over the frozen snow. It was whetting the houses. The fire in the stove began to go out. It was one of those sorry hours where a man feels warmth inevitably seeping away and cold slipping down the chimney into the stove, a lump of ice. At times like that, you have the delusion that that last bit of warmth, in spite of everything, can survive. The cold will remain trapped in the chimney. You cling to the stove. You press yourself against it. To encourage it, you give it some of your own warmth. And all the time, you know it's useless.

The glazier went to get the oil can—it was kept under my bench—replenished the lamp, and it was as light as it was at six o'clock, and the tailor, my master, sat there and didn't stir. The movements of the glazier were slow and precise, controlled by a single thought, like the troops of a general. I knew what was coming, and I didn't budge. I was neither shocked nor offended. It wasn't the suspicion of the glazier that pained me, but the cowardice of the tailor.

Somehow, I was impressed by the glazier. His deliberateness was lit up by an inner joy. In his soft yellow face, that looked as though it was made from leftover putty, I saw a calm, quiet serenity. He didn't look

at me once. But all the time he was thinking about me. His thoughts wrapped themselves around me like soft, evil, implacable tendrils.

Carefully, he carried the lamp over to my bench. "Get up!" he said.

He searched my rucksack and my sheet with silent, creeping fingers. His hands were like stockinged feet.

His serenity was at an end. His soft broad yellow face had put out a few blonde hairs. There were forty-eight of them, I counted.

He didn't find anything on my bench or in my pockets. He turned them inside out, they flopped out of my jacket and my trousers, dirty, yellow, flaccid. All my belongings were on the table. I felt more ashamed of my legitimate possessions than I would have felt if he had found the diamond on me. In the light of the revived, replenished, reinvigorated lamp, there were my scissors, a couple of round pebbles, a flat green piece of chalk, a hand mirror, a heavy claspknife with a hook on the handle, and a smooth brown piece of horn.

"A murder weapon!" exclaimed the glazier, weighing the knife in his hands.

Suddenly, he shouted: "Out, out, out!" He shouted it maybe a dozen times. He had forgotten his entire vocabulary, and that was all that was left.

I looked at the tailor. He trapped a fly, a tired, gray winter fly, held it by its wings, and counted its feebly kicking legs.

Then I pulled on my father's short fur jacket, put all my things in my pockets, and left.

A few minutes later, I heard my name being called. It was the tailor. He was running after me, hunched and crooked, his coattails flapping in the wind. I was expecting him. He pressed a little bag into my hand. It was his purse of cold, wrinkled leather, with a rusty lock.

I think the tailor had tears in his eyes.

ON WINTER NIGHTS, our town was a brutal place. The snow masked its meanness. It stifled the bickering voices that came out of the houses. Every one of the houses had locked brown shutters, with a narrow strip of yellow light creaming through them. A few street corners boasted flickering little red flames on yellow oil lamps. The snow shimmered both gently and painfully. The wind brushed the roofs, and a white powder flew up. The wind was like a cold hand in front

of my mouth. Buried under the snow were the wooden boards that we had for pavements. I was up to my knees in snow.

It was still snowing. I couldn't see the sky. No gates were open. A couple of old men labored along in silence. They carried long sticks.

I took the street that led to the graveyard. I must have meant to go the other way, to the station. But I got my wires crossed. Maybe I was thinking that the station wouldn't open till the morning, whereas the cemetery had to be open at all hours of day and night.

There was a light on in the morgue. Old Pantaleimon slept in there. I knew him; he knew me too. It was the custom in our town to promenade in the cemetery. (Other towns might have their gardens and parks; we had our cemetery. The children played among the tombstones. The old folks sat on the stones, sniffing the soil which was made from our forefathers, and was like butter.)

I went into the morgue. There was the body of a beggar who was to be buried the next day. I woke Pantaleimon.

Like all nurses and gravediggers, he had a deep sleep. He thought it was the dead beggar waking him, and he said, still half-asleep, "Pipe down, Peter Onucha, I'll get around to you tomorrow!"

When he opened his eyes—he had these little small eyes submerged in a tangle of hair and eyebrows and eyelashes, so it was hard to tell—he recognized me.

"The tailor threw me out!" I said to Pantaleimon.

Pantaleimon sat up. His legs were wrapped in thick, raw cat fur. His fur waistcoat was open.

"You've stolen something!" said Pantaleimon.

I told him the story. I swore that I hadn't stolen any diamond.

Pantaleimon, though, whispered in my ear, "Where've you got it, you cunning fellow? You smart operator. Where've you hidden it? Go on, you can tell me!"

That night, I learned that there's no point in telling the truth, and that it's easier to sell God to an unbeliever than it is to explain robbery to an honest man, or honesty to a thief.

Pantaleimon, you see, was a thief.

I don't mind that he was a thief. And not even a proper one, as he didn't even steal. Anyway, who wouldn't steal if he could?

I don't mind about his suspicion, either. I owe it to him that I didn't

freeze and starve to death. I stayed with him, and helped him dig holes and make sure the graves looked their best. On Sundays, we shared our tips and the money we got for candles.

I began to love the dead, and among the living, only Pantaleimon. I slept in his house, and once again my bed was a bench by the stove. I was kept busy trying to make peace between Pantaleimon and his wife and his three children.

Pantaleimon's wife did not respect her husband. But neither would she leave him, even though she had been threatening to for ten years. Pantaleimon had no authority. His wife beat him. He let it happen.

Other people also had attempted to take a hand in Pantaleimon's marriage. The most exalted among them was our Count. That was our name for the gentleman who lived in a castle outside our town, who could be seen walking through the streets every day, as though he wasn't really a Count.

He was a good man, he got on with everyone, and most of all with Pantaleimon.

Pantaleimon had the run of the castle: he waited on the Count, he cleaned his floors and his suits, and he also performed more delicate missions. The Count had other servants, but he had only one friend, and that was Pantaleimon.

Once a year, the Count left his castle. He traveled to Paris, and Nice, and Monte Carlo. He was away for three months.

All that time, Pantaleimon would remain in the castle, spying on the lackeys, the estate manager, the maids; and with his short, broad hand that was like a shovel, he would write weekly reports on them all and send them to the Count.

If Pantaleimon had been a perfectly ordinary thief, he could have stolen the entire castle, but he was a thief who didn't steal. That was the peculiar thing about him.

