

**THE UNIVERSITY OF WINCHESTER**

Faculty of Arts

*Ti ricordo questo uomo? :*

A creative and critical investigation into crossing cultures, countries, and identities

Adelaide Morris

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Doctor of Philosophy

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This Thesis has been completed as a requirement  
for a postgraduate research degree of the University of Winchester



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**Abstract:**

A significant proportion of the world's population lives outside its place of origin; often displaced by war and desperation. What these people have in common are human needs and desires. This research seeks to address, through the creative practice of writing, what happens to the identities of individuals from two different cultures and countries when they come together to live in a third culture, where they are neither native-born nor naturalized. Against the background of the Second World War, the story of first generation immigrants to the UK is told through the lens of a partially assimilated second-generation immigrant of dual heritage.

The hybridity of the researcher's own cultural position, being both outside and inside the subjects' experiences, produces a double dialectic that works towards criticality and creativity. The form of the work is a hybrid post-memoir, incorporating fragments of known facts and historiography. Using double dialectics, academically researched material informs and contextualises the stories of a forced migrant (a political refugee) from Poland and an economic migrant from Italy.

The research reveals how and why polarised positions may come about and the inherent dangers of ideological binaries. Its creative outcome enables readers to engage deeply with issues around sense of place, of self and of loss, as subjects adjust to the transition from rural obscurity to urban obscurity.

In generally understanding not only experiences but how people have responded to them, a deeper engagement will be reached with what it means to be both outside and inside a culture.

The work addresses: ethical issues in connection with biography; synergies between images, history, memory, and memoir, including forgetting.

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ABSTRACT

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The research reveals how and why polarised positions may come about and the inherent dangers of ideological binaries. Its creative outcome enables readers to engage deeply with issues around sense of place, of self and of loss, as subjects adjust to the transition from rural obscurity to urban obscurity.

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The work addresses: ethical issues in connection with biography; synergies between images, history, memory, and memoir, including forgetting.

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## Chapter 1 Background

To begin, I will outline why I was attracted to this area of study, what motivated me to undertake it, and what I brought to it.

The catalyst that initiated my direction towards a critically-creative project is a single photograph: a picture of my father taken during World War Two with a reverse inscription, written in Italian: *Ti ricordo questo uomo?*<sup>1</sup>

Among the many photographs I inherited from my parents, this one always piqued my interest. My mother told a romanticised story about the photograph, but my father told a different one. In fact, there were many strange stories told by both my parents



as if to overlay the identities they brought from their early lives.

1.1

Much as I tried to escape it, the photograph was insistent. It wouldn't go away until I confronted its significance to my entire project.

I came to understand that the photograph encapsulates many of the problems associated with a common family practice: that of attaching unstable interpretations to a single image. But, more than that, I needed to intellectualise my unconscious instincts about how these slippery interpretations had operated to create a believable myth in my family. I needed to know why they had happened, and to understand their long-term effects on subsequent generations. From this small beginning emerged the motivation to pursue a research project that encompassed thousands of miles of travel over southern and central Europe.

I have long-held an interest in the shaping of identity from my lived experience and identity as a second-generation inheritor of personal stories from two different cultures: Polish and Italian. The idea of my being shaped by the stories I heard (or didn't hear) consequently

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<sup>1</sup> Remember this man?

affected many decisions I made in approaching my research. Where my investigation took me, and the hidden stories I uncovered, provided enough material to fill a dozen books. But I can only present one, and here is how that one began for me.

Being of Polish/Italian descent but born and brought up in England, my formative years were spent negotiating tripartite cultural attitudes, and managing this challenge (with all that it entailed) in the formation of my own identity. My first language was Italian, some Polish then, at the age of three years, exclusively English. That was only the beginning. Throughout my life I have observed an English culture into which I have partially assimilated myself; initially to negotiate entry into some of the culture's more comforting aspects, and then to attempt to understand my marginality. That my assimilation has not been entirely successful is due, partly, to my own dearly-held prejudices; prejudices inherited from each of my parents<sup>2</sup> and which have also sprung from the sadness of witnessing their struggle to feel at home in a place that was not their home, and that sometimes did not want them.<sup>3</sup> One parent was a forced migrant (political refugee and, officially, a displaced person), the other can be better described as an economic migrant.

The most challenging aspect to my parents' integration into English culture was their lack of language. Despite one of them speaking Polish, Russian, Italian, and English and the other Italian, English and Polish, they consistently felt the sting of rejection through their lack of competency as they tried to make a life for themselves and their family in England. As a

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<sup>2</sup> Both deceased

<sup>3</sup> Whilst the study of migration is not the main purpose of this academic research, the current phenomenon of war-related mass migration from Syria and Afghanistan, and the many media articles relating to its supposed threat, (both from incoming migrants and settled first and second-generation immigrants) resonates strongly with the research. Juxtaposed with this, many organisations representing Polish history and culture understandably present a partisan view of a blameless and heroic past. This is reflected in a recent political development by Poland's conservative ruling party, Law & Justice: On 1 February 2018, Poland's Senate approved a law banning accusations of collective responsibility by the Polish Nation or Polish State for German Nazi Crimes; a controversial move, coming a week after Holocaust Remembrance Day, which Israel's Holocaust Remembrance Centre cautioned, 'could blur ... historical truths.' Whilst my project does not deal directly with Nazi occupation, the attitudes of fierce national identity, heroism and separation resonate strongly with prevailing attitudes in 1930s Poland. In addition, my father's mixed ethnic identity (Polish/Ukrainian) is seen under severe pressure in pre-war Poland, and under complete erasure during the war and afterwards in his Polish community.



second-generation immigrant, one of my roles was to help them negotiate these challenges with minimum frustration.

A particular frustration for my parents was that, whereas *they* could have been reasonably expected to explain society's structures to us, their children, it was we, apparently native in a new culture, who were trying to explain it to them; insofar as children can explain something they do not fully understand. All this, while we children were simultaneously having to cope with the repercussions of our parents' frustration, injured pride, and historic trauma.

It became apparent to me that if second generation immigrants are to feel any sense of legitimacy in a new culture they need to master its language and understand their own ontology. This beginning brought about my academic research interest to see what other academics had to say, and what a wider audience could gain from understanding the complexities of my family's issues. Research interests hitherto nurtured – the displaced female voice, nationalities and sexualities, culture, identity, modernity – are all strongly tied to the aim of making sense of rootlessness and are generalisable.

Contributing to the very practical considerations of being such a child, was the issue of family myth-making, which impacted on my own ontology: the story I told about myself. My father was secretive about his past, thus denying his children access to a history before their own lived experience. Snippets of information and misinformation melded over the years to become an unreliable narrative. My parents' developing language skills doubtless added to misunderstandings and confusion. But more significantly, for me, was the distance my father created between himself and us by these lies, elisions and deliberate (or unconscious) obfuscations. That he loved and provided for us is not disputed but, because of his personal trauma, my capacity to trust him as a parent was affected by the decisions he made when communicating his personal narrative.

Esther Leslie's interpretation of Walter Benjamin's Selected Writings helps to contextualise one of the core strands of my investigation; that is, to bring out what was stored in the cellar of the house of my father's self:

We do not track constantly how our life came to take on the shape it did, generated from a million tiny events and encounters. Foundational for the house of the self is the cellar, which is the oldest part. So much is stored there. More is stored there than we care to know. Brutally and compulsorily, old

work is shoved in there – such is the character of ritual. Ritual involves the sacrifice of other possibilities. Ritual is the name for the life that came to be, unconsciously. Dreams and failures are archived in the cellar too. Much is forgotten until the moment when the house of the self is under sustained assault. When this occurs, our very foundations are rattled. Things come back into the light at a moment of danger.<sup>4</sup>

Through my creative work, ‘Remember this man?’, I will show that the things that came ‘back into the light at a moment of danger’ or aporia for my father, was the truth behind what I have hitherto regarded as the lies, elisions and deliberate or, more appropriately, unconscious obfuscations that created the following family myth.

The story we, his children, were told<sup>5</sup> was that our father, Stefan Motkaluk, was a Catholic Polish national whose parents emigrated to Canada, leaving him behind in south-eastern Poland when he was a small child (about two years old) because he was sick and unable to travel.<sup>6</sup> His unmarried, childless aunt offered to care for him but only if she could legally adopt him. He said his real name was Polish: Jurkiewicz but on adoption, he took his aunt’s name, Motkaluk<sup>7</sup>. His aunt was wealthy, owned a shop, and had a husband-less female servant with a young child named Maria. Stefan described a privileged childhood, in which he was educated at *gimnazjum*<sup>8</sup> and then technical college.

At the outbreak of World War Two, the Russians<sup>9</sup> arrested my father whilst he was on a home visit from an underground army that was attempting to defend the eastern Polish

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<sup>4</sup> Leslie, E. (2014). *Derelicts: Thought Worms from the Wreckage*, Unkant Publishers. From *Selected Writings 1913-26* Vol 1 p3. Whilst this introduction might suggest the project is a suitable subject for psychoanalytic theory (and my methodology is indebted to the influence of Freudian ideas), it is beyond its scope as it stands to include a psychoanalytic reading.

<sup>5</sup> Until research started in 2011, I had no documentary evidence of any of my father’s wartime activities, apart from some photographs, a handful of medals thrown carelessly into a drawer and hearsay about his pre-war life, mostly relayed as anecdotes by him or my mother.

<sup>6</sup> As he was born in 1917, this version of events suggests his parents would have left in 1919, a year after Galicia was embroiled in east/west territorial disputes. The Peace of Riga in 1921, finally saw Galicia become part of the Second Polish Republic. Therefore, Stefan was actually born in Galicia, a crown land of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

<sup>7</sup> Ukrainian – these distinctions were never pointed out to us, and I only understood that Motkaluk was a Ukrainian name in 1995, twelve years after Stefan’s death.

<sup>8</sup> Polish secondary school (3 years from 13-16) with emphasis on academic learning; most children in this period would finish their education at elementary school.

<sup>9</sup> Colloquialism used rather than Soviets or NKVD

border. Imprisoned, and subsequently condemned to death, it was said he wrote to Stalin for clemency (with the help of a visiting nun) and had his sentence commuted to hard labour for life in a Siberian logging camp, a gulag.

After the termination of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, when Russia joined the Allies, Stefan was brought out of Siberia. He had the choice of joining either the Soviet or British army. He joined the British Eighth Army (place unknown), travelled to Persia, Palestine, and Egypt, before sailing to southern Italy, where he met my mother, Lucia. He fought at the final decisive battle of Monte Cassino, and on up to northern Italy. He said he was in a topographic unit of the artillery, which entailed laying radio wires behind enemy lines at night and reporting on enemy positions. He narrowly missed selection to be dropped by parachute behind enemy lines, due to a system of counting every nth soldier. He also trained as a projectionist, and even showed films to the troops in the Arena at Verona.

After the war, he became a displaced person, unable to return to Poland, where he believed his commuted death sentence would result in execution, as his homeland was then under Communist rule. Return would be especially dangerous for him, he said, as he had fought against Russia and he'd also been a member of the merchant class; his aunt having owned a shop.

He opted to travel to England, from where he hoped to continue to Canada, to join his paternal half-sister, Cesia, from his father's second marriage; his own mother having died in Canada. A land dispute between him and his sister led to him burning her photographs and letters. At some point after the war, he wrote to my mother, Lucia, sending her a photograph of himself with the reverse inscription, 'remember this man?' written in Italian. She joined him in his exile. They initially lived in a large house in Gloucestershire, employed as domestic servants. After a falling-out with his employer, Stefan moved Lucia to an abandoned Nissan hut on the edge of Babdown Airfield, Tetbury, where they had their first two children (my brother, Zbigniew Bronislaw, followed by me). At some point during this period they married in Cirencester, but we were not told when, or ever saw their marriage certificate. They then moved to rented rooms in Polish households in Bristol before finally obtaining a council house in semi-rural Yate, South Gloucestershire, where their youngest child, Carol, was born.

When asked, Stefan always said his family in Poland were no longer there, they were 'all gone.'

Some of this account is true, some not; much is missing, which my research, layer by layer, gradually revealed. Stefan, it turned out, had concealed a great deal of information about his background, the most salient being that he had had a pre-war wife and son in Poland. And it is here that fact, myth, and history meld to make a story; a memoir of sorts.

What I bring to this enquiry is the unique position of being both inside (therefore part of the story), and outside it, excluded by ignorance, which my position as researcher and author-as-producer seeks to rectify. In addition, I bring a life-long scepticism as to the nature of truth. As a child, I sensed my father's myth-making as a lie; in later life, studying the complexities of memory and forgetting, I uncovered a deeper understanding of him as a man, and of myself as a person connected to him. I now bring a need to tell his story to show readers why ordinary people, traumatised by extreme events and circumstances, make the decisions that they make as they navigate alien terrains. I also want to show the impact of those decisions on subsequent generations which are simultaneously attempting to assimilate an alien culture, because, for a child, all cultures are alien.

Using my parents' experiences, I can critically and creatively explore the notion of lack of belonging to articulate a sense of loss, of lack, in the disenfranchisement felt by a second-generation immigrant of dual heritage, living in a third culture.

## Chapter 2 Introduction

In this chapter I explain what I am trying to find out, the issues driving the enquiry and why and to whom it matters.

The submission is a critical and creative exploration of the shaping of a cultural identity; an identity much experienced but less critically explored as post-World War Two European descendants move into the twenty-first century. What the study contributes to knowledge is the creation of a neo-narrative<sup>10</sup> that presents both a hidden pre/post-war story *and* what it is to be the inheritor of such a story, as a dual heritage, second generation European immigrant trying to establish an identity in a third culture.

The identity formation of *inheritors* of geo-political displacement can themselves be displaced by their ancestors' experiences in a hierarchy of suffering, thereby alienating them from attachment to a single culture. The creative outcome of the research attempts to reveal how and why generational polarised positions can form, and the inherent dangers contained within ideological binaries. To this is the added problem of retaining my own developing sense of self.

Image 2.1<sup>11</sup> shows Stefan on the left, and on the right the son from whom he was separated by war. Stefan last saw his wife, Halina, and first-born son Teodor in 1941, prior to his arrest by the NKVD in Soviet occupied Poland.<sup>12</sup> Teodor was then just nine months old.

Stefan's arrest was followed by a journey of c. 30,000 kilometres from his home in Poland via a Siberian gulag, military service in Persia<sup>13</sup>, Palestine, Egypt and Italy and his ultimate displacement in England; the result of political betrayal. In the process, he lost family, country, culture, language, and identity; an increasingly familiar story in our troubled times.

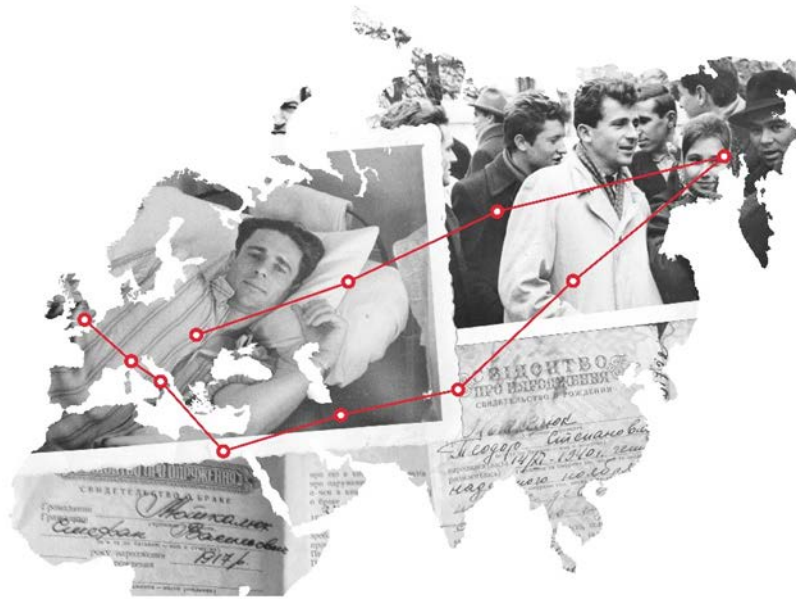
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<sup>10</sup> In short, 'a new story (neo-narrative) is constructed when the processes that inform the conditions under investigation are designed to enable such a reconceptualization.' Fuller definition in Chapter 4 Methodology.

<sup>11</sup> Documents: Soviet era certificate issues of Stefan and Halina's marriage, showing Stefan's birth date (1917), and Teodor's birth (1940). Information taken from church metric books.

<sup>12</sup> Referred to by Poles as the Kresy Territories. This part of the Second Polish Republic is now in western Ukraine (previously the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic under communist rule from 1945 to 1991).

<sup>13</sup> Present day Iran



## 2.1

A main aim was to find out what long-term impact Stefan's experience might have had on him, not just as *my* father but as a man, and *a* father. That is, to move beyond my own lived experience in order to bear witness to his.

My research has led to the partial recovery,<sup>14</sup> not only of Stefan's hitherto lost history but also that of Teodor, his lost son. Neither man knew anything of the other's post-war life. However, as a researcher, I do. I occupy a place both inside a prevailing family narrative, in which Teodor didn't exist, and outside it, in which Teodor's existence has been discovered and his life story unfolded. My omniscience reaches beyond Stefan and Teodor's lived experiences, by bearing witness to stories and viewing photographs that neither of them knew of.

An additional complexity in my research is that Stefan's second wife (my mother, Lucia) was Italian. The heritage I hold as a product of Stefan's second family, post-war, finds me in an almost permanent state of liminality: inside and outside three pre-existing cultures: Polish, Italian, and English, attempting to tell my parents' stories, and mine.

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<sup>14</sup> About six months from May to November 1941 remain unaccounted for.

Marianne Hirsch points out that as second-generation guardians of traumatic histories, it is up to us – the generation of post-memory – to manage these ‘intergenerational acts of transfer.’<sup>15</sup> A key issue, therefore, in driving this enquiry, is, how do I carry this man’s story forward, without ‘appropriating it, without unduly calling attention to myself, and without having my own story displaced by it?’<sup>16</sup>

The impact of post-World War Two first-generation immigrants’ experiences on second-generation immigrants sits alongside a general growth of interest in memoir,<sup>17</sup> and increasing ease of recovering family history<sup>18</sup>; in large part adding to the trend in memoir popularity. Where once biography resided mainly in the province of the rich, powerful, and famous, it seems that ordinary stories, like Stefan’s, are now worth their telling.<sup>19</sup> It also seems that, with the demise of First World War veterans, the weight of recovering wartime history will soon be falling on the Second World War generation, and their descendants. As Peter Wolodarski said in a recent opinion piece, ‘the last witnesses to Europe’s darkest hours will soon disappear. This is a generation that was brutally forced to learn what is important in life. They directly saw how the institutions of society can serve both good and evil.’<sup>20</sup>

Wolodarski was speaking of a Holocaust survivor, which Stefan was not, but he too survived the evils of institutions of society.<sup>21</sup> I do not propose, within the scope of this research

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<sup>15</sup> Hirsch, M. (2012). The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust, Columbia University Press. p2

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. p2

<sup>17</sup> Couser, G. T. (2012). Memoir: An Introduction, Oxford University Press, USA. In his introduction, Couser cites Ben Yagoda’s Neilsen 2009 BookScan finding that ‘Total sales in the categories of Personal Memoirs, Childhood Memoirs, and Parental Memoirs increased more than 400 percent between 2004 and 2008.’ p3. Original text: Yagoda, B. (2009). Memoir: A History, Penguin Publishing Group.

<sup>18</sup> Particularly pre-war central European histories; state archives, including KGB archives are gradually opening up and some even being digitised; something likely to become contentious in today’s geo-political climate.

<sup>19</sup> Alison Light writes, ‘Everyone does family history nowadays. Genealogy used to belong only to the wealthy; once upon a time they owned a past and laid claim to a history based on land and property.’ Light, A. (2015). Common People: In Pursuit of My Ancestors, University of Chicago Press. pxxi

<sup>20</sup> Wolodarski, P. (2018). Europe’s past matters today. My grandma’s survival story tells us why. The Guardian. Manchester. Wolodarski is editor-in-chief of Dagen Nyheter, Sweden’s leading daily newspaper.

<sup>21</sup> He also benefited from their better aspects.

to enter a prevailing Polish debate about who suffered at whose hands except to say that I have attempted to present a range of contemporaneous experiences as faithfully as possible.<sup>22</sup>

This project differs from many mainstream narratives in that the experiences of not belonging to any one culture, or background, have been little represented by cultural artefact, or recorded for future generations. Whilst my story might be considered to sit within a post-World War Two migration genre, showing impact on subsequent generations, such as Marina Lewynka's Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian or Andrea Levy's Small Island, its peculiarities are either untold or little told. The immigrant narratives in Lewynka's and Levy's works do not represent the complexities of second-generation immigrants existing in tripartite cultures. This matters because with greater global mobility and disruption we are likely to see more issues connected with lack of belonging to any one culture; floating individuals, not tied to nationalist sentiments or cultural norms, trying to understand their place in the world.

My unique position therefore prompts several critical and creative questions: as Stefan assimilates an alien culture, and adopts a new language, does he become a different person? And how does he cope with the loss of his first-born son left behind the Iron Curtain? How does this man's recall or repression of fragile memories become expressed in how he interacts with his second family as he forms a new identity in a new culture?

These and other questions have been constant companions throughout my writing process because, like R.I. Moore describing James Fentress' and Chris Wickham's accounts, I find that:

...what people have done with their memories, and how, and why, in a remarkable variety of circumstances, is as absorbing in its own right as it is illuminating and suggestive for anybody whose business it is to struggle for an understanding of social action.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> It is reasonable to say that in the genocide -v- crimes against humanity debate, there is a convincing body of evidence that Poles suffered, at the very least, from crimes against humanity at the hands of the Soviets. There is also recognition that Nazi Germany's policy against Poland was to eradicate its population. In addition, Polish nationalists and Ukrainian nationalists are still debating each other's roles before, during and after the Second World War. Poland's current institutional position on its wartime role towards its Jewish citizens is as discussed in footnote 3.

<sup>23</sup> Fentress, J., A. C. o. L. Societies., et al. (1992). Social memory. Oxford, UK, Cambridge, Mass., Blackwell. Editor's Preface pviii



The entry, then, to understanding my own ontology as such a person, is to discover the ‘truth’ of my father’s story, how he created his identity, and how it impacted on his social actions. In understanding his ontological decisions, my creative work has the potential to become a vehicle for wider understanding of the forced migration experience.

Eva Hoffman, recalling her experience as a newly-arrived immigrant from Poland on hearing yet another holocaust trauma story, acknowledges ‘that this—the pain of this—is where I come from, and ... it’s useless to try to get away.’<sup>24</sup> Any more than I can escape my family’s experiences.

Undoubtedly, my father’s narrative had become ritualised by the time we, his children, were able to understand it and became synthesised as the story we, as a family, told *to* ourselves, and *about* ourselves. Consequently, my undertaking in this project is to explore possibilities that may have been closed by historical ritualisation. I seek to find reasons for their closure, contextualise them, and present a neo-narrative, which will be accessible to a modern reader.

But how do I tell his story - as a writer, Stefan’s child, and inheritor of this traumatic legacy - without losing myself? Because, of course, it is my story too, and that of my siblings, and Teodor’s surviving relatives. I have come to realise that the story belongs to many people and there are many versions of it. And with each new research finding, the story changes. With every twist and turn, as though refracted through a kaleidoscope, new versions appear. If there could ever be said to be a correct story, whose is it?

Furthermore, to what extent would an historical social norm for these writing subjects need to be present for a modern reader to be able to locate my subjects’ individual behaviours and motivations in their own time?

Stefan and Lucia, between them, developed and distilled an account of their lives that, like a cracked bell, never quite rang true. Growing up, the questions I had remained unanswered but never left me. To understand my own lack of belonging, I realised that what I needed to discover were the factors that motivated the twists and turns of this family’s kaleidoscope.

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<sup>24</sup> Hoffman, E. (1998). Lost in translation: a life in a new language. London, Vintage. P25 Hoffman recalls the first glimpses of the particularity of her parents’ experiences within an overall metahistory.

A creative exposition of the 'truth' behind the myth follows in Chapter 3 Creative Work. Before reading, it may be helpful to contextualise the story I have written with archival and empirical headline findings from my research, which can be found in Chapter 6 Findings and Appendix 1. Chronology. They show continuities with, and differences in, the well-rehearsed family myth outlined earlier. They also show that where one myth has been exposed another has been created in my writing, because, as Hayden White said, 'all stories are fiction.'<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> White, H. and R. Doran (2010). The Fiction of Narrative: Essays on History, Literature, and Theory, 1957–2007, Johns Hopkins University Press. pxxv Editor's introduction (Robert Doran)

## Chapter 3 Creative Work

Remember this man?

England: Yate

1968

'Why is he in bed?

'And he's got pyjamas on. I didn't know they had pyjamas.'



3.1

'What?' Disturbed from her exhausted reverie, Lucy taps ash into the saucer on the threadbare arm of her chair. She takes the photograph offered by her daughter's skinny fingers.

In the grate, dying embers of coal are beginning to whiten with ash, but they still hold some heat against the chill night.

'He was shot; he's in the army hospital.'

'I never knew that. He doesn't look ill,' Adda<sup>26</sup> returns. 'Why would he be photographed in hospital?'

Lucy looks from the photograph to her husband in the grey armchair opposite, 'What do you know,' she says to the teenage girl, 'go to bed, it's late.'

Adda sits back into the settee, almost holding her breath. Her father, busy with an emaciated rollup, ignores them both.

Lucy, noticing, says absently to the room, 'I wish you'd never sent that picture.'

Stefan's response is unexpected, 'What? Let me see.' He leans over to grab the photograph, his smouldering rollup pinched between thumb and second finger. 'Don't be crazy. I gave you that picture the day I left. Don't you remember? It was after Cassino. You know when.' He smiles slyly, picking a thread of tobacco from his lips. 'Then you sent it back to me.'

Lucy snaps back, 'After Cassino. What are you talking about? No, no, you sent it from England to call me. You called me over.'

She watches as Stefan examines the photograph with furrowed brow, before pressing her point, 'You took your time, but you wanted me to come.'

'I wanted you to come?' His head jerks up. 'Hah, if anyone wanted anyone, it was you. You, with the guilt, you thought I owed you something.' He sighs deeply, exhaling a thin stream of smoke. 'Always with the guilt.' He turns the photo over, tapping it with a calloused thumb, 'Look what you wrote. Stupid. "Remember this man?" Who writes that? What is that supposed to mean?'

Lucy's face contorts, 'You did owe me.'

'Owed you, did I?' He raises his voice, 'Well I've been paying ever since.' Agitated now, he looks at the picture again, 'Oh yes, I remember that man; that man was free. Look at him now. Finished!' He tosses the photograph into her lap.

Lucy lets it lie there. 'You know how to hurt me, don't you?' She knows what she's doing. 'It's always the same thing with you. I should be used to it by now. That's what men do, isn't it? So they can have what they want. Big talk, big man promises.'

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<sup>26</sup> Diminutive of Adelaide

She picks up the photo, 'You thought, "stupid Italian girl, what does she know, plenty like her." I bet you had plenty. Why would I be different? If I sent it, it was because you promised me. You promised to send for me.'

Adda shrinks further back into the sofa, eyes flicking from parent to parent.

Lucy's lips compress.

Her smirk drives on Stefan, 'Yes, Italian girls, passionate... Well you are different. I thought you were hot but you...'

He points at the photo, 'If I sent that picture, it was to a warm girl, someone who knew how to be a woman. You, you are ice.'

Lucy has what she wants, 'Ice. Well, you made me ice. Why don't you go and find another one; they're all the same to you. Or maybe you want one of those Polish girls, eh?'

She jerks her head instinctively as Stefan stands. The shadow of his hand passes over her upturned face. She notes the look he carries and confronts him defiantly with her chin. He flicks his cigarette into the grate and is gone from the room, slamming the door behind him. His heavy steps creak on the stairs and across the bedroom floor above their heads. Mother and daughter look up.

'Shall I make a cup of tea?' Adda asks.

Lucy sighs as her hands reach for her cigarettes, 'Yes. You make a cup of tea.' She hears Stefan cough loudly upstairs, the bed squeak. She is bone-weary, too tired to move, too tired to stay. She lights the cigarette and gratefully inhales deep into her exhausted lungs before blowing the warm smoke hard into her empty living room.

The girl returns with two cups of milky tea, spilling into saucers. About to remonstrate, Lucy sees the eagerness in her daughter's face. 'Stupid girl', she thinks, 'I should send her to bed. I should go to bed.' She raises the cigarette to her dry lips and inhales again. 'Not yet.'

Lifting the cup, using the edge of the saucer to brush off the bottom, she notices her daughter's slurping. Drips splash everywhere.

'Tch, be careful. Can't you even drink tea properly?'

The girl puts down her cup, picks up another photograph. 'Is this Dad? Tell me about him, I want to know.'

'Tell you about him? What do *you* need to know? '

'Anything, other people know about their dads.'

'Your father was adopted by his aunty when he was very small. She was rich.'

'Why? Why was he adopted?'

'Because his mother and father had to go away from Poland – to Canada. They couldn't take him.'

'Why?'

'Because he had some illness that children have. They had to leave him behind; he was too young, it was dangerous. His aunty – Karolina, her name was - said she would look after him because she didn't have any children, but she said if she had him, she wanted him properly; to adopt him and give him her name. Motkaluk isn't his real name. '

'Didn't he miss his mum and dad?'

'He was small, I told you.'

'How small?'

'Two, three, or something. Just listen.'

Lucy sits up.

'His aunty had a shop and she was selling things to the people and she was rich. She had a car. And that's why his name is different.'

'Different from what?'

'Stop asking stupid questions. Different from his father's.'

The girl is silenced.

'When the war came, he was arrested and sent to Siberia then he joined the army and came to Italy, to my village. He was tall, handsome but I didn't like him at first. I had a boyfriend who was jealous, and your father was causing trouble for me, always hanging around. My boyfriend didn't like it.'

The girl is obedient, hardly breathing, listening intently, as if the slightest movement will break the spell.

Lucy continues.

'When he came, he was talking to my father because Father could speak English. Father been in America, he had business there. Well, he was working for a man, making shoes,

and the man wanted him to be his partner. He wanted Mother to join him, but she wouldn't go.'

Lucy notices the girl's mouth working up to another question. She frowns silence then picks up another picture from the pile before continuing her thread of dissatisfaction.

'We had plenty money then – Father was sending money to Mother, and she bought land. We had everything then. We was dressed nice and we had a house in the village. Mother's family had land, but she had plenty brothers. He came back now and then to visit mother, and every time he gave her another baby, then left again. '

She sees her daughter's confusion. 'Are you listening?'

'I think so,' Adda replies, self-consciously hiding the fingers she's been counting her grandfather's to-ing and fro-ing on.

'Poor Mother, she suffered with migraine. She just had to go to bed. It was very hard for her. We had to do everything.'

'Did she like Dad?'

Lucy shifts her gaze to look at the girl, hardly comprehending the question.

'Don Carlo,' she continues, 'he was very rich. He owned a big palazzo and had a lot of land; many people worked for him, but he had one leg missing. He wanted someone to look after him. Imagine, married to a sick man with one leg. What life is that for a girl? He had a car...'

'If you married him though, we would have been rich.'

Lucy looks at her daughter scornfully. 'Don't be stupid.'

'How did he drive the car with only one leg?'

'Look, do you want to hear this story or not? Stop with your stupid questions.' Lucy holds her aching back as she stretches, looking around the living room; at its loud wallpaper, red carpet and grey sofa, worn out before long before the hire purchase was paid off. But all the tired woman sees is dust from the cooling fire and bits on the carpet square. Reaching down, she picks specks of lint from the carpet. Its dark colour taunts her with its constant lack of order. She flicks the debris into the near empty grate.

'I told you to keep the house clean. Look at this mess. I have to do everything.'

'What about the man with the missing leg?'

'People were saying things to mother. One aunty, she came to the house from church. She said, "Antonietta, I've been to the church. You have so many daughters; I prayed that one of them would die so you won't be so poor." Father was so angry, he chased her away. He was shouting, "Better you go to church and pray for your soul, you stupid woman!" He was chasing her with the brush – you know, to sweep the floor – outside. The people were laughing but father was very angry.'

'Were you poor then?'

'Poor? You don't know what poor is. We were all right *before* the war. But then everything was spoiled.'

Lucy hears her daughter release a long slow breath.

'But then you met Dad, didn't you? And came here?'

'Oh yes, your father. Well, I didn't like him.'



Italy: Jelsi  
March 1944

Clinging to the side of a high Molisan hill, Jelsi goes about its daily business of surviving and rubbing along with its neighbours. Or, more truthfully, rubbing up its neighbours. Such is the way of villages on this part of southern Italy's rock-hard ground. Folding in on themselves, rock fissures run deep, cracking here and there to expose the depth of the region's harshness. Like its religion, the ground proposes deferred reward for the embrace of futile suffering wrapped in affected piety.

Vines twine and olive trees grip like grievances, gnarled and thriving on restricted roots. But despite the earth's aridity, bread, wine, and oil provide for its human population. Fig trees release passionate sweetness, bright red tomatoes glisten amongst dusty furled leaves, and grapes produce wine robust enough to soothe a troubled mind. This land travels into the soul and heart to engender ideas of infinite sentimentality.

Barely recovered from its latest trammelling by retreating German troops, sprawling camomile pushes through Jelsi's stony roads to be assaulted once again. This time it is crushed by the heavy lorries belonging to the Allies, grinding their way across southern Italy, promising an end at last to all the fighting. But it will be some time before any dream-filled sleep is released by the brave camomile's calming fragrance in this small village.

The soldiers' welcome is desultory; the villagers confused as to whether these are yet more Canadians, or *Inglesi*, English. Some do not even care.

Stefan sits up front in the cab beside Kaszczyk, who swerves from side to side, waving and ogling the girls.

'Hey! Stefan! Look at that one over there. What do you think her face is like?'

'If it's as good as her legs, I'll marry her.'

'Foolish, foolish boy. Half the girls in this village have nylon stockings already. These girls are not for marrying. Don't you know the Canadians got here two weeks ago? Between them and the Germans... Nah, if you want angels, look in heaven. Nothing for good men here, which is just as well because I'm already damned.'

Stefan slaps the driver's back, laughing, 'But, Kaszczyk, listen, that girl there, see? She is not wearing stockings.'

'Canadians!'

'No, look at her head, see how she carries it. Does that look ashamed to you? Trust me, I can tell. She'll do.'

'Well you should know, you dog. Over there, look, there's Adam. Let's see what he thinks.' Kaszczyk swerves across the road, eliciting roars of protests, and a chain of horn blowing as dust covers the trucks behind.

'*Spierdalaj*,'<sup>27</sup> Kaszczyk roars back. 'Ho, Adam! You rogue,' he shouts, pulling up the overheated lorry with a grinding shriek of gears.

Both men jump down and run towards a short man who is absent-mindedly fumbling for something in the deep pockets of his oversized khaki coat.

They see him look up with surprised delight. 'Come, come,' he shouts. His bony arms outstretch, throwing his coat open; thin skin clings to his small skull, which seems to shrink further beneath the coat's oversized collar.

All three embrace before pulling away to peer intently at faces. Their fingers dig into tortured limbs, as if by letting go they might lose their comrades for ever.

Kaszczyk starts, through laughter and coughing, 'Adam, Adam, my friend, good health. Let's feel your bones.'

Although Adam tries to shrug him off, Kaszczyk's professional examination is concerned and thorough. 'How long have you been here? How're the billets? Never mind, never mind. Let me tell you, our friend, Stefan here, damn fool, first woman he sees and he wants to get married. Me, I would just fuck her, but you know how these country boys are. Tell us about that girl over there, the one with the plaits.'

'My God, Kaszczyk, loud as ever and twice as randy,' Adam retorts. 'Ha, I thought your friends would shoot you by now, even if the Germans didn't.'

'*Kurwa jego* Adam!' Kaszczyk spits and spins. 'Why would my friends kill me? I draw fire for them, don't I? And I test all the girls personally. This is a double service to mankind,

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<sup>27</sup> Fuck off

heh, heh. Come on, you bastard, tell us about that girl. Stefan is in love,' Kaszczyk turns his finger against his temple. 'You have been here long, yes? What do you know?'

'Long enough, Kaszczyk, you son of a whore.'

Kaszczyk shrugs off the insult with a dismissive wave. 'So, tell us. Quickly, can't you see this man is dying of love? His prick has forgotten what it's for.'

Stefan smiles at his two friends, enjoying the fact that the screaming engine has stopped for a while, and no-one is yelling orders at him. With no real interest in its outcome he waits to see how far the joke will go.

'That one there? Forget it. No bread from that flour. Nose in the air. No chance. Get down to the bar, see, down there by the fountain. One last night, *Bóg*,<sup>28</sup> like sleeping on my mother's breasts! *There* you'll find kindness.' Adam thrusts his emaciated pelvis.

Stefan joins their roar of laughter, ringing high above the noise and dust. Then quietly, and to his surprise, he asks.

'Tell me where she lives, Adam.'

'Forget it, Stefan, man,' Adam says, jerking his head towards a nearby house where a tall Italian is watching them. 'Her father is at home; mother runs the place like a convent with all those girls, legs shut so tight you can't even smell them. Five of them - can you believe such bad luck? - only one married. Anyway, they're just back from hiding in the country; the eldest are still covered with straw.'

The men roar with laughter. 'Forget it, I tell you! Come on, let's get a drink before these bastards start ordering us about again.'

Climbing in the cab, they hear Sergeant Czarny shout, 'Move that bloody truck out of the way. What do you think this is, the bloody Riviera?'

Kaszczyk fiddles with the truck's ignition as Stefan reaches his seat, looking back at the house. 'So, they hid, eh?' he thinks. With a thin finger he rubs the side of his dirty face while his thumb rests on his bristly chin. This precious moment of stillness gives him time to ruminate.

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<sup>28</sup> God

On the move since Taranto - striking camp early, no time to wash, eating standing up – they've been pushing northward, gaining painfully on the German retreat. Their nerves, already rattled by four years of war, jangle furiously at every delay whilst engineers repair bridges, remove road blocks and deal with mines. Italy's ferocious terrain – rough and craggy – provides ample opportunity to enemy sabotage units to delay their progress. And for the Poles to criticise their allies, which they do, fulsomely, creatively and with great humour.

Now at last they are within sound of their goal; daily they've heard the sound of relentless bombardment on Cassino getting louder. The closer they come, the greater the numbers of exhausted and injured soldiers along the road, staring blankly with fatigue and shock; clothes and faces so covered with dust and blood they've become an amorphous mass of men indistinguishable from the fathers, sons and lovers they used to be. The sight both inflames and terrifies the fresh troops. But they finally have a chance to fight, like men, and this time they'll make sure *they* won't be pushed onto cattle trucks bound eastward. This time they'll be fighting for everything they've lost. From the humblest village house to the grandest town apartment - labourers and scholars - men and women both - they find themselves together with no choice but to commit everything to the battle ahead.

'He had it bad, that Adam,' says Kaszczyk slamming his boot onto the clutch.

'I know,' says Stefan looking towards his friend's receding back.

'Did he tell you, two years tortured, and hard labour, courtesy of Stalin,' Kaszczyk presses on.

'He told me, he got me to Teheran, remember? There's not much else to talk about on that journey. Don't worry about Adam, he's like a rat ready to fight. He can't wait to get home.'

Kaszczyk grunts.

The truck starts up its dreadful rumbling and, as the shouting begins again, Kaszczyk is ordered to park in front of a dull-looking palazzo. Soldiers run in and out of the building with boxes and equipment- good enough for German HQ, it will suit the British too. The few bullet holes marking the walls suggest recent hostility but generally it is untouched. At least here the German retreat has been relatively orderly.

Sergeant Czarny, red-faced and distended belly, shouts directions about everything to everyone. Sweat soaks his woollen uniform in the late afternoon. His efforts to organise

sleeping arrangements scatter men in all directions. The only living things not moving are two emaciated chickens that sit panting in the dust outside the palazzo, awaiting their fate.

As a corporal, Stefan is glad he won't be breathing Czarny's particularly loathsome nocturnal stink. *His* billet for the night will be under canvas with smelly soldiers, or even under a truck, with its diesel stench. That is until this incompetent quartermaster allocates shelter with the locals. One thing Stefan is certain of: he isn't planning to live in a tent for long, that's for fools. He's after the comfort of a home-cooked meal, however poor.

It's been a long time since Stefan has sat at any family's hearth. Or had his senses assaulted by the simple beauty of a well-fed child, which is what he sees across the road where the tall Italian stands watching this latest invasion. Surely here is a man taking respite from his wife's complaints; her wailing can be heard even above the noise of the trucks.

The pretty curly-haired child, oblivious to everything, is cradling a rag-wrapped stone on her lap. Stefan is attracted to the man's posture, and the child next to him, almost as much as to the girl with the plaits. *These people do not look like ignorant contadini.*<sup>29</sup> But he notes that the Italian is watching the arriving troops with a keen eye that lacks avarice. Stefan is used to greed and need. He also notes the man's dignity; not the usual strutting, puffing pride of the defeated he's seen lately.

'He doesn't look like a fascist,' he thinks, 'but who knows? Would I sleep soundly in his kitchen? Or lay awake, waiting for a knife in the back?'

Stefan calculates his moves carefully; this he knows how to do. In a few long-legged strides he is across the road, dodging the lorries, and greeting the Italian with the usual civility, '*Buon giorno signore.*'

'*Buon giorno, buon giorno,*' the man replies, 'G'day, g'day, eh,' he follows in an exaggerated parody of American accented twang. 'Eh, my name John,' the man indicates with thumb to his chest, 'Giovanni, John, yes, yes.'

Stefan nods respectfully. 'Stefan.' So, this man has travelled. No other way to learn English in a village like this.

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<sup>29</sup> Country people, peasants

The lorries are now backing up along via Andrea Valiante. Some drivers, too exhausted to shout, light cigarettes. They gaze listlessly at yet another Italian village as they inhale deeply, covering their sighs with exaggerated exhalations.

Stefan is energised though. He compliments the man on his pretty daughter.

'The last of five,' the man says, holding up his hand with fingers outspread.

'Are you sure?'

Both men laugh and the child, distracted, looks up at the two men.

Spying an opportunity, Stefan bends, speaking to her directly, '*Bella*, show me your little baby here.'

The child shyly offers up her smooth stone and in soft tones says, 'It's not real, it's just a stone.'

Even through his calculations, Stefan is softening to this encounter with a simple domestic scene. '*Permesso?*' he asks the Italian, indicating that he wishes to pick her up.

'*Avanti,*' responds the trusting father, who in his turn has already assessed the soldier's intent. Carmelina's looks have already garnered many bars of chocolate from homesick soldiers; German and Canadian.

With his soft little burden, Stefan hails a slow-moving lorry to stop, points to its grill and then to the child in his arms. The driver's broken teeth show through a sudden grin as he shrugs and brings the heavy vehicle to a halt. With one hand, Stefan removes the dirty mascot tied to the grill and hands it to the child. 'Take it *bimba*<sup>30</sup>, when I come again, I bring you good dolly. It is not fair they keep them tied on vehicles to look nice and little girl doesn't have a toy to play with. Dollies for children, not lorries.'

The driver smiles, perhaps remembering, perhaps not, then presses his fingers hard against his mouth. Releasing a kiss for Carmelina that carries too much for him, he roars abuse, shifts the lorry into gear and trundles off to follow the others winding through the village. Fat toddlers are a rare sight to these troubled men.

Returning to Giovanni, Stefan places Carmelina back onto the step where she begins examination of her new baby. He starts to engage the man in what passes for conversation; a

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<sup>30</sup> Little girl

mixture of Italian and English. There is a way to find language, Stefan knows, when two people wish it.

'Eh America, America,' Giovanni prods his thumb into his chest. 'Much money, come here, all gone.' He sweeps his arms away. 'Eh, eh, *la Grande depression, capisci?*'<sup>31</sup>

'*Capisco,*' answers Stefan. He holds up his fingers, 'How long you there?'

Giovanni gets excited, 'Oh, oh, fawteen, fawteen years.'

Stefan widens his arms, 'Long time there.'

'No, I fawteen years, I go. My mudder, no, not mudder. Eh, eh, *matrigna...*'

Stefan frowns, 'Grandmother? Stepmother?'

'*Si, si,* stepmother. Out, out, she throw me out. When Papa dead. I go USA, on boat, *da solo,* yes? Me, fawteen years.'

Stefan whistles.

'Eh, eh, I fight, first war,' Giovanni holds up an imaginary rifle, 'I fight, *medaglia,*'<sup>32</sup> ever'ting. This war. No good, no good, this war. Bad. *Vergognati, italiani.*'<sup>33</sup>

Their short exchange is enough to establish conditions upon which a friendship could proceed. This much Stefan knows, that there is more to discuss with this Italian.

The child meanwhile has finished adjusting her new baby beside its older sibling and stares inquisitively up at the two men with an open mouth. After an interval, the battered door behind Giovanni opens a crack, 'Come, hoy, come, come in. What are you doing there? Come inside.' The voice is that of a young woman, but Stefan doesn't yet know whose.

An arm reaches out and grabs Carmelina, who hurriedly gathers up her family before being pulled into the mayhem of the house.

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The Caruso family had returned late the day before to find their home desecrated. Its door lay where it was kicked in, dusty footprints betraying its assailants. What wasn't taken had been

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<sup>31</sup> The Depression, understand?

<sup>32</sup> medal

<sup>33</sup> Shame on you, Italians

broken or defiled. They'd had to sleep wherever they could find floor space. Consequently, this morning tempers are frayed; exacerbated by the very real anxiety about how they will survive the coming months. Giovanni's wife, Antonietta, leaves her daughters in no doubt of the extent of the catastrophe, and of her feelings about it.

Their precious hidden store of grain is gone; her daughters' *corredi*,<sup>34</sup> all worked by hand, her china, everything of value, has been thrown from the window onto a waiting truck. Or so her neighbour told her yesterday: 'They took everything, *signora*,' she'd said. Smugness thinly veiled her guilt; yes, the retreating army took everything except items she purloined herself. More or less all the homes left behind when their occupants fled suffered the same fate, either by retreating soldiers or, when the occasion arose, some of the villagers.

But for Antonietta's simple mind, it is exclusively *her* personal tragedy; another humiliation to bear in a long line of disappointments. Everything left has been rendered worthless, she tells anyone who calls; all the furniture. This, she considers an act of revenge on *her* alone. But a special sense of outrage is reserved for the desecration of the kneading trough where the family's bread was made. In every household, this trough is kept separate and clean - its wood scrubbed to whiteness and covered with a linen cloth when not in use; another of the many household rituals that falls to the girls. Each, in turn, of the five Caruso daughters have carried red weals on the backs of their legs, learning from Antonietta not so much how it should be cleaned but how it should not.