Our Count was from a very old family that was related to several of the crowned heads of Europe. On his coat of arms were three lilies with their heads pressed together. Above them, broad and flat, was a two-edged sword.

The Count was about sixty. He always wore dark blue suits and dark blue cloaks, patent leather shoes, galoshes, white gloves, and carried an umbrella. What did he need it for? If it was raining, he rode out in his shiny, dark blue carriage. The few steps he had to walk to get from the terrace of his house to the carriage, he was escorted by a servant with an umbrella. I often watched as the lackey, who was a little shorter than his master, raised his arm so that the whole of the Count was protected, while he himself got wet. Yes, even in the short time that the Count was sitting in his carriage and before the horses started to pull, and while the coachman was taking his whip out of its cover, the lackey stood there with furled umbrella, hatless and dripping, a few steps in front. Then he would slowly go back inside, unprotected, the umbrella over his arm, impervious to the wet, as though the sun were beaming down. There were times when the lackey seemed even more aristocratic than the Count.

On fine spring afternoons, the Count would sit out on the terrace of the only café in town, eating cake and chatting with our cavalry officers. He had connections with the army, his sons were officers, he himself was a connoisseur of horseflesh; he owned a dozen horses and occasionally rode out on a gray. The Count was on first-name terms with the young officers. All gave him a military salute, as if he'd been a general. The Count saluted back, even though he was in mufti. He touched two fingers against the brim of his top hat.

Every Friday morning, the poor people of our town gathered outside the castle. The Count stepped out onto the verandah, and tossed coins in their direction. For about half an hour it rained money, and then the Count raised his hands. All the beggars cried three times: "Long live the Count!" and then they dispersed.

There was no Countess. She had died long ago. But there was a lady living in the castle, who was almost a Countess; she was the widow of a major in the dragoons who had been killed in a duel. The talk was that the Count would marry her. But his sons kept coming to visit him whenever the marriage seemed imminent, and the major's widow never got to become a Countess.

Perhaps it's as well that she never got to be a Countess. I once saw her beating a servant because he was talking to me, and didn't hear her ring. The poor wouldn't have been asked to come up to the castle on Fridays any more. The Count wouldn't have been able to travel to

Paris, Nice, and Monte Carlo on his own any more. Who knows what would have happened to Pantaleimon and me? I have a lot to be grateful to the Count for myself. I'll get on to that later.

The Count was a benefactor to us all. He made sure that only our very strongest young men were recruited by the army, and of those, only the ones who had nothing to lose. Every year when the examining commission came round, those young men liable for conscription went to the Count. He invited the members of the commission round, spoke to the major and the army doctor, and warned them. He gave them good, heavy wines and a list of those young men they were allowed to conscript.

His method didn't always work. There are some majors who are unimpressed by counts, and tear up lists. That's why it seemed advisable to our young people to martyr themselves at conscription time, to take poisons, to weaken their hearts, to catch pneumonia, to give themselves terrible eye diseases, and all sorts of disabilities. Yes, with some, their aversion to the army was so powerful that they allowed their feet to be crippled and their fingers to be hacked off. I knew a red-haired locksmith who had the tendons in his ankles severed. He was lame all his life. I knew a roofer who poured acids into his left eye till it was permanently blinded.

The commission came every March, they were like our *Föhn*, our warm mountain wind that brings the spring. And then those young men who didn't put all their trust in the Count began drinking black coffee, sleeping around, or not going to bed at all. Some took cold baths, came down with pneumonia or tuberculosis, and died slowly or in short order. But they were never soldiers. The cleverest emigrated to America.

To get to America, you needed not only a lot of money but also false papers. A few people got involved in the business of getting young men to America, and with the production of false papers. They made masses of money. They were not reliable. At the very last moment, when you were sitting in the train but hadn't yet crossed the border, they wired the authorities, and instead of America, you landed in prison.

You had to be on good terms with the emigration agents. You could never prove that they had broken the law, and even if you had been

able to, nothing would have happened to them. They lived in our town, and therefore they lived scot-free. Living among us we had the lunatics, the criminals, the innocent, the foolish, the wise, and all of them enjoyed the same liberty.

The police turned up on the doorstep of one deserter's parents and asked if they had any letters from the missing man. The parents replied that their son had left home without their knowledge, that they had heard nothing from him, and that he was not their son any more. The police put all that in their protocol, and nothing more was said.

THE PEOPLE IN our town had a craving for beauty and art. From time immemorial, we had had our little park where chestnuts flowered—very ancient, venerable, thick-stemmed trees whose crowns the magistrate sometimes had lopped, and in whose shadow people slept on hot summer days. The park was circular, as though measured by dividers, surrounded by a gray paling fence that was barely functional—really, not much of a fence. It was more like a wooden ring, soft, splintering, moldering in some places and broken in others, but broadly still extant, like a loose belt slung around the park's hips. It could keep out neither the dogs nor the mudlarks, who on principle never used the official entrances. It was only our love of order that had prompted us to draw a largely symbolic line between the park and the street.

In the middle of the park stood a little wooden booth with crooked gables, and a little weathercock on one end. The weathercock also served no purpose. No wind ever penetrated the thick canopy of chestnut leaves. The weathercock had nothing to do. Even so, some people went by it. Because it sometimes happened that for some inscrutable reason, it pointed West on one day and North the next. I think someone probably went to the trouble to move our town weathercock in the direction of the prevailing wind. Probably one of the many lunatics who filled official functions in our town.

The true purpose of the wooden booth was another: it was a refreshment stand, serving ice cream and sodawater with syrup or without, and was run by a beautiful, statuesque, blond woman, who initiated me and many others in matters of love. The sodawater she served must have been of a special type, or else the local young men were.

Our pavilion was sometimes closed at times when one wouldn't have expected it to be. At midday, at a time when in all the other towns and cities of the world sodas are being drunk, our pavilion was shut: dumb, gray, taciturn. The birds twittered in the crowns of the trees overhead. It almost seemed as though there were a curse on it. No sound was heard from within. There was no lock to be seen on the door; it must have been bolted from within.

No one knew when it would open again. But an hour later, or two or three, it was bound to be open. And it was. It opened and shut by magic. Never did you see it happen. Not even the young men on whose account it was abruptly shut could say why they had suddenly been locked in. They didn't get a chance to look at the door.

The pavilion was the sole ornament of our park and our town. One day it struck our burgermaster as insufficient, and unworthy of the status of our town. Consequently, they erected a red and yellow brick tower, with a clock whose face was lit up every night. Then a little shop was installed in it, and a woman moved in, who sold flowers. She was another beautiful, statuesque blonde, but her flower shop was always open.

Our need for sodawater was greater than our need for floral decorations. The flower woman, unable to adapt to our habits, remained unregarded, sickened, and died young. Her shop was inherited by the husband of our blonde, the only peddler in our town to deal with old watches, a gaunt fellow with one eye. For ten years, he had dealt ambiently. There were never less than a dozen broken watches lying in his left hand. Their heavy chains of nickel and pinchbeck hung down like thongs of a metal whip. On Mondays, there was the pig market. The farmers came, made their sales, and wanted jewelry. Our peddler went from one farmer's cart to the next, shook his watches to make them tick, and offered them to the farmers.

Now he was become a proper shopkeeper, he settled into the flower shop, hung his watches in the window, and waited for the farmers to come to him. Our beautiful tower was desecrated. The farmers came, bringing their pigs with them, wearing their muddy boots, and our mayor had to think of a new amenity.

All the leading towns in the world have monuments. Our town

didn't. One could have gone through the entire history of the town without finding a personality worth commemorating.

Not that we were short of great men! I referred to a few of them at the beginning. But not one among them who had done his work at home, and remained a living memory! Not one among them who didn't have the worrying traits of a rebel, a malcontent, a revolutionary! All of them had hated the authorities. The authorities couldn't thank them by putting up a monument to them. All of them had left their birthplace. Their birthplace should not thank them for it.

They could have put up a monument to the Count, but the superstitious among us opposed that. They said a monument to a living man would hasten his death, and that a living Count was worth more than a stone one.

These superstitious voices might have been outvoted if we'd had enough money. We didn't have much. Our mayor needed support for the erection of a monument, and he was obliged to turn to the Count for a loan.

But how was it possible to ask the Count for money for a monument to the Count?

The town was in a quandary. They ransacked the chronicles for suitable great men. They found a celebrated rabbi. Regrettably, the Jewish faith forbids monuments, and besides, a rabbi is not a sufficiently emblematic figure.

A poet lived in our town. He wrote in none of the vernacular languages. His poems were in Latin.

His name was Raphael Stoklos, which has a Greek ring to it. In his youth, he wanted to be a university professor. But if you're born in a town that is hundreds of miles from the nearest university, and if you have no money and not enough savvy, the lot that awaits you is that of Latin poet.

Stoklos gave lessons in ancient and modern languages. In return, he got a room and board. Money defeated him.

The council was on the point of conferring immortality upon their living poet. Then Stoklos himself came up with a let-out: a celebrated seventeenth-century writer and scholar was born in a village no more than six miles away from our town.

At that time, our town had been no more than a village itself. But as it had now become the only town in a ten-mile radius, couldn't it lay claim to that village and its celebrated man?

He too had written in Latin, as was the fashion of his time. But he was now as dead as his language. He was in the encyclopedias and the literary histories. He was famous.

Our Count advanced the money; the stonemason was hired. Stoklos came up with an engraving of the famous man. The stonemason created a big man with glasses, a flowing cloak, a book in his hand, and a quill tucked behind his ear. That was our memorial.

It stood on an imitation marble pedestal. Round about it grew a green lawn. The lawn was surrounded by a wire fence. Later, they planted pansies on the lawn, beautiful big pansies with soft, clever faces.

And so we had our monument. We stood or sat in front of it and admired the features of our great countryman.

His book was always open at the same place.

In autumn, we worried about the effect of the damp and the frost on the expensive stone. We erected a lofty, wooden casing around the monument.

All winter long, up until April, our great scholar was behind planks. He hibernated, the way some animals do. When spring arrived, there were sounds of hammering from the park; the protection was taken off the monument. For us, it was one of the portents of spring.

The monument's out again! Spring must be just around the corner! people said to one another in April.

[. . .]

Pantaleimon and I, we never forgot him.

One day, Pantaleimon found a hanged man in the graveyard. He was a tramp, and not one we knew. He caused quite a stir in the town, and even some way outside. Because, as you might think, it wasn't every day that someone killed themselves in a world that really wasn't difficult to live in.

Pantaleimon didn't cut him down immediately. He went and got me first. I was in the middle of peeling potatoes, and Pantaleimon came in and said: "Hey, there's a man hanging out there!"

"Why didn't you cut him down?" I asked.

Pantaleimon didn't reply.

We were walking along, side by side. It was all crosses and gravestones, and then suddenly there was this thin man dangling from the bough of a lonely fir tree. The tip of his tongue was blue. He had it sticking out of the corner of his mouth, the way some idiots do. His feet almost touched the ground. A bread sack, which was full, and a tin plate, which rattled slightly each time a wind stirred the twigs, hung from his hips.

Why didn't he take off his bread sack? I asked myself. Why didn't he take off his tin plate? Given that his bread sack was full, why did he want to die? He could have lived another day at least. Two more days!

Why does someone quit this life, like quitting a room in winter when there's no stove in it? Shuts the door after him, and sticks his tongue out childishly and cussedly?

I had already seen lots of dead people who had died in their white and dirty beds—all the dead who came into the morgue, on their way underground. All of them were basically through with life; they were a part of the cemetery already; it was as though they'd been dead for years before they were brought to us.

But here was a dead man hanging, as though he were still alive. His feet moved, as though they wanted to walk. He had a bread sack and clothes. It was then I decided that suicide was not for me.

[. . .]

It was impossible to die and hang from a branch and be found by Pantaleimon.

In fact, it was a stroke of luck for him. Ropes that people have hanged themselves with are famously sought after. They're lucky, there's no argument about that.

Pantaleimon's first thought was to find a buyer for the rope. Who would buy it? Who would buy it for a lot of money?

Rich people are not normally superstitious. They buy gold chains and strings of pearls, but not hemp ropes. They are lucky without having to try.

We were left with our Count, who was rich, but certainly superstí-

tious into the bargain. Only, this fell in that time of the year when the Count had set off on his travels to unknown parts.

"How about," I said to Pantaleimon, "if we cut up the rope, and sell the individual pieces?"

"What a clever fellow you are," said Pantaleimon. "I bet you did hide that diamond!"