'They shit in it! They used it as a toilet! As a toilet! Why? Why? Why?' Antonietta wailed, beating her chest, 'We are ordinary people, this is what they think of us. What did we do to them? This is the worst thing, the worst that can happen,' she said when she'd found it.

It isn't much better this morning, '*O dio, o dio*, my head, my head. It hurts so much.' Antonietta's keening looks to continue throughout the long, long day ahead.

Her daughters exchange understanding glances; time for a strategic migraine. Well, just as well, they'll make better progress without Mama's wailing. Giovanni has long since detached himself, powerless to say or do anything right.

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<sup>34</sup> trousseaux



‘Poor father,’ Maria says, ‘he doesn’t know *how* to be a man like this; suffering so much.’

Lucia knows that Mama has never forgiven him for the Depression, as if it was all his fault. She thinks, ‘How could he forget that he is responsible, reminded every day of the family’s losses?’ She watched for years as her tall, kind father bent under the onslaught of their mother’s bitter words. In some respect, Antonietta’s migraines are a blessing for them all - a short respite from her angry recriminations and biting looks – though none of them will say so.

Maria pleads with her mother, ‘Mama, please, mama, lie down, please go and lie down. Go upstairs, we can do this. Go, please, lie down. You’ll make yourself ill. Please, leave it to us.’

Busy with her own anger, Lucia sweeps furiously around them, while little Natalina searches the floor for scraps of paper, staying well away from her mother’s reach. Every family has a scapegoat and Lina is theirs. A bright eight-year-old, she knows that if she catches her mother’s temper-filled eye she’ll get the full force of her fury, but she never knows why. Lucia motions to her to be careful. She also knows that Lina will get it for something, and that seeking school work when the family are on the brink of disaster is good enough reason for Antonietta.

‘Lie down? Don’t be stupid, Maria. Who’s going to sort this out? Where’s the food coming from? You want to eat, don’t you? Oh yes, you all want to eat. Look at you. Look at her!’ Lina jinks too late, catching a kick from her distraught mother. Antonietta meets her protest with an offer of more violence, ‘And you can stop crying, or I’ll give you something to cry about.’ On balance Lina decides it’s better to stay under the table.

Lucia takes up the pleading, ‘Come, mother, we’ll make some tea. You go and lie down. Let *us* do this.’ She knows there’ll be resistance before a final resentful capitulation. And they, or their father, will be left feeling responsible for the whole mess, for being the reason they had to hide, for the war, probably. Antonietta’s reasoning powers are a wonder to them all.

‘I don’t want that holy water. Leave me alone. I don’t want anything, just leave me alone. Ah, my head. I should never have left. My head. Why did I listen? What does *he* know? Look at the other families. They stayed, and their houses are okay.’ Antonietta scrunches her

apron into her eyes reaching out to steady herself against the steps; a clear indication that she is on her way upstairs.

Newly-wed, mild Concetta chips in, 'But mother, you know why they had to hide. You know, mother. Go and lie down. Let us do this.'

Lucia steps forward, taking her mother's arm, until, grudgingly, Antonietta allows herself to be guided upstairs.

'Tell him I am ill,' she gasps, as her short legs struggle with the steps, stopping now and then to throw down more invective, as her daughters wince: 'Tell him if he's any kind of man, he'll find some food for his family.'

As the girls return to repair their home, they exchange sympathetic looks that say they hope their gentle, funny father hasn't heard these caustic words.

Lina meanwhile, from her place under the table, is already lost in piecing her exercise book together; the neat handwriting, full rounded and flowing. School is where she'd like to be now; burning with the excitement that comes from producing work that bears the sweetest fruit: that special look in her teacher's eye. No one else has ever looked at Lina like that. She is too young and ignorant still to know how different she is from the other children, even from her own clever sisters. Lina devours learning with no other aim than to acquire knowledge. The work she is required to do at home seems somehow too prosaic to her – not demeaning – but so much on a commonplace level to seem almost unimportant and she complains bitterly at her tasks.

This, of course, to her mother who was raised to practical considerations on the land, is yet another indication that this one, of all her children, is capable of treachery. The girl has it in her to betray the values by which the family has survived for generations. This is unforgivable to her and Antonietta's reaction is vicious. She regards Lina in the same vein as she does her own husband: one who could easily turn away from the traditions that ensures a family's protection.

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Spotting Stefan, Sergeant Czarny shouts above the noise of the trucks rolling past at speed now. 'Hi! Motkaluk! Get over here now!'

Stefan quickly replaces his cap and returns to his duties.

Czarny barks, 'British lieutenant wants to see you.'

Stefan points to the convoy of trucks winding through the village, 'Sergeant, where are they going?'

'*Convento di Sant'Anna*, kilometre and a half down the road. Main cohort will camp next to the field hospital.'

'*Kurwa*.'<sup>35</sup>

'I am sorry you do not agree, Motkaluk, we had not thought to consult you on the matter.' Stefan notices, too late, that Sergeant Czarny is in no mood for messing.

'Sergeant, how may I assist you?'

'By not being too clever for a start! Our esteemed British liaison officer wants you there,' he jerks his thumb behind him, 'upstairs, first door on the right. Be quick!'

Like so many other *palazzi* Stefan has seen, the dull exterior's grim unpainted render belies its lavish interior. An enormous porcelain chandelier - too large for the swiftly retreating army to plunder - still hangs gloriously from the ceiling where the eye trick architecture of paint stands in for lack of local skill with plaster. Ubiquitous grey marble is evident from the main entrance to the wide staircase that leads to the upper rooms.

Stefan leaps the wide stairs, taking two at a time before coming to stand to attention in front of what is now Lt. Phillip Bromley's desk. Until three days ago it had been *Oberleutnant* Freidmann's, and very nice it was too. But before the *Oberleutnant*, it had belonged to Don Carlo, the one-legged wealthy local landowner, whose *palazzo* is now commandeered for a second time. Needless to say, Freidmann has left very little of value. His erstwhile occupation is discernible by crumbling heaps of blackened paper ash in the large open fireplace, its acrid smell still pervading the room. That, and a beautifully tailored great coat, overlooked by his batman, on a coat stand behind an embroidered screen in the corner.

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<sup>35</sup> Fuck

Lieutenant Bromley looks up at Stefan, 'I need some whisky. The bloody Germans have left nothing. They wouldn't know a decent whisky anyway. Can you get some?'

'Yes, sir, lieutenant. Leave to me.' Stefan clicks his heels and salutes.

'All right, all right. No need to make a bloody court appearance of it.'

'Yes, sir,' repeats Stefan, this time without the heel click but with an accompanying smile of derision that somehow discomfits Lieutenant Bromley even more.

'Are you being facetious?' Bromley demands. 'It's hard to tell with you Poles. All that bloody old-time chivalry you go in for. Doesn't cut the mustard with me.' Bromley regains his authority.

'Well, what are you bloody waiting for? Dismissed! Send in the Sergeant.'

'I have request.'

'What request? Good God, man, don't think you're getting leave any time soon. You know everything's cancelled until after the battle. You people.'

'I want to stay in here, in village. There is a house, number 63, here in this road.'

'What? For God's sake. Get me the whisky by tonight and you can stay where you bloody like. Now get lost and don't come back without it.'

'Yes, sir.' Stefan clicks his heels again, spins around, stamps then strides from the room, leaving the lieutenant muttering and shuffling papers. He meets Sergeant Czarny on the stairs.

'I need your motorbike. Urgent business for the lieutenant. I must have it now.'

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Stefan does not sleep under canvas or truck that night, nor does he sleep at number 63. He and Sergeant Czarny's motorcycle become more acquainted than he wishes when they end up in a ditch outside Campobasso; fortunately, the whisky fares better than man and bike.

By morning it falls to Maria to bathe Stefan's wounds, as Lucia looks on scornfully, and excited Giovanni organises space for an extra bed. Stefan is not the only soldier the Carusos

have been assigned but he is the one Giovanni most wants to talk to. By evening, with more than a little wine, the men become raucous. The women continue their fireside work.

No-one notices when Lina creeps back into the house to take up her place next to Lucia, who is finishing seams, overcasting with tiny neat stitches. It is the only sewing she will risk in this light. Lina picks up her knitting and, making eyes at Lucia, clumsily slips a note to her sister under cover of her work. Lucia promptly pricks Lina with her needle, while grabbing the note with her free hand.

‘Ow. Why did you do that?’ whines Lina.

‘Look to your work, you dropped a stitch. Be more careful.’

The men do not notice but Maria misses nothing.

Lucia huffs impatiently before stomping between the soldiers to get to the door. They politely move, while their minds imagine how she will lift her skirts and squat over a hole. Lucia’s face burns, knowing what they’re thinking. The girls usually visit the outside toilet together but tonight Maria has been told to stay away.

Outside, Lucia walks along the murky road in front of a row of houses towards the courtyard behind, where several families share a hole in the ground. Before turning into the dark archway leading to the courtyard, she stops to compose herself and looks up and down the road. A few steps in, a strong arm grabs her by the wrist and pulls her into the darkest part of the arch. She recognises a local boy, Marcello Santella. She hisses angrily, ‘What are you doing here? Someone will see.’

‘Never mind what I am doing, what’s your game? Tell me, eh? What’s going on in your house?’

‘The same as in all houses: dirty soldiers farting everywhere. And Father getting drunk. What’s it to you?’

‘You like that, don’t you? Dirty men?’

‘What do you mean? Marcello, they arrived today, they are dead men.’ Lucia pretends to a courage that is beginning to evaporate. It is easier to flirt when she is with her friends. She tosses her head, trying to get to the other side of her tormentor.

She’s not subtle enough and Marcello feels her movement through her wrist. She’s jerked back.

The smell of sausage comes at her as he speaks through clenched teeth, 'They will be dead if you let any of them touch you. Hear me? Remember that, I'll be watching, my friends will tell me.' His hand moves to grab a small breast.

'You? You will be watching? Who are you, you stupid? Leave me. Get off, you stink. What do you think I am? One of those Neapolitans?'

'I know what you are, and I know what you want.' He pulls her around until she is against the wall. She feels the slobber of his flabby lips trying to locate hers in the dark, sliming her face a moment before it's scraped by coarse stubble. 'Come on, be nice,' Marcello grunts. His blind hand continues to grab anything it can find. 'I won't tell anyone.'

Lucia struggles, panic-stricken, as Marcello twists her arm behind her and forces his other hand between her legs. It tangles in the folds of her dress. He swears, pushing her twisted arm higher. His hard and probing fingers become cruel. They repeatedly pound, missing their target. Lucia's adolescent attempts at bravado have long been replaced by terror but to cry out, she knows, would be to condemn her forever.

There comes the sound of approaching footsteps. Marcello, unable to process two things at once, stops his assault to listen. Lucia twists her body around, slips downwards from under his grip, turns and runs in one movement.

She is careful to slow to a walk once she is out on the street. The worn fabric of her dress has not fared well and the raw edge of several gathers fan out loose from her waistband. But Lucia's primary concern is to smooth down her ragged hair and control her breathing.

'Where are you going so fast?' comes a familiar voice.

Lucia's arm, already raised, is joined defensively by the other. She recognises her friend.

'Teresa is that you?' Lucia looks back over her shoulder to see Marcello watching from the shadows. 'You won't believe it, I got frightened, I couldn't see, and I fell over. Look at my dress.'

'You will go mad like Ermelinda.'

Teresa takes Lucia's arm. 'Come on, let's walk, no-one will look for us. And we're together if they say anything.'

Teresa leans in close, 'Did I tell what we did to *Ermelinda*?'

Lucia shakes her head.

Teresa twists a forefinger to her temple, 'You know she is a little...'

'But she is good,' protests Lucia.

'Yes, yes, she is good, but listen... Well, when you were away, we played a joke on her. Her soffit, it is joined to our soffit, no? We put a chain on a long piece of wood and did this on her soffit,' Teresa swings her arm, 'droom, droom.' 'We did it in the evening and at night when she was sleeping. We frightened her. She was *so* frightened.

'So, in the morning: "You know," she said, when she saw me, "Teresa, you know last night, I don't know, I heard a noise on the roof." We laughed, not in her face because we kept the joke going. We said to her, "you'll have to, have to say a mass to the Madonna because that's the spirits who have gone onto the roof and who are making all that noise.'"'

Lucia laughs too loudly.

'Wait, wait, there's more. The second day, again, we said, "Have you said a mass to the Madonna?" "Oh, yes, yes, yes," she says.

'Then we stopped it because she was terrified.'

The girls laugh and walk some more.

Lucia recognises it is her turn. 'You know what we did with *zia* Carmela on the farm?'

'What?'

Lucia struggles to breath and talk as more hysterical laughter forces itself out, 'We, we... you know what we did?'

'*What?* Tell me.'

'She knits socks, you know, she *is* simple, but she knits socks. So, one day we took this work and we hid it. You remember there are gaps under the house, where the cats go and so on, so we hid it in one of those places.

'So, she comes out saying, "Look, I can't find my work, I don't know, have you seen it? Under anything perhaps?" She was very confused.

'We said, "Have you looked, perhaps under here, perhaps the chickens have taken it and put it here. Let's have a look."

'We found it there because we put it there. She suspected nothing. She thought the chickens took her work there. She is a poor thing that one. How many jokes we play on that woman.

'Then, then.' Lucia can hardly speak for laughter now. 'She says, "Eeya, eeya, Lucietta, Lucietta, you were right, you were right, the chickens hid my work there". Dreadful.'

The girls hang onto each other, shrieking with their delight when a window opens and a disembodied voice shouts at them to shut up. They scream even more and run into the nearest side alley. By now they are at the bottom of the hill in the oldest part of the village where the best families live.

Teresa pulls Lucia against a wall, 'Shh, shh, look, this is where the Germans threw those Neapolitan girls over the balcony...'

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Lucia does not need to tolerate the soldiers' presence too long. Before many days have passed, *signora* Grassi's heavy bulk is blocking the doorway.

'*Permesso!*' she pants, in advance of her ungainly advance.

Antonietta, sharp to the approach of a possible paying client, selects the strongest of her crude rush-seated chairs, '*Avanti, signora, sieditti e mettiti comodo.*<sup>36</sup>' Flushing with pride at her use of formal Italian, she beckons her elder daughters.

Maria rushes to prepare coffee and a morsel of something sweet for their visitor.

'*Signora Antonietta,*' begins La Grassi, 'this war!' She pulls a handkerchief from her tight sleeve and mops the sweat from her brow before flapping it in front of her face.

Antonietta sits, short legs apart, her small hands placed on her lap. 'It is bad, *signora*. You know what we found when we returned...'

'*Ah, si,*' La Grassi waves away Antonietta's words with the handkerchief. 'The same with us.'

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<sup>36</sup> Sit down, and make yourself comfortable



Lucia and Maria exchange knowing looks. Maria whispers, 'The same, nothing, look at the size of her.'

Lucia ignores her sister.

'My husband says things will improve now *i tedeschi*<sup>37</sup> have gone. He says the wedding can go ahead, my youngest, Angelina. Now that Giuseppe is back.'

Antonietta lifts her little hands, palms upward in half a benediction, 'Wonderful.'

'Lucia,' La Grassi calls, 'My door is open to you and your sewing machine.'

Antonietta beams, 'All doors are open to Lucia and her sewing machine, she is so clever.'

The large woman ignores the short one, 'When can you come, Lucia?'

Lucia finally steps forward. 'As soon as you wish, *signora*.'

La Grassi pops the last biscuit into her mouth, mumbling, 'Good, that is settled, tomorrow morning for the measuring. No time to waste.' She heaves herself from the chair and wobbles out the door.

Maria immediately leans towards her sister, 'No time to waste. You better make the seams wide, sister, Angelina's been a busy girl since Giuseppe came back.'

Lucia pushes her sister away, smiling.

The following morning, she arrives at the Grassi's farmhouse with her sewing machine. There is no sign of the bride, but the kitchen is full of the *signora's* friends and family.

The large *Contadina* grasps Lucia's arm and pulls her into the house, while her son follows with the sewing machine.

'*Il salotto*<sup>38</sup>, Mario,' she calls over her shoulder. 'Come, come, *signorina*, you will be comfortable here.'

One by one, Angelina's sisters enter to be measured, and to wistfully flick through Lucia's pattern book, newly arrived from Rome. They whisper to Lucia, stabbing significantly at their preferred dresses, under their mother's watchful eye. 'Such style,' says one, 'Make me one like this,' says another.

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<sup>37</sup> the Germans

<sup>38</sup> living room

Lucia is equal to persuading jealous mothers to allow their daughters some freedom in their dress, but she knows too what a hard time those same mothers will get from husbands and priests alike if anything immodest appears on a Sunday morning. The arrival of nylon stockings recently resulted in a girl's leg running with blood after being spike-branded by the priest. He thought she'd come to mass bare-legged. The incident provoked an attack from the girl's father, a drunkard who seldom went to church.

But Lucia's particular skill is in persuading thick set *contadini* like *signora* Grassi away from glamour garments.

When it is the *signora's* turn, Lucia stretches to grasp the end of her tape measure behind her patron's broad back.

*Signora* Grassi stands immobile as Lucia's tape meets across her chest, 'I want to look like Anna Magnani in *Vulcano*,' she says, panting with the effort of standing.

'Excuse me, *signora*, but La Magnani plays a whore in that film,' responds Lucia, flicking the pages of her pattern book, 'May I suggest this style would be more respectable for a woman of your stature? See, we can put something here and change the sleeves like this?'

'Mah no,' La Grassi replies, unfazed, 'I saw her in *Cita Aperto*.' She sniffles emotionally, 'Magnani died trying to save her husband.' Pulling a handkerchief from her sleeve she wipes her nose and continues, 'Angelina told me she was *wonderful* in *Vulcano*.'

Lucia shakes her head, gravely, from side to side.

The fat woman stuffs her handkerchief back into her sleeve roughly and turns to see who may be listening, 'Wait 'til I see that girl,' she grunts, 'she'll get it for embarrassing me like this.'

*May 1944*

In the eight weeks since Stefan's unit moved westward to Cassino, its relentless bombardment has escalated. For days, almost two thousand guns have battered the abbey. Although used to the bombing since February, the sound Jelsi's villagers hear reverberating across 100

kilometres of rough mountainous terrain is loud, fierce, and desperate. With every exceptional explosion that bounces between the hills, people stop to look upwards, and cross themselves before going about their business. By night, disturbed from their sleep, they pray for the men so recently among them.

Morning sees citizens drag themselves wearily to their work wondering how long this mighty battle can last, as lorry after lorry trundles back through the village, carrying weary, dust-covered, and broken men to the *Convento di Sant'Anna*.

Lucia finds herself involuntarily scanning their faces for some she might recognise. Eventually she gives up, realising she can hardly tell where flesh, blood, bandage, and clothing starts or ends. Then, suddenly, in the early hours of May the 18<sup>th</sup>, the guns fall silent. And the wounded wind through the village in greater numbers, mangled men driven by exhausted drivers. Lucia no longer scans their faces. The talk in the village is of how many dead, how long before the next break through as the fighting pushes north.

*July 1944*

Weeks after the big guns fall silent, after a particularly taxing day, Lucia returns home weary, carrying the bag of onions her clients have paid her. She has been sewing a *correda*<sup>39</sup> in a bride's family home for days.

On entering the house, she sees Stefan and Giovanni playing cards over an upturned crate. Lucia raises an eyebrow at her mother and says, 'What's that long nose doing here again?'

Antonietta pushes her daughter into the corner of the large kitchen, taking the shopping bag from her.

In reply to Lucia's question, a heavily accented sombre voice from the fireside carries over to her, 'Don't worry, I didn't come to see you, I came to visit your family.' His newly-

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<sup>39</sup> trousseau

acquired Italian is perfect, but Stefan is not the man she remembers from his first visit. All cockiness knocked out of him, he looks bone weary.

Lucia frowns. She turns towards her mother, snatching back the shopping bag. As the two women squabble over it, the bag falls to the floor. Onions roll everywhere, casting off sheets of papery thinness.

‘Tchh, now look. They’ll bruise,’ Antonietta complains. ‘Go and call your sisters, the food is ready,’

Moving between the sitting men, Antonietta lifts down the iron pot simmering on the open fire. The Caruso girls slip into their seats at the table and wait as she fills bowls with steaming *minestra*<sup>40</sup>. Tiny beads of oil float on top. Dark leathery cabbage, bright carrots, and translucent bits of onions hang in the soup like fish in a half empty aquarium.

‘You didn’t stir it, Mama,’ complains Lina. ‘Maria has all the pasta from the bottom.’

Antonietta waves her ladle menacingly at Lina’s head. The child ducks automatically, almost knocking her bowl over.

Lucia reaches to pass Lina some of her bread, but Stefan beats her to it.

‘Here, take this.’

‘It’s so white,’ Lina exclaims. ‘How do they make it like that?’

As her young sister crams the hunk of white bread into her mouth, Lucia notes that hunger is quick to overtake Lina’s artistic appreciation.

‘Urgh, I can’t chew it, it’s so soft,’ the child mumbles. She makes a great show of chewing. ‘All stuck to my mouth like the communion wafer.’ Maria and Lucia hide their smiles behind their hands.

Antonietta reaches for the bread, ‘Give some to Carmelina.’ The little girl’s dreamy eyes look up from her bowl at the sound of her name. Tiny fingers receive the morsel, which flies into her mouth, and is gone.

Lucia watches for Stefan’s reaction, wondering what he might think of them, fighting over scraps of food. No dignity.

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<sup>40</sup> Thin soup using noodles, vegetables or scraps

'Eh, eh,' laughs Giovanni. 'Have more, come on, have more. He produces another loaf of bread from Stefan's bag.

'Papa!' Lucia exclaims.

But Giovanni waves a placating hand. 'A gift, a gift,' he says.

Stefan slurps his thin soup, smiling.

As soon as the meal is cleared, Giovanni beckons Stefan outside. The two men smoke, talk and walk down the hill to *Piazza Umberto*, stopping for a drink before skirting the fountain to stroll more sedately back up the hill. When they reach no. 63 *Via Valiante*, neither of them notices that the women have washed the dishes, swept the kitchen, and laid the fire for the following day. They throw their shoes into the corner and bid each other goodnight.

Upstairs, Giovanni slides quietly in beside his wife, but his efforts not to wake her are pointless. Antonietta's bright beady eyes have been open these past two hours.

He startles as her disembodied voice whispers in the dark, 'Well, what's he up to?'

Giovanni groans, 'Don't start, please Antonietta, let me sleep.'

'What am I starting? A man comes into our home, and I feed him. I have a right to know what he wants.'

Giovanni burrows his feet to the end of the bed, fighting the tightly tucked sheets. 'He wants to stay alive. He wants to eat at a fireside. What else does a man want?'

'Giovanni, we have five daughters, four unmarried. What's he up to?'

'Nothing,' comes the reply in the dark, 'nothing. He's a good man. He would do things for me.'

Antonietta shifts her weight, and blindly straightens the sheet, 'What does that mean? Do things for you? What do you want done?'

'Nothing, it's men's talk. He offered to do a service for me, that's all. Go to sleep.'

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The war moves northward, and Stefan's fighting unit goes with it.

Even though its passing has meant life is quieter in Jelsi, Giovanni and his friends still gather around the radio in Bar Roxy, anxious for any news about *Linea Gotica*.<sup>41</sup> Today, Giovanni holds forth to Maria's fiancé, Salvatore, about his experiences in Trieste.

He leans towards the young man, 'Mountains, my God, it was the worst.'

The ever-listening barman nods sagely.

'They'll never break through *i Appennini*,<sup>42</sup>' growls Marcello Santella from his bar stool. The knuckles of his coarse hand show white as he grips his tumbler of wine. 'That's what American vanity has cost them.' He hawks a gobbet of phlegm into a paper napkin. 'Rome is still ours.'

Giovanni and Salvatore glance over their shoulders. Salvatore whispers to his future father-in-law, 'He's reckoning without the partisans.'

Giovanni raise his hand to silence Salvatore, squinting across at Santella, who is staring down at his drink.

'Did that *polacco* come back? Eh? Giovanni? Did he?' laughs Santella.

'He comes. When he can, when he gets leave. A few weeks, a few months.'

Salvatore chuckles, happy to lighten the mood, 'Always to see *you*, eh?'

Giovanni sighs, 'To see me, to see the family. He brings something. Every time. He brought a doll,' Giovanni smiles at Salvatore, 'Did you see it? For Carmela.'<sup>43</sup> He said he would, and he did.'

'Where is he now?' growls Santella again from the depths of his glass.

Giovanni tosses off the last of his wine, and banging his glass down on the table, he mutters, '*Va fangool*.'<sup>44</sup>

Santella looks up, 'I can hear you, you know. Everything you say.'

Giovanni smiles, and strokes his forefinger along the side of his nose. 'Go and tell your *Duce*, then. A Polish soldier brought my child a doll. From Ancona. And the next one will be from Rimini! Tell him that, if you can find him.'

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<sup>41</sup> The Gothic Line

<sup>42</sup> The Apennine Mountains

<sup>43</sup> Diminutive of Carmelina

<sup>44</sup> Neapolitan dialect for *vaffanculo*: fuck off (contraction of *va' a fare in culo*: go do it in the ass)

Santella angrily slides his glass down the bar, smashing it to the floor, and storms out to the sounds of Salvatore's cackling.

The young man holds up two fingers, but the barman comes over with a bottle and three clean glasses. He sits and, after pouring wine, raises his glass, 'To the end of this madness.'

'The end,' the other men respond.

The barman swipes his hand across his mouth. 'You heard from the *polacco* lately?'

Giovanni looks around the empty bar before replying, 'He writes to Lucia.'

The barman grins, 'To Lucia, eh? She's...'

Giovanni looks sternly at the man, 'She's what?'

'She's a lovely girl, that's all,' he says, his hands raised, palms forward.

Giovanni relaxes, 'Yes, she's a lovely girl, and she's pissed off by the letters.'

'Good sign,' observes Salvatore, quietly.

All three men laugh.

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Lucia shoulders the weight of the family's laundry as she and Maria saunter down the hill. The sun is already high above her head, and they are late, but she doesn't show a care. As they approach the laundry house, loud chattering echoes from its stone ceiling; she recognises the sound of gossip and slows her sister down even more.

She's been in enough houses to know that the good people of Jelsi are imaginative in their judgement of others. Underneath all is land against skill - *contadini contro artigiani*<sup>45</sup> - and the only winner is the Church. Everyone's position is judged on money, and on how things look. From houses to occupations, and all in between, no-one is spared, including their animals. Even branches within the large Caruso family are criticised and suspected for their motives, all of which conspires to create division and hierarchy.

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<sup>45</sup> Peasants against artisans

Today, the girls know they will be judged on their laundry. The lower village women vie with each for displays of strength and technique; any stain left on their laundry tantamount to a stain on their reputation, to be discussed, at length, in every kitchen over supper. A less than convincing wringing-out shows laxity; all will be noted.

Lucia is aware that any carelessness by the Caruso sisters will be judged as moral slackness; a lack of discipline that could lead to who knows what incontinent behaviour. In the minds of the village women, the spectre of shame lurks omnipresent above all the village girls, just waiting for a slip. But with five sisters in one family, and since the forced sale of their house, all the Caruso girls know they are subject to special scrutiny. Whereas once they were admired and complimented, now every move exposes them to criticism. They carry the reputation of their family, and the burden is heavy on their thin shoulders. Lucia suspects it's only a matter of time before they come under fire.

Sharp-eyed Maria notices that their late arrival is being noted, 'Look, Lucia, Rosaria is already at it.'

'They have nothing better to do. Leave it, Maria. Concetta is over there, come on.' Maria is first in greeting their newly-married and pregnant sister, 'Concetta, *cara*, how are you? Are you ok? You look tired.'

'Shh, stop it. Are you stupid?' Lucia, as ever, is watchful, waiting for the laughter. Jokes about tired newly-weds are commonplace. The intimacy of a newly-wed girl parading her soiled *biancheria*,<sup>46</sup> she knew, provided fodder for the crudest humour. She once joined in with these jokes to make a *sposina*<sup>47</sup> blush but not today. For the most part, they were kindly-meant; an introduction to the sisterhood, but life has tilted, and Lucia is defensive.

She suffers Maria's huff and rolled eyes. Her younger sister, impulsive as usual, is intent on her mission. She moves towards Concetta and before Lucia can stop this public display, Maria's hand reaches Concetta's cheek, half hidden by thick dark curls. Lucia doesn't need to hear the gasp to know what Maria has seen before her sister turns her shoulder away. Concetta defensively castigates Maria, 'What are you doing?'

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<sup>46</sup> Bed linen

<sup>47</sup> Newly-wed woman



'Leave her,' Lucia intercedes. 'Let's get on, the others are watching. Concetta, you will come home with us after, yes? Mama has some beans for you.'

'I will come.'

'But, but, did you see....' Maria persists.

Lucia silences her with a thunderous look.

The three of them attend to their washing without further discussion.

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'Madonna, what has he done to you? Giova, Giovanni, come here, see this now. Lucietta, call your father.'

'Mama, leave her. Can't you see? She doesn't want this,' says Lucia.

'I don't care what she wants. She's my daughter, look at her. *O Dio*, I never liked him.' Antonietta fusses around her married daughter. Giovanni enters the house carrying an envelope. He passes it to Lucia before embracing Concetta.

Maria and Lucia settle to their work at the other end of the table.

'Is it a letter from Stefano?' whispers Maria. She waits, but Lucia says nothing. 'I think he is serious about you, Lucietta. He comes so far to see you,' Maria persists.

'He has nowhere else to go.' Lucia stuffs the letter back into its envelope and slips it deep into her apron pocket.

'Yes, but he always returns to you. You'd think between here and Ancona... You know, if he wasn't serious, would he come?' her sister continues.

'He's a soldier; they go away. Today they see, tomorrow they go somewhere else,' Lucia says with a shrug.

Maria's fingers flick rapidly over her crochet. 'Maybe not this one. He even offered to kill Paolo,' she counters, glancing to see if Concetta has heard.

'Tch,' Lucia responds. She picks up an old woollen coat, turning it inside out, and resumes unpicking its seams. Its lining, removed, is folded into a neatly pressed pile, each piece pinned with a scrap of paper.

She plops the heavy coat onto her lap and looks at her older sister leaving the house with her parents. 'I wish someone would kill him.' Her shoulders sag.

'Stefano said he would. I heard him, talking to Papa,' Maria says.

'You're crazy,' Lucia waves a weary hand. 'Get on with your work, I have another job for you here. Deliver this dress, it's ready. You can walk down with Concetta.'

'As you wish. But I heard it myself. He said to Papa, "If you want, I will shoot him."' Maria pulls lengths of crimplly yarn from a tightly wound ball of wool. Rewinding it over and under her nimble fingers, she continues to crochet, lifting, and dropping the work with each stitch.

Lucia returns to her unpicking. Without looking up, she asks, 'What did he say, exactly?'

Although the sisters are now alone, Maria looks around furtively. 'It was that time, remember when Conni came to fetch the bread. She was a mess, and Mother was crying.'

'I remember Father told her not to go back there.'

'Yes, he did. He said that.' Maria sighs. 'And Conni went back.'

'She always goes back. You want to know why?'

Maria shrugs.

'Because of us,' Lucia continues unbidden, 'because we are unmarried. She says if she leaves her husband, it will spoil our chances. Because people will say we are unreliable.'

Maria sighs again. 'Salvatore wouldn't think that.'

'Salvatore is a good man, Maria. His family is good – well, except Genaro – but they're good.'

The young women work on until Lucia breaks the silence, 'What else did he say? Stefan?'

'He looked frightened, Lucia, very frightened. I think he meant it. He would do it.'

'Tell me everything. What did he say?' Lucia picks harder at the stitches.

'Well, they argued for some time. Stefan was saying it should be him because it's wartime, and soldiers are moving around all the time. That way, no-one would suspect the family.'

'See, I told you he wasn't serious.' Lucia snips the stitches with the points of her scissors before tearing the seam apart.

'He'd kill for your family. That's not serious?'

'He'd kill, leave, and never come back. Don't you see? It's a different kind of serious.' Snip, snip, tear, snip, snip, tear. 'Take that dress.'

1945

'*I soldati, i soldati!*' calls a grubby child playing in the dirt. His friends react quickly, chasing him towards two soldiers who've just jumped down from a bus, and are striking out towards the village. The children trip and push to get ahead so they can turn to walk backwards in front of them with outstretched hands.

Stefan grins, as he adjusts the heavy weight on his shoulder, 'Nothing today, boys. Go on, tell them I'm here.' He indicates a house down the hill.

The children scatter and race down *via Valiante* until, panting, they all rap and shout at Giovanni's door. The door opens, a head peers out and is pulled back in. A moment later, Giovanni steps out, pulling braces over his shoulders, and tucking in his shirt tail.

Stefan returns his waved greeting. As he reaches the door, Giovanni takes his burden, shouting behind him, 'Mama, Mama, Stefan is here.'

Stefan enters, and respectfully kisses Antonietta, who manages to huff and smirk at the same time. Her eye is on the large bag, enticingly bulging on the table. Watchful, as ever, Stefan accepts a cup of coffee, hastily re-heated, and reaches for the bag. By the time the girls return home, his gifts are laid out; all except for the food, which Antonietta has vanished into the depths of her domain, and a large doll from Rimini, which is being undressed by Carmelina in the corner.

From his seat at the head of the table, Stefan dispenses gifts to the daughters of the house, who each in turn step forward, or are pushed to receive his largesse. Any fool can see that Lucia has the lion's share.

'Do you like them?' he asks her, watching her slip a soft black leather glove carefully over her hand.

'Yes, they are fine,' she replies.

He watches her pull the cuff down before pressing the gap between each of her fingers with a thumb. The sheen of the leather glows in the lamplight.

'They are very soft,' she says.

'They're nicer than the ones Don D'Amico gave you,' pipes up Lina. '*They* got dirty straight away. Suede, it's not practical.'

'Don D'Amico?' queries Stefan.

Lucia colours, glaring at her sister, whom Maria is pulling away from the table.

'No-one, no-one,' says Giovanni, refilling Stefan's glass. 'Drink, drink.'

'No-one?' interjects Antonietta. 'He is the school teacher. Very good family, rich. Also, Don Carlo, rich.'

'Also Don Carlo? How many Dons do you have?'

'I don't have any,' Lucia answers. 'And you should learn to keep your mouth shut,' she adds, turning to Lina.

Lina, busily munching chocolate, smiles back until she receives a cuff to the back of her head from Antonietta, who barks, 'Get some wood.'

'Wah, why is it always me? Maria never gets the wood.'

Antonietta raises her hand, 'You want another one? Go on.' The old woman huffs about, inspecting the food that Stefan has brought.

'I never asked for presents,' Lucia says, throwing down the black gloves.

'But you didn't refuse them either, did you, eh?' comes Stefan's quick reply.

Lina returns with the wood, 'Oh no, he didn't give them to her, he left them in the wall, where he puts the let...' She looks around the room, bewildered as Maria's expressive eyes look to the ceiling.

'Letters?' provides Stefan

‘Yes, exactly,’ says Lina, pleased that someone is listening without judgment. ‘He writes to her every day when he’s here. It’s so funny.’

‘I never asked him to,’ Lucia shouts, ‘And I never asked you to repeat my business to strangers.’

Lina opens her mouth to wail a protest, but Giovanni quickly intercedes, ‘That’s enough, both of you,’ he shouts over the girls. ‘Come on, now, sit, eat. Mama, bring the food.’

Lucia sits at the opposite end of the table from Stefan. She eats without looking up. Antonietta scowls at her, Lina, and Giovanni in turn, unsure quite who she is most angry with. Maria tries to fill the silence with offers of more bread, a little cheese, which everyone grudgingly takes. Injured pride is one thing, but hunger is another.

Meanwhile, Giovanni, apparently unaffected by the tension, interrogates Stefan about the fighting. ‘Where are you now? How is it?’

‘Bad and getting worse. We’re pushing north to Pesaro, green line, mountains. Tough, but at least your people are with us.’

‘My people?’ Giovanni asks, breaking his bread into the soup.

‘Partisans, co-belligerents.<sup>48</sup> They’re not bad,’ grunts Stefan. ‘Most of them,’ he adds, looking at Lucia.

Lina’s head pops up from her bowl. ‘Don D’Amico is with them, paratrooper. You might know him.’

‘Shut up!’ comes three voices.

Lina’s head drops back. ‘No-one ever listens to me,’ she mutters into her soup.

‘Shut up, now, or I’ll shut you up.’ Antonietta simultaneously kicks her daughter under the table whilst rapping her knuckles with a spoon.

‘Ow,’ snivels Lina.

‘For the love of God, can’t you see this man is hungry. He’s come a long way to see us, let him eat in peace,’ says Giovanni.

Later, two red spots glow in the dark, as the men sit outside the door, smoking. Indoors, the women clank, clash, and sweep.

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<sup>48</sup> Italian Liberation Corps – Don D’Amico had been with the *Nembo* Division, fighting in Yugoslavia. The new *Nembo* division was formed around the old Royal Army’s parachute division of the same name.

'Women, eh?' Giovanni starts.

'Women, yes.' Stefan flicks ash from his cigarette. 'Is it serious? This Don D'Amico business? Because you should tell me now.'

'Maybe, maybe not. Antonietta wants it but Lucia's not interested. Not bread for her teeth, she says. It's a village, you know how it is. He comes from a family down there.' Giovanni jerks his thumb beyond the war memorial.

'I know. I come from a village too. Is he rich, this Don D'Amico?'

'He is educated, they have money, respect. That's her problem.'

'Good, good,' says Stefan.

Giovanni takes confidence in the dark, 'You never talk about it. What life did you have before all this?'

Stefan draws deeply on his cigarette and looks down at his feet. A rat scuttles along the side of the house. He flicks his cigarette at it.

'I had land, plenty land,' he starts.

'Land, eh? How much?'

'Fields, several hectares: three, maybe five. Big. Until the Russians came. I had a house, my own house. I lived with my Aunty. She was rich, she paid for my education – *gimnazjium* – my army training: uniform, equipment, everything. I had everything.'

'Why?'

'Why what?' Stefan frowns.

'Why did your Aunty pay?'

'Oh. Because she had no children.' Stefan gets up and stretches. Hands on hips, he walks up and down in front of Giovanni. 'She adopted me when I was young, very young; small child, anyway.' He coughs loudly.

'Your parents?' Giovanni prompts, 'Dead?'

'No! No, not dead.' Stefan clears his throat again. 'Canada. Emigrated, they have land there. They, they couldn't take me, I was ill. Children's illness, rash all over.'

'So, your Aunty took you in?'

'Yes, that's why I have her name. She wouldn't do it unless she could adopt me officially.'

'You don't carry your father's name?' Giovanni turns to look at Stefan in the moonlight. 'He's dead anyway, he died over there, and my mother.' Stefan exhales through loose lips.

'You have no-one then, who is yours?'

'I have a half-sister, Cesia.'

'In Poland?' Giovanni's eyebrows raise. He scratches his head. 'Your parents died in Canada, and you have a half-sister in Poland. Did your Aunty take her in also?'

'No, not in Poland. Cesia is in Canada. My half-sister by my father's second wife. He died in a mining accident.' Stefan sits down again, folding his arms across his chest. The middle finger of his right hand scratches softly at the fabric of his tunic.

Giovanni places his hand on his knees. 'He was a miner?'

'Yes, he was doing something in a mine.' Stefan gets up and stretches again. He turns to Giovanni, blocking out the light. 'Look, I like your daughter,' he says, 'but I can't promise anything.'

---

Giovanni's sleep that night is disturbed by Antonietta's sharp little elbow in his ribs.

'What are you doing, woman? It's late.'

'I want to know what he said,' she whispers, 'You were out there a long time.'

'Nothing. Men's talk.'

'Men don't have that much to talk about. What did you find out?'

'Nothing, go to sleep.' Giovanni turns onto his side.

Antonietta lies in the dark, waiting for her husband's breathing to slow and become deep.

'Ow, what do you want from me? Can't I have any peace?' Giovanni grumbles, pushing at his wife's arm.

'Not until you tell me what he said.'

Giovanni rolls back. 'All right. He's rich. Happy?'

'That's it? Anything else? Is he married?'

'He lived with his Aunty is all he said. He has a house and land.'

'How much land?' Antonietta demands.'

'How do I know?! A lot, okay?'

'Does he have brothers?'

Giovanni groans. 'Brothers, now? No, he doesn't have brothers, he has a half-sister or something. It's complicated.'

'Half-sister. Mother or father's side?'

'Father's'

'Not so good,' Antonietta sighs.

'She's in Canada.'

Antonietta props her tubby little frame up on one elbow. 'Canada? Why Canada?'

'Because they're rich!'

Antonietta huffs, 'That's the story he's telling today. Another village, another girl, another story.'

Giovanni shoves his wife's elbow out from under her. 'Enough! Go to sleep.'

The next morning, Giovanni and Stefan go out early to the bar where Adam has spent most of the night. They find him slumped over a table, asleep, with his hand still wrapped around a glass. Between them, they haul the semi-conscious man upstairs to his room above Bar Roxy and return home for breakfast.

Stefan whistles as he washes in the corner of the kitchen. Antonietta reaches up to pat his cheek and passes him a linen cloth to dry himself. The family settle to a meagre breakfast of bread and milk.

Lucia is absent. She has been called to measure a dead virgin. She returns to the house with a packet under her arm.

'I need the table,' she announces. The family quickly disperse, except for Stefan who moves his chair back into the corner and cradles his coffee cup, long legs outstretched.

Lucia opens the package and shakes out two metres of white lace. 'Melinda,' she says.

Antonietta crosses herself. 'Poor girl,' she says, 'she was never strong.'



Lucia folds and refolds the fabric this way and that. She unfurls her rolled tape measure, consults her notebook, then folds the tape in half, then in half again, before placing it onto the fabric. She takes a sliver of dried, brown soap.

Stefan watches, mesmerised, as Lucia marks crosses here and there, before drawing lines and curves between them. Her movements are swift and controlled. In no time, it seems, she has drawn her pattern directly onto the fabric. She produces large, pewter-coloured scissors and deftly cuts along her lines. Each cut reverberates on the wooden table as it crunches through the heavy lace.

Stefan notes her lips, compressed with concentration. He hardly dares to breathe, lest she notices him in the dark corner.

Pushing away a stray curl, Lucia lifts her cut pieces from the snowy layer until only the thinnest strips of white fabric remain. Half a metre, at least, of unused lace lies at the end of the table.

Stefan steps forward, 'What will you do with that?'

Lucia jumps, knocking the heavy scissors to the floor. She bends to pick them up a second before Stefan moves to reach them. Straightening up, she says, 'I will wait until everyone has forgotten, then I'll make Carmelina a blouse.'

Stefan watches, as Lucia sews all day and late into the night, hardly leaving the house. He watches the curve of her neck, the shine on her plaits. He watches the hairs on her tanned legs, which work the treadle in perfect synchronicity with her arms, which push the heavy fabric under the needle, guided by her confident fingers. He watches those same legs cross at the ankle when she sits at the table, finishing every seam inside the dress. He watches the way she licks the end of her thread and spins her needle to avoid tangles. He watches her pick at a knot with the point of the needle, and how she arches to force the pain out of her back with a stretch.

By two a.m., the dress is finished; pressed, folded and packed neatly in the same brown paper the fabric arrived in, which itself has been pressed flat.

Stefan puts his thumb to the string knot as Lucia finishes off the packaging.

'What will you do now?' he asks.

'I will dress the body,' comes the simple reply.

'At this time?'

'At this time. They bury her tomorrow morning. Her mother needs to see her properly dressed.'

'I will come with you.' Stefan rises, shrugging on his jacket.

'No,' Lucia protests.

'Come on, you're not going out there alone.' He throws her coat at her, tenderly lifts the parcel, and holds the door open. 'Come on, then,' he smiles.

They walk down the silent road towards the only house with a light showing. Lucia falls in step with Stefan, breathing in the fresh night air. The sound of keening increases as they approach the house.

Stefan knocks firmly on the door, and they wait apprehensively as footsteps approach.

A bleary-eyed man peers at them. He has been crying and his face is swollen and red. He wipes his nose with the back of his hand.

'Lucia?' he whispers, 'Is that you?'

'I brought the dress, *signor* Manzoni. I've come to dress your daughter.' Lucia takes the package from Stefan and presents it to the grief-stricken man.

'You've come to dress my daughter? My Melinda? My Melinda. To dress her?'

Lucia places a hand gently on his arm. 'Call your wife, Signor Manzoni. Please.'

'My wife?' He turns to the room behind him. 'Teresa, Lucia is here. She's come to dress Melinda.' He collapses, swaying against the door frame.

A capable-looking woman dressed in black comes forward. She takes his elbow, her other arm supporting his back. '*Scusa, signorina*, sorry, come in please. This is good of you, so late. You are a saint.'

Lucia steps into the house behind the grieving parents. She turns to Stefan. *Signora* Manzoni turns also and sees him for the first time. '*Avanti*,' she beckons.

Stefan responds quietly, 'No, no, *signora*, I wait here.'

Lucia throws a grateful glance at him as she steps towards her duty. The door closes behind her.

Stefan strolls towards the fountain and sits on its stone rim. Bar Roxy is in darkness. He imagines Adam slumbering in the arms of his Italian lover. He lights a cigarette and waits.

An hour later, light spills across the road from the sad house, and a small shadow falls over it. He hears extended farewells and the sound of fresh tears, then he sees Lucia cast about, alone on the dark street.

'I'm here,' he calls softly.

She walks quickly towards him.

'All done?' he asks.

She nods. He can see her shivering in the early dawn. 'How old was she?'

'Fifteen. She never lived. Never...'

Lucia stops. 'Come here.' He pulls her into an embrace, and they hold each other, half-standing, half-sitting against the fountain's damp edge.

Stefan smooths her head, pats her back and rubs her shoulders to warm her. His hand moves around her waist, and he draws her into him. With a deft movement, his other hand holds the back of her neck. He turns her head up until she is looking at him. Then he bends and kisses her cold lips.

Lucia draws back, scanning the houses that surround the dark square. Stefan tugs her back. 'Not here,' she whispers.

Stefan looks around, his hand firmly holding Lucia's wrist. He pulls her away from the fountain towards an alley. Its low, elliptical arch leads to the very oldest part of the village. A metre in, and they are in total darkness. Twenty metres further on is the church where Melinda's coffin will be carried in a few hours.

The following morning, Lucia's family descend from their sleeping level to find Stefan slumbering by the dead embers of yesterday's fire.

Maria clears the ash as quietly as possible, relaying kindling for the new day.