We cut up the rope. The buyers came. We buried the suicide with ceremony, without a priest, under the tree he had hanged himself on. Our poet gave a talk on the unknown stranger, who had died far from home, who knows why, alone, perhaps ostracized. His fate was not merely tragic; it was more, it was unknown.

Straight after the burial, we had the sale. By evening, we had a lot of money in the drawer and not one piece of rope left.

We said nothing to Pantaleimon's wife about our earnings.

We decided we would be rich, the rope had emboldened us, and the jingling coins we counted cheered us like schnapps.

"Where will I find another hanged man?" asked Pantaleimon. "People hang themselves so rarely," he complained. "The priest scares them off. Tells them they won't get to Heaven. How does he know? It seems life is like prison, and we have to wait for God to let us out, and then we're free. But if someone hangs himself on a nice fir tree, and it's summer and the birds are all twittering, and the sky is blue and the flies are buzzing, then the devils will chase his poor soul to Hell.

"But what if he's mistaken, and people wind up in Hell, whether they waited for death or went and got it for themselves? Then none of it will have made any difference, except to me. I'll only have had to wait another hundred years for my next bit of rope!"

Suddenly, I felt as though someone had directed my attention to the stove. I saw the rope that we used to lower the cheap coffins into the graves.

I took a knife, cut up the rope, and laid the pieces before Pantaleimon. "We can sell this rope," I said.

"What if it's not lucky?" asked Pantaleimon.

"I think," I said, "that all ropes are lucky."

I was probably right. People kept coming; we sold teeny-weeny bits, and we kept starting on new ropes.

I got myself a new fur cap and a pair of boots. Pantaleimon got himself a waistcoat. He gave his wife corals.

We were very rich.

I had enough to go out into the world I was dying to see.

"Wait for the Count," said Pantaleimon, "I'm sure he'll tell you where's a good place to go!"

THE SUMMER LAY THERE, waiting to finish. Autumn was when the strangers were expected, the hop merchants from Austria, Germany, and England, the rich men off whom many people in our town made their livings.

The summer lay there, and it spawned various illnesses. People got bellyaches and died from eating rotten fruit, the water ran out in the wells, a couple of evergreen forests burnt down, and the dry grass on the steppes caught alight. At night, the horizon was red, and the air was full of acrid fumes.

We kept getting new visitors to the morgue. The authorities announced that the water was dangerous. We drank hot tea, and avoided cherries, even sour cherries. Apples and pears were not yet ripe.

A lot of people went to the steambaths, to sweat out the poisons. Frau Bardach, the owner of the baths, was kept so busy that she fell ill. Another two weeks, then she was dead, and she was buried in the Jewish cemetery before her son could get there, her son out in the wide world who wrote to her a couple of times a year.

His uncle, Frau Bardach's brother, was a rich timber merchant in Vienna. Wolf, the nephew, had crossed the border to join him when still a boy. It was said he had become a great lawyer, a celebrated man. Everyone was eager to see him.

He came. He really was worth seeing. Could that gentleman really be a son of our town?

Wolf Bardach was not merely wide and fat, with glinting spectacles in the middle of his face, with a stiff gray hat perched on his head, with shiny red cheeks. Bardach also wore light checkered pants. They were the first such pants that had ever been seen in our town. Not even the Count had such a pair.

Bardach inherited a large fortune. Steambaths are a good business. If Bardach had stayed to run his mother's business, he would have made millions within a few years. He had no shortage of advisers, either. People who had known Wolf Bardach when he was a little boy came to him with propositions. Wolf Bardach was staying in a hotel, oh, what a hotel!

Because of course we had a hotel, it stood at the end of the street that led to the station. A simple little house, with a bar in the middle, and a ridiculous sign over the door. It showed a fat knight, holding a beer tankard aloft in his right hand, while his armor vainly strove to restrain his bulging belly.

The hotel had no more than three rooms. Each of the rooms was heated by a bad stove. None of the rooms had a bed with a mattress in it. All the beds had straw sacks. There will have been vermin as well. It was known as "The Cockroach Arms." In fact, the hotel was called "The Drunken Bear." That was where the great lawyer Wolf Bardach stayed, the famous man, the man in light checkered pants.

He took all three rooms for himself. There was nowhere left for any other visitors. Even rich people who came to our town were forced to stay with our two bakers, who let out their beds at night while they did their baking.

It was probably the pitiful condition of the tourist facilities in our town that persuaded the attorney to build a new hotel. He decided to build a hotel along American lines. He wanted a hotel such as you might have found in New York City.

Wolf Bardach sold the steambaths and his mother's house. He bought five little houses, and had them torn down.

It wasn't just the houses themselves that cost money. The demolition cost as well. Because three families on average lived in each of the five houses, and because each family had lots of children, Herr Bardach had to build tenements to rehouse all these homeless people.

So, there was work in our town. The oldest men, men with white beards, men you would have called on at most to fix your stove in winter, now clambered up and down scaffolding poles. They were like bearded weasels.

I too found work. I had a notebook, and wrote down meters and centimeters and kept a tally of planks, posts, and bricks. I wasn't the

only one, either. There were other intelligent young men with notebooks with me.

It couldn't have been done without us.

The hotel was to be five stories high. It was the tallest building anywhere within ten miles.

White, tall, lonely, it stuck out over the world. Our old people, who didn't think much of progress, were angry. They thought the hotel was like a Tower of Babel.

But it kept growing.

One day, the engineer who was in charge of the building climbed up on the scaffolding, fell off, and was dead.

He was buried between the Christian and Jewish cemeteries because no one could remember his faith.

His death provoked a huge kerfuffle. But Bardach, a progressive chap, was undeterred. He hired a new engineer, and he went on building.

Four months later, with the snow already in deep piles on the streets, he was forced to call a halt.

But when the first swallows arrived, so did Herr Bardach.

We carried on building.

On a hot July day, the work was finally finished. But the money was finished, too.

Creditors came. Invoices came. Only no travelers came, and all two hundred rooms were empty.

To save his bacon, he installed a café on the ground floor, a café featuring classical music.

But no customers came.

The music played to empty tables. One or two wealthy officers went in, played a game of billiards, and went out again.

Instead of sitting in the café and enjoying life, the inhabitants of our town stood outside the windows, which were protected by thick green curtains.

The inhabitants of our town would drink their coffee at home, then walk up to the windows and listen to the music, without having to pay anything.

That thrifty style of course did nothing for our hotel owner. One day he quietly packed his bags and left.

At least, we had earned some money. We had a new hotel. When visitors came, they stayed there, and they sat in the café, and listened to the music.

But in summer, spring, and winter, the great building remained empty. A porter stood in front of the door like a stone statue, perfectly immobile. He aged visibly; his gold buttons grew dull, his black tailcoat acquired a greenish patina.

Nothing more was heard of the fearless builder. The steambaths sent gay plumes of smoke into the sky every day. Unlike the hotel and the café, they were always busy.

OUR TOWN WAS POOR. Our people had no regular income, they were sustained by miracles. There were many people who had no occupation at all. They borrowed money. But who gave them loans? Even the moneylenders didn't have any money. People lived off lucky breaks.

Things kept happening that gave us new hope. The building of the hotel had only led to disappointment. A winter followed with hard early frosts, it fell upon us like a murderer, by the end of November it was already twenty-five below. The birds fell out of the trees, we could pick them up every morning. The snow groaned underfoot, the frost cut into our flesh with a thousand tiny lashes, our stoves were filled to bursting, the wind pushed the smoke back down the chimneys, so that we almost asphyxiated in our rooms. We couldn't open the windows, because we had already wedged them shut with cotton wool and newspapers. The windowpanes acquired thick crusts of opaque crystal, the strange flora of winter.

The poor were fed by our Count. Those who couldn't beg, starved and died. People were forever running through the streets with corpses, the black-clad coachmen whipped their black steeds to a gallop, and the mourners ran after the departed: it was as though there was a race between the quick and the dead to see who would reach the overflowing graveyards first. No room! No room!—screamed the crows. Those ravenous birds hung heavy and black in the bare boughs, winged fruits, they beat their wings at each other and squabbled noisily, they flew around the houses and pecked like sparrows at the frozen windows, they were at hand like bad news, they were remote like

gloomy premonitions, they were black and menacing on the black boughs and the white snow.

How suddenly the evenings used to fall there, evenings that came with a keen wind, with remote glittering stars in a frozen blue sky, with short vehement darkening indoors, with howling devils in the stoves, with ghosts spun from nothing. The sun was visible for half an hour a day. It was pale and white, obscured by a frozen windowpane. Long heavy icicles hung off the low roofs, like tassels with rigor mortis. Narrow paths were trodden into deep snow; people walked between tall white walls of snow. The only cheerful thing was the jingling of the sleigh bells, a ringing almost like spring. The frost imparted a short, harsh, glassy echo to the sound; from a distance it was like the buzzing of alert young flies.

The evergreen forests were black slashes on a white field. Fog blanketed the distant hills, streams lay gurgling behind thick windows, and round the wells were circles of thick, honed, dangerous glass.

In that winter, which made our poor still poorer, we awaited, with more than usual impatience, the arrival from faraway Peking of the wealthy Herr Britz, the wealthy tea merchant whose trademark (a set of scales held by an angel) is known the world over as a guarantee of genuine China tea.

When Herr Britz arrived, things looked up for everyone. He spent two weeks in our midst; he visited the grave of his father, he visited his dead relatives and his living relatives, those he didn't know as well, he was invited by the rich, and he invited the poor.

He came every winter, in the middle of winter, when the frost had reached its sharpest intensity, he came like an envoy from God. Everyone blessed him, wherever he came and went.

I don't know how people learned of his coming. At any rate, one day everyone knew. The train only stopped in our station on Wednesdays. And every Wednesday, people said to themselves: He'll be coming in two weeks! In a week!

The train got in at twenty-five past five in the evening. That was late evening in this part of the world; by rights the windows should have been shuttered, and people back in their homes. But not a bit of it. All the shutters were still open, the lights were on in all the houses;

the windows looked illuminated, the lamps had all been cleaned and gave out all the light they possessed. Sleighs, crowded with people, slid along the straight road to the station, dropped their dark cargo, curved elegantly to a stop, blue smoke came out of the horses' nostrils, their hooves cracked on the ice, impatiently they whinnied, the coachmen rubbed their hands and smacked their shoulders, people stood at the bar and warmed up with schnapps and stamped their feet just like the horses.

Then out came the porter. There was ice on his fair mustache. He announced the train, doors opened, there was a ringing on the platform, the train drew in, steam came hissing from the locomotive. And among the visitors who got off was Herr Britz.

The fine and stately figure he cut! The beaver and sealskin coat! The beautiful silk scarf thrown round his neck!

He wasn't tired, there wasn't a wrinkle on his clean-shaven face, his skin was rosy and brown, his dark eyes clear and kind; his large, slender hands slipped easily out of their heavy fur mittens and reached out to greet everyone.

All the coachmen fought over him, all of them wanted to take him. If only he had brought his entire wardrobe with him, then he could have divided it among all the sleighs! It wasn't even as though he had a lot of luggage, just a single suitcase. He couldn't break himself up into pieces, he couldn't stand in ten sleighs with just two feet! He sat down in one of them, the first in line, and all the others set off after him, with bells chiming. When he got out of his sleigh, he had to pay all the coachmen. But that didn't matter. He had money!

We had a new hotel now. Herr Britz was delighted with the luxury. "We had it built for you," lied the mayor at the reception the town put on in Herr Britz's honor that evening. Maybe Herr Britz believed him.

He took five rooms on the first floor, he received the poor, he doled out money, every day he chartered a different sleigh, he took the edge off winter, he distributed wood and coal, bread and herrings, tea and lard, bought Madeira for the sick, and in short he warmed the world like a hundred summers.

When he went away, he left a lot of happy people behind, but he didn't look as fresh as he had when he arrived, he was tired and

stooped; his skin was pale, his kind eyes shone less brightly. That's what a strain charity can be.

THAT YEAR, HERR BRITZ left us so much money that we could finally equip an expedition to the underground passages that had gripped our imagination for many years, and to which we looked for a solution for our perennial shortage of funds.

The underground passages, so they said, had been dug in the seventeenth century, and led from the church, which was right in the middle of town, as far as the Count's castle, past the cellars of many old houses, containing quantities of gold and silver that had been hidden in times of war from whatever enemies we were facing at the time.