By the time Lucia descends, it is midday and all but her mother are out working. There is no sign of Stefan or his belongings.

Poland: Germakówka

1937

Lying comfortably in its fertile soil, the landscape seems to cradle Germakówka and nourish its dwellers, as if compensating for the horror it has witnessed. Over many years, well-husbanded strips of land have been farmed in the medieval way, resulting in fields that might look, from the air, like freshly cast-off knitting.

Friable is a word that might have been invented for Germakówka's soil, its symmetrical rows, rich and dark, pushing out the greenest green shoots. Soft weather moistens the earth which takes what it needs before sending its excess up to greet the dawn, wreathing fields, houses and roads with the ethereal mists of legends. Its history is so tragic that a stranger might ask, 'Without this annual renewal, would its people carry on?' They do because they know that as long as the soil holds and nourishes them like a mother, they will survive.

A fool would find it hard to starve on land like this. A smart man would build a life, thrive, rear sons on its woodland, fields, and rain. Striving to be more than it is, Germakówka sits squat in a shallow valley hard up against the Maravinitz forest. Its buildings, for the main part, are of the land: timber, mud-mixed straw and thatch. They huddle together as if to resist the bitter winds blowing from the eastern steppes of Siberia in Winter, envying the brick-build of their wealthy Jewish neighbours. But they all share its bounty in the long, hot summers.

Stefan's house - neither too large nor too small - sits on Stefan's land. At a mere twenty years old, he is the only man in residence and this entitles his ownership and has done for the last three years. He stands on his boundary, forehead furrowed, in deep discussion with his neighbour, Pawel.

'Leave it to me,' grunts Pawel, slapping his heavy paw onto Stefan's narrow shoulder. A thinly concealed smile reveals pink gums in his grubby face.

The men, if Stefan can be called a man, have been cutting timber. Its fragrant sawdust cushions their boots as, grunting, they stack the last of the logs. Pawel brushes his face to wipe away intrusive flies attracted to his sweat. Straightening, he notes Stefan's agitation, 'Was I ever so young and in such a hurry?' he thinks.

He calls the young man to attention, 'Look, your cow is eating my grass. Go and move her. I'm going home.'

Watching Stefan lope across the grass, Pawel sees his godson as more boy than man. The one who wouldn't cry when his father died, the one he's looked out for these last three years. 'If he'd only known what was to come, he'd have cried a bucket,' thinks Pawel as he turns towards his house.

On entering the kitchen, he greets his wife and daughters with news.

'Stefanowicz wants a wife. He needs help in the house.'

Basia doesn't look up from her cooking, 'Peh, who would take him on with that mother of his wailing and wandering all over the place?' Steam rises from bubbling pots. She turns to her husband, hands on lardy hips.

'You know, we had to bring her back home again yesterday, all black and blue where the people beat her. It's an offence.'

Slopping stew into tin plates, she continues her tirade, 'A wife of Stefan wouldn't be able to keep track of her, never mind help in the house.'

Drying his hands, Pawel replies, 'She's not so bad.'

'And if there's a child?' The lid crashes back onto the pot. 'What woman would do that to herself? She'd have to be a fool. Sit, eat.'

Basia flumps down on the settle and breaks bread from the large, hard loaf, passing pieces to her family. 'Still, he's good-looking,' Basia glances at her daughters between mouthfuls, hunched over her food, 'and young girls are stupid.'

'He has a house and land, and he knows how to work.' Pawel waves his spoon. 'Anyway, I know someone who'll fix it. Józef Zadrożny.' He blows on the hot stew. 'He has three girls, unmarried – he'll leap at the chance to unload one of them. They are all strong. And one is intelligent.'

Pawel's daughters start to laugh. 'Oh, *Tata*<sup>49</sup>, no! You cannot do that to *wujek*<sup>50</sup> Stefan. They are awful. Did you see Antonina last Sunday? She can't even walk like a woman.'

---

<sup>49</sup> Dad

<sup>50</sup> Uncle

Katya mimics the poor woman's wide-legged gait around the kitchen, until even Pawel's grim face starts to crack.

'Sit down. What do you know of such things? I will speak to Zadrožny, man to man. Stefan is a fine catch. And Karolina can't live for ever.' Pawel picks a piece of gristle from between his teeth. 'He will see the advantage. Anyway, two daughters are more enough to look after him; he can spare one.'

'But which one, husband?' his wife asks, looking up at last. 'Surely not Antonina. I saw her picking plums in Mendel's orchard. I swear she ate more than she packed ... wouldn't like to be sharing a bed with her tonight.'

The girls explode. '*Tata*, no. We want someone nice next door. Think of us. Who will call for us to go walking when they see Antonina? They won't stop running 'til they reach Russia.'

'Go walking? Katya, Stefania, you are children. Basia, do you hear this? How are you raising your daughters? I'll give you walking. If you don't have enough to do in the house, I can give you work in the fields. Let them run to Russia, it will be a short journey.'

'*Tata!*' in unison.

'Leave them alone, Pawel, you know they're good girls.'

'Listen, when you speak to Zadrožny, ask for Halina. Don't let him palm you off with one of the older ones. And money. Make sure you... Well, make him pay, they say he's rich that one. They say he sends his girls outside the house to work when he doesn't need to. Those are the ones who have money, they know how to keep it.'

'Not him, he drinks,' mutters Katya.

'There's another reason...' Basia announces.

'Ayee, don't bother me, woman, I know what I'm doing. I'll see to it.'

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The following day, Stefan's excited thoughts are little soothed by a night's sleep. He stands at the open door looking across his field and sees the trees he will plant with Halina, measuring the rows in his mind. They will laugh while they work. He will no longer prepare breakfast for his mother, or rush back from the fields to calm her down. Halina will do everything for Karolina. She will be safe.

There will be a tree by the house for shade in the summer – just there – and to take snow away from the roof in winter. The kitchen will be full of good smells, its wooden shelves weighted down with kegs of pickles and loops of *kielbasa*.<sup>51</sup> Yes, they'll kill a pig every year. And his clothes will be smart, sharp, as he likes them. 'This is how it will be, I know it will. *Tata* Pawel will fix it for me. And if he doesn't, I'll speak to the old man myself,' he thinks. He muses on a small kitchen garden, with hollyhocks, fenced round to keep out the chickens.

'Stefan, Stefan,' Karolina calls behind him. 'I need to go, I have to find him. You know where he is. Let me go to him, let me go.'

Stefan lingers a moment too long, holding onto his plans, before turning into the house.

He sees that Karolina has finished her bread and is reaching out over the wooden board he built to keep her in her bed. He cannot contain her hysteria, but he tries to keep her safe.

'Silence, *Matka*.<sup>52</sup> He is not here. He is gone. Come on,' he says, lifting the board out of its slots, 'walk a little. Come to the well with me. Come on, we have things to do, don't we? I have news for you too.'

Karolina is mollified by the morning ritual, allowing Stefan to dress her. He tuts as his calloused hands snag in her woollen shawl. 'Come now, come,' he leads her out to the front of the house. Adjusting a wooden yoke across his shoulders, he easily adds buckets before holding her arm firmly and walking slowly to the well. Karolina mutters all the while but is calmer outdoors. When they reach the well he allows Karolina to wander, preferring her away from the unprotected drop. When both buckets are filled, he calls to her gently.

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<sup>51</sup> Homemade farmhouse u-shaped sausage, usually made from pork, veal, marjoram and garlic.

<sup>52</sup> Polish: Mother

'Sit, *Matka*, sit,' he instructs. 'Listen, can you hear the birds? Spring is here. Feel how warm the sun is.'

Stefan sits beside his mother as she settles on a log. He turns to Karolina, allowing some of her sadness to enter his heart. He absorbs her touch as her fingers trace across his lips and up to his eyes, which close slowly beneath her fingers. He feels their touch on his lids, eyebrows, and forehead. Then, he lowers his head towards his mother and, eyes still shut, feels her palm rest upon his head and receives her blessing. Finally, she gently cups his head between her hands and pulls it towards her. Her lips linger on his forehead with a kiss that will carry him through another day's lonely labour.

'Thank you, *Matka*. May God bless you in return,' he takes her hands between his own. 'Come, *Mamusia*, come. We'll go back to the house now. Come, maybe I'll make some tea. You'll like that, won't you? He waits patiently as Karolina shuffles up from her seat, and they make their way back the way they came.

For Stefan, this is the best part of the day, when his mother is calm and biddable.

Now and then, struggling with the heavy yoke, he lowers his face towards the small hands that reach up to him, enjoying her soft caresses. For a short time, he sees his mother as she used to be; kind and caring. Once again, he is the object of her devotion. Together, mother and son return to their house.

As they approach, Stefan's mind begins the transition from calmness to excited anticipation. He settles the now-quiet Karolina on a wooden bench by the door, talking softly all the while.

'*Matka*, you should know. I'm getting married.'

Before she has time to react, he has poured water into a shallow wooden trough and is wetting a rag which he hands to Karolina.

He helps her dab her face, moving the cloth carefully around her eyes, then her mouth.

'Married?' Karolina pushes away the cloth. 'You're just a boy. Oh no, no, Stefan. I can look after you. You don't need anyone else. See, I'm feeling better today. I will make some bread.'

Stefan removes the shirt in which he slept. Half-naked, he stands before his mother, smiling. He splashes water over his face, blasting through its coldness by blowing with his



mouth, flustering the water everywhere. His narrow bony shoulders and youthful vigour is silhouetted against the sunshine, trapped in flying droplets all around him in a kaleidoscope of bright colour. Another scoop, and another; water rains over his head. He rubs his fingers around his ears and grips his lobes before smoothing down his mop of blue black hair with wet hands.

Invigorated by the water's freshness he throws handfuls of it under his arms and across his smooth chest.

'No, no, not your chest. It is too early, too cold. You will make yourself ill,' his mother cries.

Stefan laughs amid the sparkling droplets in the early morning sun.

'I am a man now, *Matka*. In the army<sup>53</sup>, we wash like this every day. Even in the Winter.'

'The army will kill you, if the Russians don't get you. Oh, my son, dry yourself, dry. Quickly, here.' Karolina scrambles for a cloth but finding nothing to hand, she grabs her apron and tries to pat her son's back and chest.

'Enough!' Stefan pushes her away. The morning ritual is over. Now he must be a man. Not a son to be babied. 'Stay here, don't go anywhere. I have business with Pawel. I will send over Katya to make you something.'

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Stefan dresses carefully in brown twill slacks and a clean white shirt. Adjusting the knot of his brown tie, he folds down his collar and reaches for his tweed jacket. Responding to Karolina's urging, he flings a fine wool scarf around his neck and across his chest before shrugging on his jacket. Three buttons fastened, he straightens the jacket front and makes a great show of adjusting its wide lapels.

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<sup>53</sup> 32nd Infantry, Skalat Battalion. See Appendix 1, Chronology.

He takes the folded handkerchief offered by his mother without comment, before lifting his pocket flap to take the hanky, ensuring it is flat against his hip. Another glance front and back in the small mirror satisfies him that he is ready for his outing.

When he bends to kiss Karolina tenderly on her forehead, she grips his sleeve. He tenses as ready tears flow into her sore eyes.

Hanging onto his hem, Karolina says, 'Your father repaired this for you, remember?'

Stefan pulls back his arm. 'Yes, *Mamusia*, you tell me every time; he took cloth from the hem to bind the cuffs. Is that what you're going to say next?' Stefan frowns at his reflection.

Karolina's idle hands pull at her shawl. 'He was so good to you, Stefan. You were his pride.'

Stefan sighs. 'And now he's gone, and I have to go too, so sit down and occupy yourself until Katya comes. And don't go out. Hear me?'

Stefan leads his mother to her bed beside the still-warm stove and helps her up, sliding a wide board between two slots to keep her in. 'Stay there and be quiet. I'll be back later.'

He goes next door to consult his godfather, whose daughters dance around in excitement as Pawel passes on the news Stefan wants to hear. Refreshments are taken in celebration, which delays Stefan further but Basia insists on plying him with spiced biscuits. The girls argue over who will attend Karolina.

Finally getting away from Pawel's, he steps outside, where he takes a deep breath of fresh spring air and turns towards the road. The further he walks from his own house, the more easily he breathes, and his steps quicken. He stops only to pick up a bottle of beer, before walking a kilometre from the centre of Germakówka on the long, straight road leading out of the village towards Iwanie Puste.

A row of smart houses, set back, line the wide road. Led by the sound of violins and accordion, Stefan turns towards the third house on the left, to find Gorzynski, Wojcik and Nawara standing around. They have already set up table and chairs by the barn, where the musty smell of last year's straw hovers, in strange contrast to the domesticity of a heavy damask cloth on the table.

Grimacing, Stefan pulls the beer bottle free from his pocket and places it next to a pile of gramophone records. *Tango Milonga* continues to scratch its way out of the portable gramophone, 'Why don't you change that needle? It's terrible.' He lifts the heavy brass arm from the player. 'Here, I'll do it, where's the box?'

Gorzynski steps forward. 'You always have to interfere, don't you? No, "Hello Gorzynski, how are you?" Straight in, interfering. Just leave it, it's okay as it is,' he complains. 'Anyway, there's plenty of life left in that one.'

Stefan continues to unscrew the needle, ignoring his friend. 'Stupid, don't you understand, you'll ruin the record. See, it doesn't take much. Now listen,' he says, about to lower the arm.

Quickly, Gorzynski lifts off the record. Stefan turns to Wojcik and Nawara with palms upwards and lifted shoulders. Gorzynski selects a new record, and pretty soon, the sound of Marian Hemar is drifting from the turntable to the tune of *I Have a Date with Her for Nine*. The song is answered by the gentle lowing of the Wojcik family cow.

Satisfied, Stefan punches Gorzynski's arm, 'See? Better, even the cow approves. Where are the glasses?'

The four young men laugh, as Stefan's frothing beer is shared between the clinking tumblers.

'Whose turn is it to deal?' shouts Wojcik sitting down, and the card game commences.

Stefan's cards are thrown with grunting ferocity onto the table, as the little pile of broken matchsticks in front of him grows and diminishes with his luck. Suddenly, he says, 'Let's make this more interesting,' and pulls a handful of change from out of his trouser pocket.

'On a Sunday?' Wojcik remonstrates, 'If my parents find out...'

'Your parents are in church,' Stefan laughs, 'Who's going to tell them, that cow?'

The friends continue to play, clinking their worthless little coins, until the sound of a cart disturbs their game. Quickly, they scoop the coins into their pockets and sweep the matchsticks back into place.

Michal and Maria Wojcik wave from the house, calling blessings on Stefan and his new fiancée.

Gorzynski's eyebrow lift, as he looks enquiringly at his three friends. 'What? What fiancée? What don't I know? What? What?' He turns his head from one to the other.

Wojcik and Stefan shrug, but Stefan's resolve breaks first, and a slow grin creeps across his face.

Nawara leaps to his feet. 'Come on, you guys, let's have a picture to celebrate this moment.' He pulls out a shiny new Leica, at which Stefan whistles.

Catching on, then Gorzynski leaps up, letting his chair fall away behind him. He pulls Stefan into a hard embrace. 'You dog, you did it. You got her, Halinka! You dog.'

Nawara fiddles excitedly with the Leica, looking through the viewfinder. 'Come on, we need to capture this. Gorzynski, you stand there. No, better all behind the table. Hold your cards up. Stefan in the middle.'

Stefan pushes Wojcik forward, 'You're the tallest, you go in the middle.' He takes up Wojcik's place by the gramophone.

Nawara's head flits up and down from the camera to his friends. 'Okay, stand still. Wait, don't move,' he instructs, sharpening his shot. 'Keep still, okay. No, wait, you look like you're holding prayer books.'

The young men quickly fan their cards. Stefan presents his hand to the camera, Wojcik grips his close to his chest, while Gorzynski holds his nonchalantly.

Nawara tuts, 'Put the beer bottle back on the table.'

'It's empty,' the others protest.

Nawara waves the Leica, its strap flapping, 'We have to have it. Gorzynski, just put it behind the vase, no-one will know it's empty.'

'Come on,' shouts Wojcik, 'we're losing our hair and teeth here.'

Click. 'Okay, all right, now another,' shouts Nawara. No click. 'Oh, I forgot to wind on. Stand still.' Click.



### 3.2

Wojcik steps out of shot, 'Come on, you stand there now.' He takes the camera from Nawara, and the young friends move around.

Nawara eyes Wojcik's fiddling with his camera. 'Why don't we just ask Jozefa to do it?'

'No, she gets flustered easily,' Wojcik replies. 'I can do it, come on.'

The camera clicks again, then the boys return to their cards. They play on, arguing all the while about the cost of the film, until Michal ambles over in his Sunday best, grinning toothlessly and waving a bottle of vodka.

*29 July 1937 – 1938*

The first summer of most newly-weds is good, with shelves filled with wedding gifts of food. Among the usual wooden kegs of pickled dill and cabbage, and baskets of eggs there is the occasional bowl of *pierogi*<sup>54</sup>. Delivered on the pretence of neighbourliness, these bowls of shiny dumplings are an excuse to check out how the bride is coping, and how dark are the rings about her eyes.

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<sup>54</sup> filled dumplings

Halina's larder overflows. Her sisters make sure of it, with little persuasion from their father. Many *babcie*<sup>55</sup> also add to the youngsters' stores; their hearts softened by her handsome young husband's devotion to his mad mother. For which one of them isn't wondering what treatment they might expect from a son?

Under this new regime, it's not long before the last three years of Stefan's life are reordered. Stefan and Halina laugh while they work and even Karolina seems happier. Stefan is pleased with his young wife's patience.

To twenty-year old Stefan and his neighbours in Germakówka, the outside world seems a long way from this quiet patch of Poland's eastern borderland. Next door, his neighbour - born into the small kingdom of Galicia - now spends his evenings with Stefan in the Second Polish Republic, even though he hasn't moved a metre from his front door.

Pawel has looked out for the young man long enough to call him son. That's how it is here; villagers rubbing along as villagers do, with their petty squabbles and occasional land grabs, and no sign of uprising for at least 20 years.

On this hot August night, away from the women, the two neighbours lean against the warm clay of Stefan's house to talk of what they've seen and heard; precious little, you'd think. The moon is climbing, throwing long shadows from Stefan's saplings.

Pawel lights Stefan's cigarette, casting the young man's face in a warm glow. 'They're doing well,' he nods towards the young walnut trees.

Stefan inhales contentedly. 'They're doing well. By the time my son learns to read, he will be able to help us harvest.'

'Your son? Is she?'

'Not yet but it won't be long.'

'A boy first, then maybe another, and then a girl to help Halina in the house. Yes, two boys first. And then, who knows. Children come.'

Pawel thinks about his girls.

'The watering's hard on Halina,' Stefan interrupts. 'She is strong but a woman, you know...'

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<sup>55</sup> grannies

'Go easy on her, Stefan. She is very young, and those sisters have over-mothered her all these years.'

'They are coming again tomorrow. Every Sunday now, and her father. He's okay. I feel sorry for him with those women. He likes to visit.'

Pawel tenses. 'Have you noticed how many Jews are visiting their families, Stefan?'

Drawing contentedly on his cigarette, Stefan is calm and at peace with his day's work. He adjusts to this new line reluctantly. 'They always do that as harvest approaches. They're after something to take back to the city. See how many friends you have when you make your sausages.'

Pawel quickly becomes agitated. 'Pull your head out of your woman's skirts and look around you. This is different; they're coming from Rumania, Hungary<sup>56</sup>. They're everywhere, and they don't look right.'

'What do you mean, "they don't look right"? When did they ever look right? They're Jews.'

'Listen, fool. Take a day off from your stupidity. It's August, right?'

'Right, it's August. Amazing, I never noticed.' Stefan smirks.

Pawel sighs. 'How long does it take for your milk to sour?'

'In the sun? Not long. So?'

I'll tell you, so. Why, then, do they arrive wearing fur coats, eh? Ask yourself that.'

Silence.

'Because they don't trust their servants! I don't know why.'

'Think, Stefan, think. If you thought something bad was coming, would you hang around to wait for it, or leave with your valuables?'

'Who knows how a Jew thinks. And why here, then, eh? Why would they come here? And where are they coming from? Anyway, what bad thing is coming? *Tata*, you're not making sense.'

Pawel continues. 'From western Poland, Germany, Austria, everywhere, all coming east. They're deporting them! And the Polish government are letting them in.'

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<sup>56</sup> *Flüchtlinge* – refugees from surrounding areas

'And, the starving one? That old woman Mendel took in? Left the city. I've seen it before. Cities are bad places; nowhere to hide and eyes everywhere. They're scared, I'm telling you.'

'You think a village is any better?'

'No, I don't, but forests are. You can hide in a forest.'

'The city is not bad. I would live there...' Stefan clicks his fingers, '...just like that. Trams, picture houses, cafes, bars, dancing. Lwów, that's the place to be.'

Pawel stands up, 'Not if you're Jewish. Didn't you hear anything at the academy?'

'I heard plenty shouting.'

He moves in front of Stefan, 'Gah! Women. They make fools of every man. Do you want to talk seriously or not?'

'Sure.' Stefan grinds out his cigarette stub with his heel.

'Well stop pissing like a puppy and listen. They want us gone from here too.'

'Who?'

'Everyone who wants what we've got.'

'Now who's being stupid? First you talk about the Jews, now you're talking about us. What us? You've had too much sun, I'm going in. Halina is waiting.'

'Let her wait.'

'Tata, I love you like a father, but I have my duty to attend to.' Stefan grins, rising, but Pawel grabs his sleeve.

'You have a duty all right. That pretty uniform of yours will mean something sooner than you want. I was in Chernivtsi. The only talk is war. People are buying up everything.'

'I have to go.'

Pawel picks up a twig and throws it, 'Go then. But know this, you're strutting around in that uniform now, but you wait.'

Sure enough, Pawel's warnings come true. Soviet Russia's invasion is as swift as Poland's capitulation. No match for Russian hordes pouring across the eastern border on 17<sup>th</sup> September 1939. Poland's mainly ceremonial army quickly falls. Stefan, and men like him conscripted into the Border Patrol, are discharged of duty two days later. They melt away to their homes before they can be re-conscripted into Soviet ranks. Or be taken to a secret



wooded place and shot. While the world watches, Russia marches in and takes what it has been aching for a very long time.

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Eighteen months into their marriage, Stefan and Halina listen to the phatt, phatt of heavy rain on the thatch above them, accompanied by pouring streams of water from the low eaves outside their windows. The stove which cooked their meal has cooled but enough warmth is held in its bricks. Stefan and Halina lie snug on their straw filled mattress under padded cotton quilts.

‘The morning steam will rise thick,’ thinks Stefan.

‘Listen: the sound of money falling from the sky,’ he murmurs to his drowsy young bride. Their lovemaking tonight, as always, was furtive and silent. He will not disturb Karolina’s sleeping peace in the room next door. The last thing he wants is her wandering, confused in the dark.

He prods Halina, ‘I’m talking to you. Can you hear it?’

‘Yes, I can hear it.’

‘It’s good we got them in before Easter. They’re doing well. They are, aren’t they?’

She protests, half asleep, ‘I know, it was hard work.’

‘But it’s good we got them in when we did. In another two weeks, I’ll take away the stakes.’

Halina resurfaces from her torpor. ‘So soon? Won’t they bend?’ Pressed against the wall, she raises herself on an elbow to peer out of the small window. All she can see is wet glass shining in the candlelight. All she has seen for over a week is rain and mud-hardened chores. Stefan’s confinement has resulted in far too much energy, and bedtime has come earlier every day.

‘No, they need the wind to make them strong. They’re good roots, deep. You saw, everywhere green; not one lost. Deep roots, that’s what makes them grow.’

Stefan's body stirs, 'that's what you need to make things grow. Roots planted deep.' He rubs his rough hands across the girl's soft cheek then, lifting the top of her nightgown, he cups out a small, tender breast. Feeling her heat, he pulls Halina's hand towards him.

'Ow, stop it.' Halina protests, pushing his wrist away. 'Holy Mother and all the saints, not again, go to sleep, I'm tired.'

Stefan pushes her roughly away. His thoughts return to the nut trees.

By the time he's calculated annual returns per tree, his resentment has subsided. 'Go to sleep then,' he says.

St Theresa, cradling white roses, looks on implacably above their heads from her mean wooden frame.

The next day it rains, and the next. Stefan and Halina, heads covered, rush out to tend their animals under the blue-black sky then rush back, muddied to their knees. Karolina rocks and croons as usual but, since Halina has found simple jobs for her fidgety hands, the old woman seems more able to tolerate her removal from the main room to a truckle in the kitchen. Her old bed by the stove belongs to Stefan and Halina now.

Three weeks after the rains first start, the little household awakens to a startling light. Blue sky excites them to step outside and lift their heads. As one, the young couple move towards their promising crop.

Halina, first to see there's something wrong, cries, 'Stefan! What's happened?'

The saplings lie at distorted angles, still tethered to their stakes. Some of the roots point skyward, as if a giant ball has bowled through the field. Not one tree is upright.

'*Cholera*<sup>57</sup>!' Stefan runs between the trees, grabbing one here, one there, spreading the roots before throwing them down again. 'All of them, every single one,' he screams.

'The rain! It's washed them out.' Halina's eyes are wide, and scared. Stefan is running wildly now, swearing as he grabs his precious saplings, their future.

At this moment, Halina's concern is with her husband's reaction. She looks back at Karolina standing in the doorway. 'Not two of them, I can't deal with two like that,' she thinks.

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<sup>57</sup> Damn it

Her earlier anticipation of a hard day's work, writ across her face, is gone: the faint hope of clean washing, drying in the sun, appears foolish. 'All that work! We can't dig in this mud, we need to get help,' she beseeches.

Stefan has ceased his running inspection; lifting saplings, one by one, before throwing them down in disgust. He stands with his back towards the house before slowly turning towards his wife.

'They're no good.'

Halina is well used to his catastrophising. She takes up the placatory tone that has served her well, 'It's okay, we just need to plant them again, see. We can ask Pawel and some of your friends to help us. Antonina and Maria will help. I know they will, if I ask them.'

She picks up the nearest sapling, 'Look.'

Stefan doesn't move.

A moment later, Halina lets the sapling fall from her hand as realisation dawns. Its promising feathery green shoots are curled, and limp, and yellow. The bright vibrancy that proclaimed life - that received hard-gained buckets of water throughout the hot summer - is gone. She sees fresh cuts above the roots, which hang like a little scalp from their trunk. Her eyes move from one tree to another. Each has received the same meticulous treatment. Some roots are severed altogether, while others are attached by slips of sinewy bark. It seems not everyone in the village means them well.

Stefan stands, silhouetted against the sky with arms outflung.

'Every one of them. All dead.' His young face is contorted, all dreams of wealth evaporating with the rising steam.

'What are we going to do?' breathes Halina.

'Go back to the house.'

Pawel, roused by the shouting is now plodding towards them, each step heavier with mud than the last. He waits until Halina is out of earshot.

'They don't just want your land, Stefan. You do know that, don't you?'

'What? What then?' is all that emerges from Stefan's anguished throat.

'Your wife's father is wealthy, she is beautiful and young, her sisters are not. Who do you think is going to get it all when he dies?'

'That won't be for years. And anyway, I'm her husband, it will be mine.'

'Maybe, maybe not.'

'Why do I get this bad luck now? Isn't there enough trouble in the country without my own neighbours doing this?'

'It's the best time. I feel sorry for you, Stefan, but you're a man now. I won't help you wring your hands. '

'Someone will pay.'

Pawel laughs. 'Where is the policeman? Who is in charge, eh? Who will you tell about your troubles?'

'Shut up, I'm trying to think,' Stefan replies. 'I'll take it to the *nachalnik*.<sup>58</sup> The *Poliskydom*<sup>59</sup> will hear about it.'

'What *Poliskydom*? That's all over. We're all Russian now.'

'If you weren't fucking yourself stupid, you'd be able to think. Go running to the NKVD and you'll go on a list, they'll be watching you. Keep quiet. Plant new trees. Plant anything. Get a dog. Just don't go looking for trouble. And be thankful you have a Ukrainian name.'

1940

They plant new trees, and they get a dog. The country settles under a new regime and Halina gets to grips with her new household. Every morning, she washes and feeds Karolina before putting some simple work into her feeble hands. Small things appear whenever Halina's sisters come to visit: a coloured postcard, embroidered cloths, painted pots. Karolina's chest is full to bursting with worked linen sheets and warm rugs.

For his part, Stefan appreciates the almost complete transformation of his house. The bedding is always dry, and his mother no longer smells sour. The stove is always lit, with good

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<sup>58</sup> An official appointed by the Soviet Ministry of the Interior overseeing all aspects of peasant affairs.

<sup>59</sup> Polish: village meeting place where grievances were settled by the village head man.

smells coming from it. No matter what ungodly hour he returns to the house, Halina has food and water ready for him, and another list of complaints about their neighbours.

Hard work replaces resentment, and despite his Polish friends' sudden 'repatriation'<sup>60</sup> to western Poland, Stefan's confidence returns.

Best of all he likes to watch Halina as she works. The soft plump girl with the beautiful voice that he married has grown into a sinewy woman with a lively wit.

Stefan makes sure she is always within sight as they work their land and tend their animals. Whenever he senses that Halina is distracted or lost in thought, he whistles and calls her name, 'Halka! Take a rest.'

And every time, she straightens, and stretches her young shoulders, she smiles at her handsome young husband.

'If she ever knew what her smile does to me, I'll be finished for life', he thinks. He doesn't know it's already too late.

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The first few months of Soviet occupation are deliberately chaotic, with Soviet exhortations to the people to get even and settle scores with their neighbours. Their tactic is to sow confusion so that people don't know who is on their side and who the enemy is. As a result, the new regime quickly flushes out those who eagerly welcome Russians, as well as those who silently

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<sup>60</sup> Local people are told that families with obviously Polish names have been sent back to Poland. In fact, they are rounded up in the early hours of the morning by the NKVD, given half an hour to pack warm clothes and food before being transported east as slave labour. Stefan, with a Ukrainian name, would not have appeared on official transportation lists. Total number of deportees from the Western Ukraine (where Germakówka finds itself after Soviet invasion) and Western Belorussia, based on incomplete Soviet data runs between 309,000 and 327,000. Number arrested during the period: 110,000 to 130,000. Gross, J. T. (2002). Revolution from Abroad: The Soviet Conquest of Poland's Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia, Princeton University Press. There were four waves of mass deportations from Soviet-occupied Polish territories; first major operation took place February 10, 1940, with people sent primarily to far north and east Russia, including Siberia and Khabarovsk Krai; second wave, 13 April 1940, of people were sent primarily to Kazakhstan; third wave was June–July 1940; fourth and final wave occurred in June 1941.

oppose them, and those, like Stefan, who pretend not to care. Being neutral in Germakówka gets harder, and people's secrets become deadly.

One day, Pawel arrives around the corner of the house, dragging Buk by the scruff of his neck. 'Stefan! You've only been out of the army since last September, that's not long enough for a KOP<sup>61</sup> uniform to rot. I've just caught Buk trying to dig it up behind the barn.' He lets go of the dog, which immediately runs back to his great new game.

White-faced, Stefan grabs a shovel and, together with Pawel, digs a deeper hole. The men finish off by laying sheets of corrugated iron over the fresh earth, shooing away inquisitive hens.

Stefan's recent scare alerts him to how the village is changing. The newcomers prosper under their new rulers. They assume a swaggering attitude; unusual in men two generations from serfdom. As a young man, he can almost understand the headiness of power experienced for the first time. But not from their wives, who, for him, are far worse, enjoying new possessions pilfered from their neighbours; there are many pigs seen wearing lipstick about the village.

His own wife is largely biddable but can be spirited and defiant. He worries and warns her to be careful in the market, especially around some of their neighbours' new-found authority. Halina is more than a match for them. She is even getting to be a match for Stefan, whose attempts to train Buk are immediately undone by Halina's protests. However, today, Stefan is engaged in his own material pursuit.

'If I could get a bicycle, I could...'

'A bicycle?' she says, 'a bicycle? Are you crazy? In the middle of all this, how are you going to get a bicycle?'

Stefan throws her a warning look. 'I can get one. How much money do we have?'

'Not enough.'

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<sup>61</sup> KOP Podole: Border Protection Corps: at the eastern border, their combat value was much lower. The recruits lacked experience and training and the units of KOP were deprived of almost all heavy weaponry. They were demobilised two days after Soviet invasion. Anyone found to have fought against Soviet forces would have been summarily executed.

'I saw one here, see.' He waves the magazine at her. 'A good one, aluminium, never rust.'

'No, it will never rust. Because it's never coming out of that magazine. We don't even have money for meat, so we don't have money for bicycles. For a sick woman, your mother eats like a horse.'

'Don't talk about her. She can't help it.'

'No, she can't help it, but you can. You bring sausage and give half to her. We work morning to night and *babcia* gets half the world. How is that fair?'

'You do all right. I see what Tonina brings.'

'And if we didn't have Tonina, where would we be?'

'We would be fine, look.' He pulls Halina towards him, the tip of his tongue poking from the side of his mouth as he smiles. 'You're getting fat anyway.'

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When news of reprisals in Czortków<sup>62</sup> filters through, Stefan quickly sobers.

Czortków Red Army garrison lay vulnerable one cold January night just four months after Russia's invasion. The saboteurs, mostly students, took advantage with the heroic idea to attack the garrison, liberate the prison holding Poles from the region, and move on to the centre of the town. They then planned to seize the railway station. Few of them were armed, and those only with knives, old-fashioned swords, and a small number of guns. They failed, of course.

Pawel and Stefan's father-in-law pass a bottle of vodka along the long table, while they discuss the situation in low whispers. The women are next door, close to the stove.

Józef speaks first between belches. 'But then, they were mostly boys.'

Stefan looks up from his glass. 'Anti-Soviet members of the scout movement.'

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<sup>62</sup> The first WWII Polish uprising started here on the night of 21-22 January 1940 in Soviet-occupied Czortków, approximately 60 kilometres north of Germakówka.

'Boy Scouts,' shouts Pawel. 'Boys, who thought they could free hundreds of ordinary Polish men; those so-called *enemies of the people*.'

'Shh,' hushes Stefan, glancing at the closed door.

'Which one of us isn't an enemy of the people?' says Józef clutching the bottle, 'since options to be anything else are limited: become communist, or risk being considered an enemy.'

Pawel drains his glass and holds it out to Józef, 'Easy to become an enemy; you simply show disrespect to the communist cause.'

He raises his refilled glass. 'To the communist cause, *na zdrowie!*'<sup>63</sup>

'*Na zdrowie!*' the other two join in.

Halina opens the door, 'Are you all right in here? What are you celebrating, so happy?'

Stefan turns, 'Nothing for you to worry about, go back to your women.'

She places a bowl on the table. 'Here, something to soak up your drink.'

'Good woman.' Stefan slaps her backside as she turns to leave, and she takes a little hop, giggling and jumping out of the room like a happy rabbit.

The men look at each other, their faces illuminated by two candles. They remain silent for a long time, dipping coarse chunks of bread into leftover pickle juice.

Pawel is first to speak, 'You know, if someone owns a choice piece of land, or a fine house, then his status as enemy goes up, according to which Party member has his eye on it. It is usually quite rapid.'

Józef grunts, 'Rapid.'

'Rapid,' repeats Pawel. 'In fact, rapid enough to overcrowd Czortków Remand Prison with men awaiting transportation. "Permanent exile" they call it. Or, worse, "imprisonment without the right of communication". Know what that is?'

Stefan and Józef remain silent.

Warming to his theme, Pawel informs his listeners, 'This is a charming way of saying summary execution in the prison yard or, some other Godforsaken spot where they do their

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<sup>63</sup> Cheers (your health)



filthy work; usually underground.’ He turns to look at Stefan, ‘Remember, son, if they take you below ground, you’re finished.’

Stefan looks at his godfather. ‘Why are you telling *me* this?’

‘Because you’re young, that’s why,’ answers Pawel.

Stefan bangs down his glass, ‘Young, is it? I thought those students were mad at the time of the uprising, now I don’t know what to think. But it’s not just the young.’ He glares at his father-in-law. ‘They kill old men fools too.’

Józef glares back. ‘We are *not* old, and we are *not* fools. You read about the mass arrests, the reprisals. They were stupid, that’s all; high school students.’ He slams his palm down onto the table, rattling bottle and glasses, ‘Fifty-five tortured: children. Know what condition they finished in? Then a train to Siberia, how long will *they* last? And they were the lucky ones: twenty-four executed, teenagers wetting their pants like babies. Fourteen killed in action. Boys!’

Stefan rears back from the table, swaying on his feet. Pawel quickly restrains him with a shake of the head.

Józef bangs his glass down. ‘Give me a drink!’

That night Stefan and Halina have another whispered argument in bed.

‘I am twenty-one years old, a full-grown man. I need to fight.’

Halina pulls his upper arm until his face is close to hers. ‘You need to farm.’

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Carefully lifting the latch, Stefan slips out in time to see the flash of Pawel’s shadow melting around the corner of his house. He quickly follows him in a crouching run, keeping him in sight until he reaches the road, glowing white in the moonlight. He stops and looks around. Pawel has vanished.

*'Kurwa jęgo<sup>64</sup>,'* whispers Stefan, peering into the dark. He is about to turn back when an arm wraps itself around his neck and he finds himself flat on his back, thrown into a ditch with a familiar shape standing over him.

'Where do you think you're going?' hisses Pawel.

'Take me with you,' says Stefan, pulling himself up onto his elbows.

'Take you where?'

'To the woods. I know what you're up to.'

'It doesn't work like that.'

'Well, how does it work? I want to fight. Do you see what they're doing?'

'Do I see what they're doing? Haven't I been telling you?' Pawel spits. 'Now you want to fight. Have you finished your useless farming then?'

'Useless?' Stefan is brushing grass from his clothes.

'Never mind, get up.'

Stefan gets to his feet, stumbling in the long grass, preoccupied with brushing down, and straightening his shirt. He breathes fast and swallows frequently, as he watches the older man's profile.

After a long silence, Pawel says, 'All right, come with me and don't make a sound. I'm going to leave you somewhere. You have to wait, okay? You don't move until I come back. Then we'll see.'

The men take the soft grassy verge rather than the gravel track, stopping frequently to check they're not followed, until they reach the edge of the village. Away from the houses, they make faster progress, the way lit by a bright moon. Night screeches emit from the dark as they approach the forest's shadowy margin.

'Sit there, stay.' Pawel points to a pile of logs.

'I'm not a dog!'

Pawel ignores him. 'If anyone comes, say you're waiting for a girl. They should believe that, especially if they recognise you.'

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<sup>64</sup> For fuck's sake

Stefan waits. He doesn't sit. He paces up and down, muttering from time to time as he confronts his resentment and misgivings. No-one comes.

It is almost dawn when Pawel re-emerges from the forest.

'Okay, you're in. Don't let me down. Here, take this and hide it.' He thrusts a knife towards the startled man. 'Now, let's go home.'

The men return home by a different road. By the time Stefan has reached his house he is sweating and exhilarated. He already knows where he will hide the knife; in the well where the family keeps its money. Wrapping it carefully in a rag, he fastens it to a rope and gently lowers it down. The moon's shining reflection enables him to fasten it just above the water level. 'I will draw the water from now on, I can't let Halina see this,' he thinks.

He slips quietly back into the house, removing his shirt and trousers in the porch before entering and slipping his cold body in beside his wife. She stirs immediately.

'Stefan, what have you been doing? You're freezing.'

'Shh, you'll wake Mama. Go back to sleep, it's early.'

Halina chooses to turn over, ignoring her wayward husband except to shrug off his optimistic advances.

Stefan, for his part, lies in the dark, feeling more alive than ever.

---

Stefan slips away frequently, sometimes for days at a time. Halina doesn't ask but knows enough to make excuses to the neighbours. She doesn't even know that Stefan is working with Pawel until the day when Basia complains about her husband's laziness. The women are shucking the last of their dried beans while the men talk.

'He fell asleep when he was supposed to be chopping wood,' Basia whispers. Halina's laugh emboldens her to taunt her husband.

'What is the matter with you, Pawel?' she calls out, 'Are you ill? Don't I feed you enough? You're always tired these days, I have to do everything to keep the house going.'

The crack of a swift slap silences the old woman.

Halina looks down at the beans, her hand fluttering over her stomach.

---

Over the next few months, Stefan spends many more nights in the woods. He learns as much about his chain of command as Pawel decides is safe. He doesn't even know what army he is in, and suspects that neither do the other men. Most of the time he is cold and bored.

One thing he does know, though, is that he is not content with the minor acts of sabotage and resistance he is trusted with. Pawel stubbornly refuses to take him into his confidence, preferring to spend most of his time talking with the older men. Stefan, on the other hand seems to be at everyone's beck and call, running and tripping through the dark forest, spooked by night noises, as he carries messages back and forth.

One night, he tackles Pawel. 'What is it you talk about back there?' He jerks his thumb towards a small cave entrance, overgrown and obscured by trees.

Pawel shrugs in response and carries on sharpening his knife on a spit-covered whetstone.

Stefan tries a different approach, wheedling, 'Come on, *Tata*, what's going on? My risk is the same as yours, they'd shoot us side by side if we get caught. I deserve to know.'

Pawel's throat, cloggy with phlegm, garbles coarsely, '*You* do not deserve to know. You could jeopardise us all.' He keeps his eyes low, refusing to look for Stefan's response.

The younger man plants himself down in front of his neighbour, godfather, and surrogate father. 'You don't trust me,' he says quietly, his eyes prickling, knees spread.

Pawel is silent before clearing his throat softly. He licks away a thin line of blood from the pad of his thumb where he's tested his knife edge, before spitting blood-mingled phlegm onto the musty forest floor. Neither man moves for a long time under the gloomy canopy of trees.

Finally, Pawel says, 'We were just talking about what's happening in the north, beyond Tarnopol. Wołyn, you know where that is?'

'I know,' says Stefan. He holds his body in tension, his hands clasped between his legs.

Pawel looks around, then back towards the other men hunkered in clusters under an ancient beech tree. He looks back at Stefan, hesitating a moment longer, he finally whispers, 'Your Poles, they're not so clean as you think.'

Stefan leaps up. 'What are you saying? What?'

Pawel looks around quickly and tries to pull him down. 'Nothing, nothing, just that things are going to change,' he says, exhorting him to stillness with his outspread hands. 'Steady. It's nothing.'

Stefan paces quietly on the soft mulch. 'Come on, you can't stop now. What are you trying to say?'

'All right then, you asked me, remember that.' He gestures Stefan to sit. 'There's trouble up there. Those Poles don't like Ukrainians, and they're beating up on them more and more. Bad things. Long time now, you must know what's been happening. Haven't your Polish mates told you?'

Stefan shrugs, 'My friends have gone, have you forgotten that?'

'Well, Ukrainians are getting stronger. Poles don't like that.'

'Meaning?'

'Meaning, Stefanowicz, that they've been pacifying the region. The Germans are coming, and Ukrainians think *they're* going to be the answer. If your heroic Polish state doesn't come out of this mess, there will be carnage, Wołyn especially. And you. Well, you'd better decide who you are because things are not looking good.'

Stefan's disgusted snort is all Pawel needs to hear. The rest of the night passes in silence between them.

When Stefan leaves at first light he doesn't go his usual route home. Instead of skirting the woods back to the village, he strikes out along the railway line to visit his friend, Janek's outlying farm.

Arriving at first light, he sees a line of smoke gently rising straight up out of the mist which is slowly receding back to the forest edge from where it came. The silvered boards of

the small house can just be seen in the midst of flattened meadow grass around it; dull grey grass, its mildew marking a farmer's tardiness. Small farms like these are being eyed by neighbours. An old woman has already been turned out because her neighbour thought he could do a better job with her land. And after all, wouldn't she find it more comfortable living in the village with her daughter? So far, no rough stuff, but Stefan knows Janek. He is given to violence.

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For himself, by day, Stefan goes about his business and tries to stay out of sight of the communists.

However, the day his bicycle arrives, he knows he will attract attention.

Busy assembling the bike, Stefan does not look up when Halina's shadow falls across him beside the house. 'What have you done?' she demands. 'Where has this come from?'

She moves in front of him, hands on hips, 'Stefan, listen to me.'

Still he does not look up.

Storming back to the house, Halina shouts over her shoulder, 'All right! Don't tell me, I don't want to know.'

Pretending to be preoccupied with his bicycle, he watches the twitching curtains, and smiles. He knows she will come around. He's learnt the softening effects of pregnancy and it's given him confidence. Enough to buy a bike.

But he hasn't learnt about living in occupied territory.

It has been over a year since the Soviet invasion and some form of rule has settled on Germakówka. One rule says, 'keep your head down and your nose clean, don't ask too many questions and don't trust anyone.'

Pawel arrives and sits, scratching, 'Have you heard?'

'What now?' says Stefan, alternately tinkering with and swearing at a greasy chain.

'Son of Guchinski, that Shunik. You know, the one with the fine house. Made a big mistake; spoke out of turn. Idiot thought the *nachalnik* was his friend.'

Stefan shrugs.

Pawel looks over his shoulder to the road, then pulls his ear nervously before continuing, 'Some friend he's got. *Nachalnik* now lives in that big house and Shunik's on his way to new accommodation: Siberia, transport provided.'

Still sulking from their recent run-in, Stefan answers, 'As you said, trust no-one.'

Pawel grunts and comes over to inspect the bike. 'Has she found out yet?'

'No, she has no idea. I think she likes it really.'

The older man laughs, breaking the tension. 'You'll never get away with it.'

The tip of Stefan's tongue pokes through his smile. 'We'll see,' he says.

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Of course, Halina does find out that Stefan sold a piece of land to buy the bike. She remains as angry as a pregnant woman can be.

With a smirk, Stefan justifies his decision to sell the land after a third of his holding is confiscated for the collective farm, 'You see. At least we have a bicycle. If I hadn't sold that land, we'd have lost it all.'

Halina's pregnancy is too advanced and tiring for her to argue any more. She has carried her child through a hot summer and now in the cool days of late Autumn she is content to be looked after.

Each evening, Stefan places his hand on her swollen stomach. 'How is my son today?' he asks. 'Hey, Teodor, Todek,<sup>65</sup> can you hear me? Come and meet your father – see what he has for you.'

Halina rubs her side, 'And if it's a girl?'

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<sup>65</sup> Polish diminutive of Teodor

'Then we'll do it again until you get it right,' he grins, ducking away from her blow.

Three weeks later, in the dark of mid-October, Stefan's son is born. Healthy, loud, and large, the sound of his cries almost reaches the house next door where Stefan and his friends have been comforting themselves with vodka since Halina's labour began that morning.

Karolina's bumbling frame comes out, and with much hand flapping, she proclaims joyfully, 'A boy, a boy!' across the fence.