Deep down, then, we had a lot of gold; it was only on the surface that we were poor. Our excavations could make us all wealthy. Then we wouldn't have to work any more. Every inhabitant of our town would have so much money that he wouldn't have to worry for the rest of his life, and his children would have a future.

But we were short of money to reach the treasure. We needed equipment, gas masks, various kinds of instruments, lamps. Above all, we needed courageous men, prepared to risk their lives. They would have to be well paid. The rich benefactors of our town (the Count, for instance) had always been skeptical about this undertaking. They didn't believe in the buried treasure; they didn't even believe in the historical existence of our old passages.

But now, at last, we had the money.

When spring arrived, we walked around the streets all day long, discussing subterranean matters. What a sensation, every step you take to believe there are quantities of gold and jewels underfoot! Every man who climbed down into his cellar in those days to fetch ladders, wine, vinegar, or whatever else could not fail to be awestruck. Everyone fancied doing some digging for themselves. Some did it on quiet nights; others tapped their walls, looking for hollow spots. It was already being said that so-and-so had unearthed treasures in his cellar. Everyone grew suspicious. There came a time when everyone began to complain how badly they were doing, so as not to be sus-

pected of having discovered treasure. Of course, the more people complained, the more suspicious they made themselves. It was a time when people stopped giving to beggars, because they believed they were the ones who had struck gold and silver, and were just begging as a front. The shops were empty, because everyone was afraid that making a purchase would incur suspicion of a windfall. When people noticed that their complaints were met with suspicion and unbelief, they stopped speaking altogether. It was all they could do to exchange casual greetings. When two were seen talking together, people pointed at them and called them millionaires.

One day a history professor arrived, with assistants, lamps, and gas masks. Placards were put up on houses, saying the town council was looking for courageous workmen.

Pantaleimon came forward, taking me with him. We were experienced diggers, and well used to subterranean things from the graveyard. We were experts in matters subterranean.

We demanded to be paid in advance, because we were afraid we might meet our deaths tunneling, and die for nothing. We buried our wages next to the fourth grave in the oldest row, wrote our wills and put them in our pockets. Pantaleimon left his wage not to his own family, but to the Count. I had a long think about who I should bequeath my money to. I had the money I had saved for my great trip abroad. I left it to my brother in Mexico.

We got up at five in the morning, it was 10 May, the birds were twittering for all they were worth. There were ten of us, with shovels and mattocks. We were issued with rubber boots, descended into Herr Jampoller's cellar, broke down a nailed-up door, and found ourselves at the beginning of our subterranean journey.

Oh, the stink! I'll never forget it! It stank of old potatoes and rotten hay, of mushrooms and mold, and a little bit of autumn forests in the rain. We lit the tunnel and the walls with the scientific lamps. We found skeletons, chests; the professor wrote it all down, the stone walls were dripping, they were covered with whitish slime, we encountered stone coffins, inscriptions, but we found no gold, no silver, no jewels.

We worked all day. When we returned to the surface, it was evening and we were near the castle.

We had earned our money, and we dug it up and put it with our savings.

The town calmed down, people lost their suspiciousness, there was life in the streets again, and the beggars fared better once more.

EVEN SO, HERR BRANDES was mistaken.

He had emigrated to London twenty years previously, he had earned money, married a freckled English redhead, and put on a belly with a heavy watch chain looped across it.

Now he was returning, he had money coming out of his ears, so people said. Why did he come back to our poor town? Why didn't he stay put in London?

But no, he was back, a missionary for English civilization. He wanted to show us how people did business in the world. He bought up some common land from the town: he bought up our "open space," where traveling fairs, menageries, and magicians always used to pitch their tents, where sad gray grass and little yellow flowers sprouted, and which seemed to have been designated by God to be our open space, and nothing else besides.

Brandes built a house, not as tall as the hotel, but a two-story house all the same. Extraordinarily, it had no windows. People were not a little astonished. How would Brandes manage to do without windows? Did people in London live without natural light?

When the scaffolding came down and the white walls stood there, blind, windowless, smooth, without stucco or ornamentation—we had expected there to be some, of course—no one had any doubts but that Herr Brandes was insane.

But Brandes turned out not to be as insane as we believed at the time. It wasn't a dwelling he had built, but a big store, a department store; perhaps they had them like that in London!*

*One can only conjecture, of course, why Roth got no further than this with his "Galicia novel"; the contradictions that make it such a magical fragment perhaps also prevented it from ever growing beyond that: the contradictions between static and picaresque, intimate and distant, personal and essayistic, lyrical and comedic. It seems that Roth tried again in the following fragment, using a speaker who had left; later, he used the material principally in *Weights and Measures*.

THIS MORNING, A LETTER ARRIVED . . .

(undated)

THIS MORNING, A LETTER ARRIVED from my friend Naphtali Kroy in Buenos Aires. He's happy, he's enjoying life in the big and presumably very exotic foreign city. He's met people from home, acquaintances. They're dealing in tobacco or other goods, and they say hello to me. They haven't forgotten me, even though I was just a boy when I left them, to travel west, to my father's family in Vienna. The people of my town have a good memory, because they remember with their hearts. I for my part had almost forgotten them, because I have been living, and still live, in Western Europe, where the heart counts for nothing, the head for a little, and the fist for everything.

Who knows where I might not have landed up, had my friend Naphtali Kroy not also gone west. I was already in the process of losing my heart, my desire, and my capacity for love and pain, which is as strong as longing, love, and death put together. Already I had forgotten my birthplace, the little town in Russia which no longer exists, which has died, which has fallen in the Great War, as if it had been an infantryman, a human being. Oh, it was so much more than a human being! It was a fertile womb, from which many individuals, striking individuals, were cast out like seeds on the broad fields of the world.

The town no longer exists. It has been blown up by guns, burnt down by fires, trampled upon by boots, and now the golden maize flowers where once were dirty lanes and houses, and the wind blows over the streets and pavements of my childhood. Other towns grow rich and powerful, or, if they are condemned to die, they die slowly, death torments them for a hundred years or a thousand. But our little town it abruptly mowed down with its big, sharp scythe.