The news prompts the men to set up round after round of toasts. Their drinking and singing carry them through the night. At dawn, Pawel's wife pushes and pulls the men to their feet and out the door to reclaim her kitchen. Her daughters run across to peep in the window for a glimpse of uncle Stefan's baby.

Fussed by her sisters and Karolina, Halina nests above the stove while her baby suckles at her breast. The three older women wait impatiently for their turn to hold the child.

Finally, Stefan returns, stumbling and bleary-eyed to view his son, whom he takes from scowling Antonina. She has only recently gained possession. He is overwhelmed with something, but he does not know what. He passes the baby back and steps outside.

The land he owned as a single man suddenly looks more beautiful than ever. In that moment, on that morning, at that time, everything shines with brilliance. Each blade of grass is unique, each plank of wood possesses artful texture, thrown into sharp relief. He cannot place his hand on anything that he does not own. And everything he owns is good in the world. The new life inside his house is warm and safe against his wife's milk-filled bosom. He imagines the taste of her sweet milk. If he can capture this feeling and hold it forever, he will be blessed among men.

His burden is light – October is a fallow time – but even so he works up a sweat organising wood and oil. Now he has a baby to keep warm through months of sub-zero temperatures, work takes on new meaning. He is a father. He will be judged as a father. By Pawel, by Halina, by her family, his friends, and the whole village. In that moment.

Leafless branches cut stencils against the pure blue sky. The sun traces out long shadowy lines across the dormant earth below. As he swings his axe, his body on fire with passion and alcohol, each intake of breath pierces Stefan's lungs with cleansing cold. Sweat runs chill down his arms. He has not felt so alive since his sorties in the forest.



Later that day, Pawel strolls across for their daily talk. After passing a cursory eye over the infant, he sits in the porch admiring the stack of logs on either side.

'You've dried them?'

'Of course; last year's.'

'Good, good. Baby's eyes, you know. Basia said to say, so...'

'Tata,' Stefan begins.

'I know what you're going to say. No-one will judge you for it.'

Stefan frowns. 'Judge me? Who will judge me? For what?'

'For giving up. Anyway, I heard they're pulling out. The Germans are advancing. Things will change but we don't know how. It will be bad again. A man in your situation. New baby. Best you stay at home now. Cut your wood.'

'You're wrong. I want to carry on. '

'They don't want you, Stefan. You are too risky. Your mouth.'

#### 1941

The Winter of '41 is particularly hard. Stefan, Halina and the baby sleep above the stove. Stefan's wood store keeps them warm despite temperatures dropping to minus thirty-six degrees and Spring seems a long way off. Stefan is the only one to venture out.

The baby amuses everyone except Halina, who needs a constant supply of clean, dry cloths for nappies. Antonina and Maria come with food for a glimpse of the blessed child and leave with wet bundles of smelly rags.

Stefan broods, and remains angry with Pawel, despite Halina's efforts.

Finally, she breaks her silence, 'He was probably just saying that, so you wouldn't go back. You know how he is about you. Anyway, would you want to go out there? At this time of year? He was doing you a favour.'

'I don't need such favours,' Stefan shouts. 'I need money; these *złoty* are worthless.' He throws the notes across the room. 'If we are to survive I must get money.'

'You could always sell the bicycle.'

'No! Shut up about the bicycle.'

'Well, how about some more land?'

Stefan's shadow falls across his wife. He controls himself, but Halina has seen the twitch in his arm. She turns to the baby.

Winter progresses, and food stocks fall low but the baby thrives.

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As the Soviet Union's occupation of eastern Poland becomes entrenched, the Russians waste no time in taking full advantage of their newly-captured larder, leaching salt, bread, sugar, and soap away to the east. Very soon shoes and clothing are non-existent at any price.

A few months more, and a dark pall falls across Germakówka as the full meaning of Sovietization becomes clear.

For some, however, there is an upturn in fortunes. Where once only Polish cooperatives flourished, now Ukrainian ones are starting up. And the Ukrainians, taking full advantage of their power, are loading prices for Jews and Poles alike. That is, until their Soviet comrades snatch it away.

Having welcomed the Russians as liberators, Germakówka's Ukrainians are finding themselves drawn into a communist vortex that their compatriots across the border in Soviet Russia understand very well.<sup>66</sup> They now become impatient for Germany's invasion. The air crackles with anticipation as much as their secret radios, broadcasting Germany's impending march into Eastern Galicia.

It is now the Russians' turn to become nervous. Stefan hears they intend to begin conscription in their haste to recruit men into their retreating army. He's seen trainloads of

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<sup>66</sup> Holodomor: Stalin induced famine 1932-33

captured Poles being transported east to work in the coal mines. Hunger and fear haunt the Poles and Jews; the more people who arrive<sup>67</sup>, the less food to go around.

The Winter continues long and hard, and Stefan considers selling his bicycle for food. But he doesn't need to; by the Spring thaw it is gone, only to reappear ridden by his old school friend, Borysko. Grinning and waving his cap, upon which shines the yellow and red hammer, sickle and sword, Borysko calls out a greeting to Stefan. The glinting badge of The People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs and the red flashes on Borysko's uniform is all it takes to halt Stefan's angry tongue. He spits on the ground as his old friend passes, swearing under his breath until Pawel grabs his sleeve and roughly pulls him round.

Through clenched teeth, Stefan seethes, 'You see that bastard? Wait 'til it's dark, I'll fix him good.'

He struggles to shake off his neighbour, but Pawel hangs onto him, saying, 'Yeah, you fix him, and they'll fix you. Leave it.'

Stefan turns on his old friend and mentor, 'What about you?' 'Eh? What about you? What are you and your friends doing about this? What are you up to in the woods?'

'We don't go there anymore. It's getting too crowded. That's all you need to know.'

Stefan lifts his arms slightly, before flopping them down to his sides, 'All I need to know... Fucking hell.'

'I'm telling you. Keep your nose clean and there's a chance we'll all survive this.'

Stefan looks at the sky, 'Maybe *you* can.'

Pawel sighs, 'They'll be running soon enough when the Germans get here, don't you worry. But you won't see that bike again. Just keep your head down, hear me?'

The days pass with humiliation and uncertainty. The land that was their salvation is further eroded into the collective farm. Neither Stefan nor Halina speak much about the future any more. They watch everyone closely and only repeat village gossip when they are alone.

'Did you hear what happened to Bogdan?' Halina tells him. 'He was taking clothes from the line of the old Jew, Fertel, and passing them to his wife. NKVD came and beat him.'

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<sup>67</sup> *Flüchtlinge* refugees

Poor Bogdan, no-one has seen him for a week. His wife doesn't know, no-one knows. His father went to the *Nachalnik* to protest and they beat him too. Old man of eighty years, disgusting.'

'Serves him right!' Stefan replies.

'How can you say that? He is an old man.'

'He is greedy, like all Ukrainians. Don't want to work for things. They think they're going to be free when the Germans come. Don't be so sure. They're in for a surprise, Pawel says.'

'Pawel says. Pawel knows everything, does he? Maybe he can tell us how we're going to eat!'

But the Ukrainians, emboldened, are sure they will eat when the Germans arrive. Daily, Stefan's neighbours grow more confident. They started with the Jews, but the big prize is Polish land.

Sure enough, two weeks after Easter celebrations, just when everything is growing and green, and Stefan is working near his ditch, his far boundary neighbour appears.

'Motkaluk, good, I find you with a spade. You need to fill this ditch.'

Stefan's face tenses. 'Why?'

'Because it is on my land.'

In two steps Stefan is at his neighbour's throat, his spade discarded. 'Your land. I'll show you your land.' He hurls the man backwards with all the force, frustration and fear that's been growing in his empty belly the last few months.

The man grunts as he falls against a tree root, blood running into his left eye. 'You'll regret that,' he says, wiping the blood with the back of his hand. He tugs the scarf from his neck, dabbing at the now steady flow. Then he smiles up at Stefan, 'Oh my friend, you'll be very, very sorry.'

Stefan kicks him, picks up his spade and shakes it at the man before walking back to his house.

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Barely ten hours pass before Buk is barking like fury, and there is a thundering at the door. Halina gasps, grabbing the sleeping baby. Karolina, terrified, feels her way into the room, hair awry.

‘Stefan, Stefan,’ she calls, ‘who is it?’

Stefan goes to the door. He hardly has a chance to unbolt it before four men push it open, forcing him almost off his feet.

‘Come with us. You are under arrest.’

At this moment, he has become an enemy of the people.

Fully grown and strong, Buk, barks like only an Alsatian can. His teeth bared to the gums, he rears on his chain, pawing at the air, until a swift kick to his head sends him tumbling and squealing.

Halina squeezes the baby hard. Startled from his warm sleep, he screams in protest, alternately yelling and grubbing for his mother’s breast with his angry mouth.

Stefan bends to reach his boots and receives a blow to his back. He grabs what he can as he is prodded roughly out of the door. He turns to look at Halina, kneeling in bed with the baby still furiously trying to suckle, its tiny fists beating against its mother’s breast. Karolina, bewildered, is plucking at her sleeves. Stefan thinks, ‘Will I ever see them again? Is it the basement for me?’

Persia: Teheran

1943

Musty canvas flaps over Stefan's head as the sun's gathering heat drives off its night time sweats. He has been in Teheran for long enough to know he shouldn't eat oranges and fresh dates until his stomach is ready.<sup>68</sup> A sad irony is that recently starving men, women, and children from Siberian gulags, are dying in large numbers from diarrhoea, caused by the generosity of the Persian people. The hunger these people have experienced stays with them for life, or at least whatever is left of it. And the groans issuing from British latrines are hardly any gentler than those from the Polish ones.

However well set-up, the British facilities, the weakest new arrivals from Siberia face rampant typhus. Lice- infested and starving, they are hardly able to stand. Having travelled thousands of kilometres, sometimes on foot, hundreds of them die; free at last in their new-found paradise, destined to remain strangers in a strange land.

Most everyone who is able to go outside is either dehydrated or sunburnt. Stefan has never known such heat, nor such gratitude. In his two months here, he has been de-loused, re-clothed, and put to work. His enlistment in the British Eighth Army, Polish Second Corps entitles him to food, shelter, training and pay, and he has made the most of his new-found wealth in the city. A shiny engraved cigarette case lies open on the table beside him, as he leans on his elbow, stroking his forehead.

He is disturbed in his reverie by Adam, who peers under the raised tent flaps.

'Stefan, what are you doing? Some of us are going for a swim, come on.'

'In a while, I have to write to my wife. She doesn't know... it's been over a year...'

'Your wife? Stefan, there are women in bathing costumes out there, and you are writing to your wife? This sun has made you mad.'

'She will be worried. I have to know... to let them know.'

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<sup>68</sup> Anders' army units cross Soviet-Persian border 1942/43

Adam sighs, throws down his towel and pulls up a chair. Turning it round, the small man turns it round and sits astride, leaning over his arms towards his friend.

'Want my advice?'

Stefan looks at the man who's kept him alive on the journey from Siberia. 'Of course,' he says, dropping his pen onto the air mail letter card in front of him. He leans back in his chair, smiling, arms folded behind his head.

Adam makes short work of his young friend's optimism. 'You must give her permission to make the best of her life now.'

Stefan blinks, not understanding his friend's words. Adam patiently explains, and by the time he leaves, Stefan is swearing between sobs as he writes:

...many miles apart, separated by war, who knows if we will ever see each other again. I left you a child, and I left you a sick mother. You must think of yourself and the child. If you find someone you like, marry, be with him. But please, I ask only one thing of you, please look after my mother...

The unit's post tent is hung with a string of cut out paper hearts. Stefan drops his letter into the posting box and hears its soft landing onto a pile of similarly hopeful letter cards: forget me, remember me, find someone, be faithful.

He walks back to his tent to fetch his towel, having done his duty.

Poland: Germakówka  
1944

'Your *Tata*, look, it's from your *Tata*.' Halina waves a small folded card over her toddler's head. Teodor reaches to grab at the flapping distraction. It disappears as quickly as it has appeared when Halina lifts her son from the floor.

'Aw, he was playing so nicely with his *Babcia* Karolina,' Antonina protests, coming into the room. 'What's all the noise about?'

'From Stefan,' breathes Halina, alight with excitement, the letter clutched behind Teodor. She smacks kisses onto the baby's head. 'Stefan has written. Your *tata* has written.'

'Let me see. Is it really him?' Karolina demands, arm outstretched. 'Praise be to God, he is alive!'

Halina spins away from her mother-in-law and paces with the wriggling child. 'Yes, it's Stefan's writing.' Her breath comes short. She shifts the child onto her hip. She waves the letter. Teo, enjoying this new game, snatches at it.

'Let me see,' repeats Karolina.

'It's to me, his wife. It's my letter.' Halina pulls it back. She passes her child to her sister on the bed before sitting on the bench under the window.

Karolina folds her arms across her chest in protest, and turns in her chair. She grabs a handful of nuts from a pot and, grumbling, pushes one between her hard gums. 'He's my son,' she mutters at the stove, chasing the nut around her mouth.

Taking up a knife, Halina carefully slits open its edges.

Todek sits on his aunty's lap, chewing on a crust. 'Go on then, read what he says. Praise be to God.' Antonina's eyes sparkle at her young sister.

Halina slides her fine fingers along the cut edges, smoothing away the glue into little rolls. She unfolds the card to find Stefan's familiar writing closely inked over two pages.

'Teheran,' she whispers. 'Where is that? Is it Siberia?' Trembling, she turns the letter over to read his closing words.



Her hand flies to her head, pushing away an imaginary wisp of blonde hair. She swallows air, trying to still her thrumming heart. Fidgeting, she crosses and uncrosses her legs, finally twisting them impossibly together, as if by doing so, she might still herself. 'No, no, no,' she exhales, 'no.' The letter trembles in her hand.

'Halina, darling, what does he say?' comes a soft voice from Antonina in the corner.

Karolina turns. She crosses herself before kissing her thumb, then does it again, and again as if to stay the words that might come. 'He's alive, he's alive,' she mutters.

Halina drops her head. She rubs the back of her hand across her nose then presses her fingers into her closed eyelids.

Finally, she looks up and speaks to the child in her sister's arms, 'He says goodbye.'

Her twisted body convulses with wracking sobs.

Antonina climbs down from the bed, beckoning to Karolina to mind the child. 'Let me see,' she says.

She prises the screwed-up letter from Halina's fist, gently lifting each finger so as not to give her sister any more pain.

Smoothing out the crumpled card, she reads slowly; pausing now and then to look at her trembling sister. She reads it a second time. Then she scoops up the young woman with her large arms and, together, they cry, rocking each other in grief.

'What is it? What is it?' cries Karolina, her arms scrambling for the letter. 'Is he sick?'

Antonina throws the letter onto the bed, where Karolina grabs it. She holds it close to her eyes, turning this way and that towards the window.

By the time Józef and Maria return, they find all three women enfolded in their own misery. Teodor, bewildered, has sought refuge in sleep.

Halina rushes to her father with the letter, almost worn out by reading. Her salt-dried face is mottled red and her lips are cracked.

'Maria, bring them some water,' he orders his second daughter. 'What is going on here?'

Halina hands him the letter.

While Maria administers water, he reads. 'It makes sense,' he says, flipping the page with the back of his fingers. 'It makes sense.'

'How can you say that?' Halina's anguish is as fresh as before. 'It was better when I didn't know where he was. At least there was some hope.' She drops her hands helplessly into her lap.

'Hope? There was never any hope, my girl.' Józef softens to his youngest daughter. 'Halina, he's telling you what to do. Look, haven't you read it?' He turns to Antonina, 'Hasn't she read it?'

Antonina nods, smoothing Halina's hair, her other hand on her sister's sweat-soaked back.

'Here is your hope,' Józef flicks the letter again. 'He's telling you to find someone else. Are you clear about that?' he demands, going to sit beside his daughter. Antonina moves to make room for the big man.

'Halina, *kiciu*<sup>69</sup>, darling, this is how it is now. He has written it.' Józef reads from the page in his hand, "There is a war, we are separated by thousands of miles." Halina, this was written months ago, this is from Persia. He may not even still be alive now. He says, look here, "Who knows if we will ever see each other again, or even survive what is coming."

'We will, we will. I must see him again.' Halina looks at the sleeping child, jerking in his sleep. 'Todek,' she whispers, as fresh tears come.

'Halina,' her father continues, 'he has done the right thing. He tells you, "You must think of yourself and the child. If you find someone you like, be with him." For the child's sake, Halina.'

Karolina comes forward. Taking her daughter-in-law's hand, she cups Halina's chin with her other hand, and turns the young woman's face to look into her own. 'We will do it together, *malinka*, we will raise his son. I can help.'

Halina stares at the old woman. She swallows down on the words rising in her throat.

Having provided water, Maria starts to prepare food for the distraught family, as each one again withdraws into their misery.

Antonina taps her father's shoulder and flicks her eyes to the door. Józef rises and follows his daughter outside.

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<sup>69</sup> kitty

‘Did you read what else he wrote?’ his eldest daughter hisses, “‘ I ask only one thing of you, please look after my mother.” She’s been doing that for two years. Now, it’s a life sentence.’

‘It is our life sentence, and we will help her do it,’ Józef snaps, hands shaking. ‘Go back inside. I have to see someone.’ He steps into the darkness and soon disappears behind the house.

All the following week, the family are busy with their sorrow. Karolina increases her muttering and rocking. Halina assuages her grief by work. Only Teodor, bumbling about on his fat little legs, seems content. He becomes accustomed to the women’s sudden lunges, and adept at screeching and wriggling free.

Outside the sad house, however, there is a different atmosphere, no less miserable but substantially more alarming.

Antonina and Maria watch over Halina, and hardly speak to neighbours. To avoid suspicion, they tell enquirers that Halina is ill. But somehow word gets out that Stefan is not coming back.

Ten days after the letter, Halina rallies and starts to eat again. Her sisters reduce their visits, bringing food every other day.

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Over the coming months, the Nazis are pushed back, and Ukrainian nationalists face renewed occupation by the communists. The people, or at least those who survived German occupation, are suspicious of everyone. The Jews are gone, the few remaining Poles are about to go, and no-one knows who to side with. Halina is no exception. A gentle knock comes in the night, and she opens the door to a hungry fighter. Word is out that she is one who will not poison the food.

So far, she has not joined the collective farm, and she’s protected by her father from too much NKVD attention.

But one night, weeks after Stefan's letter, tensions explode. Shouts, screams and gunfire sound around the village, and there is a rumour that the Polish head man has been found hiding in a barn. By morning his twisted body lies in front of what used to be the *Polskydom*, arms and legs broken by torture and a hole in the back of his head.

The terror continues, until people cannot trust their own souls. Eventually, the terrible hammering comes to Halina's house. In the darkest reach of the night, two men burst upon her, Karolina and Teodor. All three cry out, shrieking their confusion and fear.

They pull Halina from the warmth of her bed, their lamps swinging wildly, throwing huge shadows across the walls and ceiling of the small room. Halina struggles, only to receive a heavy slap to her face, followed by another. Half senseless from sleep, her head swings with each blow. Working in concert, they hold her upright, as they take turns to slap and shout.

'Traitor. You have been denounced,' the larger man screams, holding her arms behind her, his hot breath on her neck.

'Make it easy on yourself,' smiles the smaller man. His slap throws Halina's head back. It lands on the bridge of her captor's nose.

'*Poviya!*<sup>70</sup>' the large man shouts, bringing his knee hard into the small of her back. She grunts, absorbing the pain.

Half mad with fear, Halina cannot speak. She tries to cover her face but the blows land on her hands, her ears, her head, her neck; anywhere that can be reached.

'Tell us who you know in the West.' Another slap lands. 'Tell us.'

'No-one,' she mumbles, holding her head as if to keep it on her neck.

'Don't lie, tell us.' Another vicious blow.

The larger man steps back, the better to punch her stomach.

Halina's legs fold first, then her body crumples.

'Please, please,' she crawls her hands towards her assailant's feet. Her fingers caress his thick toe caps. 'Please.' She receives a kick from behind, followed by one to her chest.

The men, now warming to their task, take off their jackets. Ignoring the screams from Karolina and Teodor, they continue their interrogation.

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<sup>70</sup> Whore

'Who sent you a letter?'

She shakes her head, trying to mouth some words above Karolina's shrieking.

Finally, they drag the half-conscious woman outside. Lamps, which have been lit in surrounding houses, are quickly doused.

'Tell us or we kill you here. Who do you know outside?'

Halina looks around, the cold wind flicking blood-stained hair across her face. She becomes aware of a cold wetness in the nightdress flapping around her legs. She folds its fabric in front of her as the skin of her inner thighs prickles and stings. The men throw her to the ground.

There is a clicking and clunking as they make ready with their rifles. Halina pleads, turning her head frantically, expecting any moment to see her father, her sisters. But no-one comes. She tries to get up.

The noise of a late-returning cart carries above the men's swearing, whose drunken fumbling and the cold wind is leaching heat from their lust. They also turn to look around.

Halina stumbles sideways. She rises to a crouch. The sound of the horse and cart is louder. She propels herself forward, half-expecting to fall, but finds her feet. Without thinking, she forces her body forward, towards the cart, towards the horse. Stooping, running, and tripping, she reaches the track beside the house. She holds her nightdress high above her white knees. Her feet are caked to the ankles in black mud but still she runs, towards the horse.

She hears a crack, followed by a resounding echo. Still she runs. A second shot rings out, its echo followed by a third shot. She falls on the fourth. Feeling nothing but warmth running down her upper arm, she places her hand on her shoulder, and touches stickiness. The wheels of the approaching cart throw mud across her face as they roll past.

The driver pulls up his panicked horses, shouting towards the house above the shrieking wind and wild neighing, 'Don't shoot, don't shoot. The horses!'

The men shout something back, but Halina doesn't hear what. She crawls away from the track towards the ditch. On two legs and one arm, holding her nightdress free of her knees, she crawls. She realises she is crying but can hear no sound; only the cold lightning of salt tears dripping from her nose and chin tells her she is still alive. Reaching the ditch, she rolls

into it as if into a deep feather bed. She pulls down grass and branches over her body, pushing and burrowing into its dankness like an animal. Before she loses consciousness, she draws her knees up to her chest and pulls her urine-soaked nightdress over them. This is how Józef finds his daughter in the morning.

He takes her to Mielnica to hide with his brother. Despite the NKVD calling regularly day and night they find no-one at home, and no-one betrays her hiding place. One day, they find Antonina at the house with Teodor and they try to take the child, insisting he go to a communist orphanage. But Tonina pushes him behind her skirts.

She juts her heavy jaw in defiance, 'Sovietization? You mean certain death.'

And pushing Teodor further into her skirts, she refuses to let them take her beloved sister's child.

It is the final straw for Antonina, she carries Teodor to her father's house, insisting Józef takes him in.

'You helped the Jews with food,' she argues, 'now you can help your own.'

It is many weeks before Halina is strong enough to travel by cart back to Teodor. The NKVD are watching the house. Within minutes she is arrested and taken to Czortków remand prison. In quick time, she is on a train, heading east to seven years' hard labour in Magadan for uncommunist activities, still nursing infected bones in her shoulder.

Teodor remains beside his fearsome aunt, who will allow no-one else to attend to him.

Italy: Jelsi  
August 1948

The church of *Sant' Andrea Apostolo* seems impossibly squeezed between houses in the narrow streets of old Jelsi. The area around it – *Largo Chiesa Madre* - allows hardly any room for mourners on this stifling hot day in August. Above its confines, insistent tolling bells reverberate, pushing melancholy down onto the heads of the Caruso family.