Now I was born nowhere and belong nowhere. It's a strange and terrible thing, and I seem to myself like a dream, without roots and without purpose, with no beginning and no end, coming and going and not knowing whither or why. It's the same with my compatriots, too. They have been scattered all over the wide world, they grip foreign soil with their frail roots, lie buried in foreign soil, have children who don't know their father's birthplace, and to whom their grandfather is a mythical figure. From time to time, I hear from one or other of them. I happen to know, for instance, that the baker Surokin now runs a restaurant in Tokyo, is married to a Japanese woman, and has six children, two of whom are studying in Europe somewhere. Rich Herr Kobritz stumbled upon Surokin in curious fashion. Herr Kobritz trades with half the world, and so in due course he found himself in Tokyo, sat down in a restaurant, and was served some excellent fish. The fish was completely according to his taste, and rich Herr Kobritz was already beginning to philosophize, expounding his theory that the whole world was just a village, one big village, and that people were the same all over the world. How else was it possible that he could travel to the end of the world, to Tokyo, there to be served fish of the very sort that his cook at home prepared for him? Herr Kobritz was very pleased with his philosophy when the chef walked up to him, a Japanese man with thick glasses, saying, "Good evening, Herr Kobritz!" So the world really was just one big village, where everyone knew rich Herr Kobritz. "Don't you recognize me?" asked the Japanese. "No," replied Herr Kobritz, "I've never been to Tokyo before." "But I knew you right away," replied the Japanese. "I used to be the baker Mendel Surokin, and now I've been a Japanese for thirty years."

Herr Kobritz came to Vienna, so I had the story straight from the horse's mouth, and I told it to my friend Naphtali, who's now busy giving it currency all over Buenos Aires. Soon everyone will know what became of the baker Mendel Surokin. But I'm racked by curiosity. I want to know what happened to the others, to blind Turek, for example, to Pantaleimon the gravedigger, to Peisach the tailor, to Dr. Habich, to Jonathan Bruh, and to Mordechai the scribe. I can vividly remember every one of them. I can see Jonathan Bruh as if he were in front of me now, a Swabian from the German colony, a retired postman who went around in a shako and an old saber and a lot of tin

medallions on his jacket. He thought he was a prince or a great general, related to kings and emperors all over the world, and sometimes he read out a letter from the Emperor of China. "Dear Cousin," wrote the Emperor of China, "I am surprised I haven't heard from you for so long. Under separate cover, I send you my latest medal I've had struck. Please write to confirm its safe arrival. Your Faithful Emperor." The letter was brushed on old parchment with Chinese characters. That's why no one was able to read it, and we were dependant on the truthfulness of Jonathan Bruh.

Even more important would be to discover what has become of Peisach the tailor. He was the nonpareil of tailors, you wouldn't find another like him anywhere in the world. He knew the measurements of all his customers by heart, because he couldn't write, not even figures. Often we stared through his windows, Naphtali Kroy and I, when we returned from roasting potatoes in the fields. There we saw the greasy yellow glow of the little lamp on the tailor's table, and himself as he sat on the kitchen bench, pondering. Certainly he was busy trying to picture the dimensions of his customers, to remember their bellies and chests and thighs. When he picked up his scissors, it was as though he had them standing in front of him, and he had no trouble cutting out their coats and trousers and waistcoats. But from time to time, he did make a little mistake, and so he was left with enough material to make the occasional suit for himself. Because it was only right and proper that a tailor who knows all his customers' measurements by heart should be allowed to keep a little material for his own poor, scrawny, shivering body.

So what happened to our tailor? His son, I know, has been living in America for years, and is also a tailor; he always said in his letters that he was the owner of a fashion house. I suppose it's not impossible that the son got his father to come to America, and that tailor Peisach is sitting in a corner of the fashion house, old and shortsighted and hard of hearing, and still unable to write.

Mordechai, the scribe, didn't have any children. I think he died alone. He was a widower, and he taught writing, and he always used to carry a pen and an ink bottle around with him when he went to his pupils. But his pockets were holey, and his wife was dead, and there wasn't anyone to patch his pockets. Therefore, he used to wear a top

hat on his head: he kept his writing gear in his top hat. Because of that, he wasn't able to greet anyone. He had to content himself with putting one finger to the brim of his hat. That was his greeting. There was only one person whom he couldn't greet like that, and that was our mayor. So he always avoided the mayor, and when he came to a corner, he would always stop and look around furtively, and not walk on until he had assured himself that the mayor wasn't coming.

Dr. Habich was a doctor who found anything and everything more interesting than patients and diseases. He had studied medicine in Vienna, and he would probably have liked to be a famous consultant in the big city. But just as he was finishing his studies, his father died. Dr. Habich had no money and returned home, even though his professor had told him that talented individuals were much sought after in Western Europe. There weren't any particular illnesses in our town. People had a hernia, or a catarrh, or an upset stomach, a broken leg, or a farmer cut himself on his scythe. These weren't the sort of things to keep a gifted and ambitious doctor interested. Year after year, with every new patient that came to him, Dr. Habich hoped to come across a grave and interesting condition. But all it was was a hernia or a catarrh or a late birth. Then Dr. Habich stopped writing prescriptions, and if you sent for him, he never came, and gave instructions without seeing the patient. A new young doctor arrived in town, who understood his business, and managed to treat a catarrh in such a way that it turned into a nice double pneumonia. People started dying in droves, and the young doctor was in constant demand, and no one ever sent for Dr. Habich.

He sometimes sat in the bar that Naphtali and I used to go to, too. There were Pantaleimon and blind Turek, drinking and talking. Pantaleimon had cut a suicide off a tree; he'd kept the rope, and was looking for a buyer for it. Whoever had a hanged man's rope would get a lot of milk from his cows, his horses would thrive, the wheat would grow heavy on his fields, and he himself would be immune to the Evil Eye. A rope like that was worth a couple of hens among brothers, or at the very least a few dozen eggs. Pantaleimon didn't need money. Anyone who's been a gravedigger all his life, and has seen the rich having to leave behind their two large rooms and kitchen and a bag of money under their pillows—anyone who's seen that a hundred times

over doesn't want money. Think of the worms, says Pantaleimon each time he sees a big wedding procession. He always thinks of the worms.

But now he has his rope to sell. Who can fit us up with a purchaser? Who is familiar with everyone's requirements? Who gets to go everywhere? Who sees everything? Blind Josef Turek, the brushmaker, who learned his handiwork at blind school in the big city and always talks about the beauty of the city, as though he'd had a proper sight of it. He knows it better than a sighted person. Because he is blind.

"I wouldn't sell the rope to one single purchaser," says Josef Turek.

"Fool," replies Pantaleimon, "it's only a single rope."

"Just a moment," says Turek. "Who's the fool? Why not turn one into many? You get a hen for each one. And you go on selling pieces of rope all your life."

"Now, unless I'm very mistaken," objects Pantaleimon, "I'm somewhere between sixty and sixty-five. And I want to live to be a hundred. So how many years have I got left?"

"Thirty-five or forty."

"You see! There's not so much rope that I can go on selling it for forty years."

"Who says it has to be the same rope? When the first one is finished, you just cut another one in little pieces."

"But a rope that hasn't hanged anyone isn't going to be a lucky rope!" said Pantaleimon.

"All ropes are lucky!" retorted Josef Turek. And he's right.

Such were the conversations you might catch in the bar at night. I drank schnapps there, even though I was barely ten years old, but Naphtali Kroy, who was eight years older, had honored me with his friendship, and so I just had to play at being older and drink schnapps. It tasted not at all bad.

In fact, it tasted very good, and it kept me alive when I returned from potato roasting tired and chilled to the marrow. We set out early in the morning. The fogs were still hanging over the earth, and over the autumn morning, which looked like an old man, silent and dumb and all swaddled up. The crows sat on the swaying branches for minutes on end, till you thought they were grown on, like big, mournful autumnal fruit. They lifted into the air when we lit our fires and the

smoke went up. We were the enemies of the crows. Sometimes we threw stones at them. Sometimes we brought one down, picked it up, and were invariably alarmed by the crooked sharp beak, which was like a little two-edged saber. Willows smelled bitter and narcotic; there was a reek of mold and putrescence. The damp passed through the soles of our boots up into our bodies, we flapped our arms to get warm, and stomped about on the stubble fields and breathed into our cupped hands. On the edge of the woods, lonely animals peeped out shyly and furtively. Exhausted late beetles crept over the furrows, black and gleaming like bits of coal. The clouds stood insistently in the sky like a curse in waiting. It was only afternoon, and the western horizon began to redden with the sun we couldn't see. We hadn't seen it rise in the morning, we didn't see it at the height of its powers at midday, we saw only its final decline, its flat beams and its painful red reflection in the evening clouds. The wind got up on tiptoe and set off on its nocturnal walkabout. At the same time, a few yellow lights started to flicker in distant hovels, like sparks struck by the wind.

Naphtali whistled the song of the miller whose wheel turns, whose years pass. From our little plume of smoke, we could tell that the wind had changed: only yesterday it had been from the north, today it was from the northwest, and the first snow would be with us in a few days. Already, I longed for its small, hard, cutting stars, and its lashing, deadening sharpness in my face. The smell of our roasting potatoes was like a kind of home to us. The crows had gotten used to the smoke by now, and had returned to their boughs, where they spread their wings from time to time without taking off, maybe just to give us a fright or because they themselves were frightened. And long, tall, lanky, red-haired Naphtali walked home with long steps. I scuttled after him, and couldn't keep up. I got back to town ten minutes after he did. He was standing in front of the bar, waiting for me.

It was the saddest autumn of my life, the autumn that Naphtali Kroy went to Vienna. The war and the Revolution were over, and the countries and peoples were still trembling, even though the storm that had shaken them was already moving off. I was a poor bastard. I had nothing but my rucksack. My rucksack had my coat in it. The shoes I wore at the time I owed to an embarrassing act of charity. They were patent leather boots. That happened to be the pair my

benefactor could do without. The leather was cracked, and all the damp of the rainy autumnal world seeped through their thin soles. When I cleaned the mud off them, they glowed startlingly. They were a traumatic present.

Then Naphtali Kroy arrived, blown from East to West like everyone else, he arrived with the poor, the refugees, the prisoners of war. He was poor, and so was I; together we were even poorer than we were separately. But we were friends, and friendship is a great wealth.

If Naphtali had had a regular job, it wouldn't have been so bad. But he was just a coachman. At the age of twenty, he had married a widow, a widow with a couple of half-grown children. The widow was forty. She owned a cab with a horse. Her husband, the coachman, had been a drunkard, and died insane. Now the poor horse stood in its little stable, whinnying, and in the yard stood the cab with its broken windows, spattered with gray mud, with its sorry shaft that rested glumly on the ground. The sight broke Naphtali's heart. Every day he looked into the stable and the yard, till one morning, he impulsively hitched up the horse to the carriage, climbed up on the box, and trotted along to the station. Visitors arrived. Naphtali was in luck. He stayed up on his box. Every day that trains arrived, he rode to the station. He married the carriage and had the widow and her children thrown in. During the war, the town was occupied by the Austrians. They requisitioned the carriage, the horse, and Naphtali Kroy. The horse died on the battlefield, Frau Kroy died at home. The children were taken off by typhoid fever. The carriage was a piece of junk abandoned somewhere. Only Naphtali was healthy. He went to Vienna.

On the way there, he stabbed a Hungarian who had attempted to rob him of his new yellow boots.

YOUTH

(undated)

I LOVED TO make myself invisible. I used to dream of a cap of invisibility. I wasn't a puny boy, who was afraid of a fight. Even so, a fight in which I was invisible to my enemy always struck me as the only one possible.

I had what they call a devious nature. I despised boys of my own age, who measured their equal or unequal strength. It seemed to me perfectly honorable to vanquish a foe by subterfuge, and assassination, if it was done for a good reason, didn't seem to me to be shameful.

I was capable of persuading myself that I was invisible, although really I knew that everyone could see me. I liked hiding. I was an expert at hide-and-seek; no one ever found me. I always felt a measure of contempt for the heroes I read about in fairy tales and story books. And even so, they impressed me, not on account of their actions but because of the postures they struck, the splendid roles they were allowed to play. I liked to compare myself with them.

Because, obviously, I was ambitious as well. I was quite set on outstripping the run of mankind—how, I wasn't quite sure yet. I was determined to let nothing get in my way. Of the poverty that surrounded me in my youth I was not greatly aware. I saw it as one of the many obstacles that fate puts in a man's way. It was something to be overcome. I did not envy other, well-fed and smartly dressed boys. I had always known that to feel sorry for myself was just as reprehensible as feeling sorry for others. Joyfully, almost lustfully, I embraced poverty, and that set me apart from my peers.

I was always at pains to be on good terms with everyone else. I recognized quite early on that resentment and enmity—in particular, the