Last to enter, and first to leave the funeral service, they stand aside as the D'lorio family carry Concetta's coffin out of the church. Paolo D'lorio struggles to hold the baby, Giuseppe, whilst pulling Andrea along by the hand. As they pass the Carusos, Andrea breaks free of his father and runs forward, burying his face in Antonietta's skirt. Unable to bear this painful reminder of her dead daughter, Antonietta turns helplessly to Maria, who tries to pry the toddler's fingers free.

Paolo, furious, deals a sharp flick to the back of his son's head.

Andrea takes his face from his grandmother's skirt and gives his father a silent malevolent look. Surrounding mourners gasp and mutter.

Paolo grabs the child by the hair and drags him back to the coffin. In his anger, he tightens his grip on Giuseppe. The baby squeals, 'Maa, maa.'

Those who are close enough (and even those who were not there), swear that Andrea looked up at his baby brother and said, 'Mama is dead.'

Antonietta falls upon Maria, panting in distress.

Desperately scanning the crowd for Lucia, Maria sees her sister descend the three steps from the church, crossing and re-crossing herself.

When Lucia reaches her family, she asks, 'Where are they taking her?'

'*Maria delle Grazia*. Where were you?' Maria whispers between clenched teeth. 'We came out ages ago. Andrea ran to Mama, and Peppino was crying.'

'I was praying to *Sant' Antonio*<sup>71</sup>,' says Lucia, dead-eyed.

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<sup>71</sup> Catholic tradition to pray to Saint Anthony when something is lost.

'Couldn't it wait? We are burying our sister.'

'We are not burying her, they are,' Lucia spits.

Giovanni places a restraining hand on Maria's shoulder. 'Leave her, she's been up all night, she's tired.'

The Carusos follow Paolo's family out of *Largo Chiesa Madre*, through the low elliptical alley and onto the road.

They emerge in time to see Paolo climb into a car with his sons, which then pulls out in front of the hearse.

'He's not even riding with her!' says Antonietta.

Giovanni pats her arm, 'Shh, shh.'

The remaining D'lorios drive after the hearse.

Giovanni, Antonietta, Lucia, Maria, Lina, and little Carmelina follow on foot. By the time they've walked the dusty kilometre to the *Convento di Sant'Anna, Maria delle Grazie*, the cemetery is empty, and Concetta lies beneath a mound of earth.

A low moan comes from Antonietta. 'Here, alone, with no-one,' she wails, pulling at her hair. 'They didn't even put her with their people.' Her rosary flails her face.

Lina and Carmelina sit on one of the nearby graves, yawning in the midday sun.

Antonietta paces, holding her rosary between both hands, and muttering, bead by bead. Giovanni reaches out, but she shakes him off, raising her voice, as she rapidly moves through one *Ave Maria* after another.

Giovanni shrugs, his hat in hand, and goes to Lucia who is kneeling in the dirt beside Concetta's grave. Her eyes are dry, but red and tired. He waits quietly, as she stares intensely at the fresh earth, patting it here and there as if tidying a bed.

The family linger the whole hot afternoon, before slowly making their way back. In their private grief, they walk the long way to the top of the village to avoid intrusive questions and the speculation they know will come in the following days. For now, they keep Concetta to themselves. But, despite this tactic, a few close neighbours call out condolences, crossing themselves; only to recommence their whispered gossip as soon as the family pass by.

They pick at their evening meal in silence. They have fasted all day, but few have an appetite.



Much pity and anguish has been exhausted in the past week, but when Maria and Lucia are in bed, Maria asks, 'You saw her, Lucia. At the end. What was she like?'

'Skin and bones. And bruises.'

'He locked up the food.'

Lucia replies through clenched teeth, 'Better where she is now than with him.'

'Did you see him in the car? *Orgolioso!*<sup>72</sup> He was smiling, but I could see he was embarrassed,' Maria went on, 'You didn't see how Andrea looked at him.'

'I hate this place. Go to sleep, I can't think about it any more, it hurts too much.' Lucia kisses Maria hard on her forehead, clasps her hand tight in hers, and closes her eyes. She tries to forget the feel of her sister's cold body.

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<sup>72</sup> Proud

England: Babdown Resettlement Camp Tetbury

*January 1949*

Since his arrival in England on a cold and murky October day in 1946, Stefan has moved from one Army Resettlement Unit to another.

On discharge, his experience with tobacco-growing secured a job at the Royal Agriculture College, Cirencester, where he was generous with his opinions of the students. Sadly, the students - England's finest, drawn from viscounts, earls and lords - were not so impressed with these opinions, and Stefan left after five months.

Over the next two years a series of low-level jobs follow. These are accompanied by drink, cards, and some women, but nothing to build a life on. A two-month dalliance with a wealthy widow in Dursley – five years his senior - is short lived when she throws him out.

New Year's Day, 1949 finds him back at Babdown Hostel with a throbbing hangover, and no money, still living with men.

Stefan examines his green Certificate of Registration, no. 834941, issued Cirencester, Glos., on the 10 April 1947 under the Aliens Act 1920, recording all his moves

*Nationality* Polish

*Born on* 6.4.17 in Tarnopol, Poland

*Profession or Occupation* Steward (Domestic)

*Single or Married* Married

*Arrival in United Kingdom on* 5.10.46

*Address of last Residence outside U.K.* Ravenna, Italy

*Government Service* Polish Army 18.10.38 – 19.9.39 & Sept 1941 – 4 April 1947 (Cpl)

*Passport or other papers as to Nationality and Identity.*

Army Form X204 (Polish) issued 4.4.47

The man in the photograph looking back at him is well-dressed, suited with striped shirt, and tie. His features have thickened. Italy's sun has coarsened his skin, and lines have appeared under his eyes. He looks tired. Although only 30 years old, all his youthful bloom is over-written with a 60-year-old's burden. Sadness haunts his eyes.



### 3.3

Beside this document lies an open pad and pen. Stefan picks up the pen and unscrews its top. He takes a scrap of newspaper and wipes the nib, then scribbles a few lines to get the ink flowing in the cold barracks.

Pulling the pad closer, his hand hovers back and forth over the blank paper, as if he is in the blocks, preparing to start a race, or something far greater.

It is five o'clock in the morning, and he has lain awake in his hostel bed since early dawn. He is facing one of the hardest tasks of his life; to try to find out what has happened to his family in Poland. He's seen the tears, and breakdowns, heard the angry and anguished cries from other men when the Red Cross letters arrive.

*No, not Poland* he reminds himself, screwing the cap back onto the pen, and throwing it down.

'Soviet Union,' he says aloud. The man in the bed beside stirs, mutters, and calls out in his sleep. Stefan is used to these shouts in the night. He is used to the sight of exhausted men with haunted eyes.

He reaches under the bed for a small brown cardboard suitcase. Quietly unclicking it, he moves his few items of clothing over the slippery, checked paper lining until he locates a brown envelope.

He straightens the coarse grey blanket on his bed and slides out a collection of photographs. He rifles through them, sorting into piles: fun in the desert, sights of Cairo and

the Holy Land in khaki shorts and shirts, Monte Cassino, other Italian cities in battle dress, the one of him and Adam together, inseparable long before landing in Persia, sleeves rolled to above their elbows. He smiles, reminiscing how the girls flocked to their good looks. He picks up the photo taken with Polish women soldiers, one of them tickling his head.

Finally, he selects the one he will send to Halina; a studio portrait, in profile, in a smartly-tailored uniform (no army issue for Stefan), wearing the Polish Cross of Valour, the Jerusalem Cross, and the Monte Cassino Cross. His dark hair is slicked back, his chin rests lightly on his right hand, and he gazes down, pensively.

'Teodor should see his father's medals,' he thinks, confirming his decision.



3.4

The photograph gives him courage to pick up the pen again. He unscrews its top once more and starts to write to his wife. This second letter is very different from the first, written six years ago from Persia. 'Will she reply this time?' He picks up the photograph and turns it over to see it is dated 1946. Stefan exhales, long and thin between pursed lips, 'Seven years since I last saw her. What have I done with these years since the war ended?'

'My dear wife!' he starts. And, having once started, he continues. He tells her he is well, that he is in England, that he has a job, and... 'And what?' he thinks. 'That I have a house,

that I have anything at all? That I long to see her and the child? That war is a terrible thing, but that peace is harder? That I am lonely?’

He tears the page and starts again. When he is satisfied, he addresses the pale blue envelope with its chevron edging:

Pani Halina Motkaluk  
Germakówka  
Tarnopol Oblast  
USSR

He does not know that this place no longer exists. Its name has changed to Hermakivka, Ternopil, and its people are no longer Polish but Soviet Ukrainians.

He licks the envelope and, at the last moment, remembers to slip the photograph inside. He puts the envelope into a pocket in his old battle dress jacket, then tidies away the photographs before heading to the wash-house. The smell of frying bacon wafts across the camp. ‘One barracks to another,’ he thinks, ‘Is that what I fought for?’

March 1949

'Why so miserable?' Adam asks Stefan. The two men are cleaning their shoes on the barrack steps. Their nostrils fill with the naphtha turpentine smell of polish as they chuff their brushes back and forth.

'We're going to have a great time tonight. I heard some of the local girls have organised a bus,' says Adam.

No reply.

'Stefan, what's wrong with you? I said, women. Are you still sulking about that letter?'

Stefan sniffs, 'It's been months now, and nothing. Nothing from my first letter either. That's six years, Adam, six years since I first wrote.'

Adam looks at his friend, 'Put down that brush, and listen.'

Stefan stops his violent brushing and wipes his forehead with the heel of his hand. It is a warm day for March and, despite their strip-wash, both men are sweating into their white vests.

'She's gone, Stefan. You must accept it. You'll drive yourself mad like this.'

'Don't *you* ever miss your family, Adam?'

'All the time, of course I miss them. But what can we do? We are lost people wandering this world looking for comfort where we can find it.'

'I have a son, you know,' says Stefan, looking towards the family barracks, where children are playing with a bucket of water.

'Yes, you have a son. And I do not.' Adam's gentle voice is quieter than usual.

Stefan quickly responds, 'No, no, I didn't mean it's any easier for you.'

Adam passes a cigarette, lights his own, then Stefan's. He sits back on his heels, and blows a long stream of smoke through half-closed lips. Finally, he says, 'My wife was pregnant.'

'I'm sorry, I didn't know.' Stefan reddens, and moves to pick up his brush again. Adam stills his hand.

'No. You're going to hear this. Tomczak, you know him? He got a letter from home. I don't know how they got it out, or how they found him; he never wrote to them.'

'So?'

'So, Wołyń<sup>73</sup>. He's from the village next to mine. He...' Adam stops. He exhales a deep smoke-laden sigh. 'He got word from home, UPA.<sup>74</sup> His people escaped, some of them.'

Once started, Adam does not falter, 'My family didn't: wife, mother, father, and my son. Yes, my son, the one I don't have. He *was* born, and then he died, two minutes before his mother.

'They waited for her to give birth, on the ground, then they killed him, in front of his mother's eyes. Then her... then my mother... next my father.'

'Adam...'

Adam raises a hand. 'Please don't speak.' He continues, 'I never got to hold him, Stefan, to feel his presence in the world.'

Adam's head drops, rivulets of tears drip from his face onto his black shoes, like tiny black beetles scurrying over a black polished dome.

'He shouldn't have told you, this is wrong.' Stefan throws down his shoe brush, angrily. 'It's not his business to tell things like this.'

Adam looks up. 'Not his business? Whose business is it then, Stefan?'

No answer.

'Stefan, look at me. Do you think it better not to know?'

Stefan takes a deep drag, its smoke sighs out between his words, 'I don't know, Adam, I don't know. What was her name, your wife?'

---

<sup>73</sup> Wołyń Voivodeship, a higher administrative region (one of sixteen) of the Second Polish Republic (dates 1920-1939) to the north of Tarnopol. Stefan's village is further to the south of Wołyń. In the years of 1942–1944 Wołyń (Volhynia) was subject to genocide, conducted by paramilitary groups associated with the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), in particular, the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA). These forces engaged in summary executions and massacres of the Polish population, along with the destruction of settlements. The razing of towns and villages would continue until August 1944. Estimates of the slaughter vary: Władysław and Ewa Siemaszko estimate that around 60,000 Poles were massacred in the province. According to historian Professor Czesław Partacz (Historian and Lecturer at the Koszaliniejskiej Politechnic) the true figure of massacred Poles was between 134,000 and 150,000. Ukrainians who opposed the attacks on Poles were themselves targeted with similar aggression.

<sup>74</sup> Ukrainian Insurgent Army

'I do not speak her name to anyone. She is here.' He places his palm onto his chest, 'with me; my woman and my boy. I carry them here.'

The men look at each other.

'I'm so lonely,' Stefan says.

'Find someone else. Isn't that what you told Halina? Take your own advice.'

Stefan's head drops.

Adam jumps up, and as if the conversation has never happened, he says, 'Come on! We have to press our trousers. We cannot disappoint the ladies.'

---

Three days later, Stefan meets Stanczyk on his way to Listers, where they both work in the fibre board shop.

'Stefan,' greets the older man. They shake hands and pat each other's shoulders roughly.

'How goes it?' asks Stanczyk, blinking from his round, pink face. White stubble on his shaved head glistens like frosting in the sunshine.

'Good, good. I'm glad I saw you to talk to. I need some advice.'

'My ears and heart are open, tell me. You want a woman, yes?'

Stefan frowns, 'Who have you been talking to?'

'No-one, I can tell when a man is ready to settle down. Do you have anyone in mind? That widow, perhaps?' Stanczyk smiles. He is able to manage Stefan's moods without the young man knowing it.

'That witch? She's crazy.'

Both men laugh.

They walk on a while, flanked on both sides by the winter skeletons of cow parsley standing like sentinels in the dead hedgerow.

'No,' Stefan says, eventually. 'I'm thinking of Lucietta.'

Stanczyk peers enquiringly at his young friend. 'The Italian? I thought she was history?'

'Not, history,' Stefan demurs, 'I just haven't been in touch with her lately. Do you think she will answer me if I write?'

'Only one way to find out. If she isn't married, maybe.'



'Married? No, she sent me a photo, "I'm always yours for all my life" she wrote. Anyway, that's what she said two years ago.'

'Two years ago! Are you mad, do you think a woman would wait that long?' Stanczyk blows his nose with his fingers, and flicks snot onto the road.

'She had reason to, I... we... Well, we exchanged a couple of lines since then – photographs - nothing serious.'

'And what are you going to do with her? Go to Italy? It's worse there than here.'

'I have a new job, big house near here. There's a cottage. I will ask for her to come.'

'She'll need a sponsor,' Stanczyk hawks and spits onto the road. 'Why don't you take a nice Polish girl? I can find you one. My brother's wife has four sisters, plain but hard workers. Healthy, strong.'

Stefan laughs, 'Like a horse?' He punches Stanczyk's arm and almost knocks the old man over.

---

Once again, Stefan sorts through his photographs. He picks up, studies, and discards each one, sighing in between. There is a gramophone playing in the barracks, and someone is humming along, badly, to its crackling music.

'Can't you play something cheerful,' calls the man lying on the bed next to Stefan's. 'Stefan, here, is writing to his *innamorata*.'<sup>75</sup>

Several men laugh, and gather around the gramophone, picking out records. 'Let's see if we can find something to help him,' says one.

'Stand back, stand back, don't touch them,' shouts the gramophone owner. 'I know what you lot are like, you don't deserve nice things.'

'What do you have so precious here?' says an ex-sergeant, diving into the box.

---

<sup>75</sup> *Innamorata*: romantic lover as opposed to *Amante*: sexual lover

'Leave them, I say,' replies Mr Gramophone, 'I didn't carry this lot all the way from Naples, so you peasants could scratch them. I will choose.'

He flicks through the records, sucking his teeth until, finally he brandishes his choice. 'Here, Tito Schipa, *Vivere*.'<sup>76</sup>

He lifts the needle and replaces the previous record with his selection.

Thirty seconds into *Vivere*, everyone is shouting, including Stefan.

'No!' the sergeant yells. 'Haven't you got anything more *romantico*?' he leers, rubbing his stomach.

'You animals. Let's see, I have Jone Caciagli, *C'Era Un Sentiero Nel Bosco*'<sup>77</sup>. The men laugh louder.

'Ah, no. This one,' says gramophone man, changing the record.

Pretty soon, the needle picks up Enrico Caruso singing *Santa Lucia*. Several of the group turn to each other with arms outstretched. Coupled up, they sway around the centre of the barrack room with exaggerated displays of adoration on their unshaven faces. As they pass Stefan, they blow kisses in his direction, and glide on.

'Get lost, *frajerzy*,'<sup>78</sup> he laughs, throwing his pillow.

One of the men picks it up, and starts to make love to it, kissing its plumpness, 'Oh, Lucia, Lucietta, my darling. I left my love in Italy. I dream of you every night.'

'Yes, and your sheets are a sticky mess every morning,' shouts the Sergeant. The succeeding uproar blots out the music.

The song ends, and gramophone man changes the record to *Non Ti Scordar Di Me*, Don't Forget About Me<sup>79</sup>. As Beniamino Gigli's mellifluous tones float out across the barrack, the men drift back to their beds, each picking up where the fun left them.

*Partirono le rondini dal mio paese  
freddo e senza sole,  
cercando primavera di viole,  
nidi d'amore e di felicità.*

The swallows left  
From my cold and sunless country.  
Searching for Springs full of violets  
And lovely happy nests.

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<sup>76</sup> 'Live'

<sup>77</sup> There was a path in the wood

<sup>78</sup> Suckers

<sup>79</sup> Written in 1912 by Ernesto Di Curtis (1875 – 1937) First sung by Gigli in 1935

*La mia piccolo rondine partì  
senza lasciarmi un bacio,  
senza un addio partì.*

*Non ti scordar di me:  
la vita mia legata è a te.  
Io t'am sempre più,  
nel sogno mio rimani tu.*

*Non ti scordar di me:  
la vita mia legata è a te.  
C'è sempre un nido nel mio cor per te.  
Non ti scordar di me!*

*Non ti scordar di me!  
Non ti scordar di me!*

My little swallow left  
Without leaving me a kiss  
She left without a goodbye

Don't forget about me:  
My life is tied to you  
I love you more and more  
In my dream, you stay.

Don't forget about me:  
My life is tied to you  
There's always a nest  
In my heart, for you.

Don't forget about me!  
Don't forget about me!

Stefan goes back to his photographs. He picks one up and, with a decisive gesture, flips it over and writes on the back.

Italy: Jelsi  
April 1949

Lucia and Maria stroll along *via Roma*, arm in arm with Teresa. The letter in Lucia's pocket burns into her thigh. Ever since the girls were stopped by *Postino D'Pietro* flapping a letter, Lucia has felt Maria's attention on her. She notices Maria steal sidelong glances when Teresa is talking, and Teresa is always talking.

Later, when Teresa goes home, the sisters sneak into the courtyard behind the house. They huddle over the letter.

'What does he say? Did he go home? Where is he?' Maria fires questions, her face thrust over Lucia's hands.

Sucking her teeth, Lucia pushes her sister back. 'It is my letter, let me read it in peace.'

Maria flumps back against the wall, arms crossed, and kicks at the ground, while Lucia examines the envelope before opening it. She reads slowly, sometimes scanning lines a second or third time to make sense of the sentences. This is a letter she wants to understand clearly. But Stefan's poor written Italian, coupled with his strange cursive style is confusing.

In the two years since Stefan was last in Jelsi, there have been few letters; usually polite, enquiring after the family, her health, and so on. The last six months, there has been nothing at all. The family has puzzled over this silence, considering he spent two months recovering from his wounds in their house. Speculation ranged from death to 'other women', and everything in between.

Beside this, Maria and Teresa's constant badgering about boyfriends has troubled Lucia more than she will admit; neither sister nor friend understands why Lucia is so reluctant to meet boys. 'Do you want to stay a virgin for ever?' Maria would taunt. Lucia remains tight-lipped and tense, fervently praying to *Sant Antonio*. The letter in her hand looks like an answer to these prayers.

'Come on,' Lucia says, hastily returning the letter to her pocket, 'Mama will be waiting.'

Maria bounces herself off the wall, arms still folded and plods back to the house behind Lucia.

Early the next day, Lucia finds a moment alone, and taking her notebook, she flicks the pages to its centre and picks up a photograph of Stefan. He is lying in bed, gazing directly at her with a look she well remembers; soft, languid eyes, a half smile on his lips. He has one hand behind his head, the other rests casually along his flank. He is wearing pyjamas. 'Who took this?' flashes through her mind, blinding rational thought. She turns over the picture and reads, '*Ti ricordo questo uomo?*<sup>80</sup>' Her heart thrums so fast, she tries to still it with a hand to her chest. The photo trembles between her fingers.

Maria enters the kitchen, lifting the heavy *spara*<sup>81</sup> down from her head. She tries to grab the cloth roll before it falls but only succeeds in splashing water onto the hearth, causing sizzling balls to run in all directions.

'Let me see,' she says.

'No, it's only a card.' Lucia hastily hides the photo in her notebook and, picking it up, she says, 'I have to speak to Father, where is he?'

Maria shrugs her damp shoulders and pouts.

Lucia finds her father sitting on the monument steps chatting with a couple of his friends. They are all chewing raw garlic.

'Papa?' she calls from across the wide road.

Giovanni looks over and gets up. Bidding his friends farewell, he crosses the wide road back to the house. As he comes closer, he notes her distress.

'Papa...' Lucia repeats, her hand firmly on the letter in pocket, the other clutching her notebook. 'I need to speak with you.'

'Come on, you poor creature. Let's go for a little walk away from this chatter.' He adjusts his hat, and guides Lucia with a gentle arm. Seeing his wife coming up the hill, he says, 'Antonietta, we're going for some air, Lucia has been sewing all day.'

Antonietta tuts, 'All day, is it? She must be exhausted, it's 10 o'clock already.'

Her neighbour laughs but Giovanni dismisses them with a backward wave of his hand.

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<sup>80</sup> Remember this man?

<sup>81</sup> Copper water pot for carrying water from the shared well behind the house. The pot was carried on the head on a *spara* (dialect for a rolled cloth or handkerchief used to make a soft pad and balance the pot). Those without access to a communal well would fetch water from the fountain in Piazza Umberto at the bottom of the hill.

Lucia and Giovanni walk in companionable silence towards the bottom of the village then turn left on via Roma towards the river.

Once they are out of earshot of the houses, Giovanni is first to speak, 'You got a letter yesterday. From Stefano.'

'How did you know?' Lucia replies.

'Jelsi, you think you can keep a secret here?' Giovanni laughs, then starts to cough.

Lucia bites her lip. She is all tension. 'Papa...'

'You want to leave,' says Giovanni, simply.

'Papa...' Lucia tries again.

Giovanni places a hand on his daughter's shoulder, 'You will need a photograph, a proper one.'

'Photograph?' Lucia's middle finger pushes the crinkly edge of Stefan's photograph as her hand closes over her notebook.

'For your documents. I will help you. But, you must promise me one thing.'

'Yes, Papa,' says Lucia, wondering how things have got to this stage so quickly.

'If things don't work out, you come home.'

'I promise, Papa,' she says, squeezing her father's arm.

'I mean it, Lucia. I can't lose another... you write to me, and I will come and get you, wherever you are.'

'Thank you, Papa.' In her confusion, Lucia stumbles on a raised cobble. Giovanni steadies her.

'Where are you going, anyway?' he asks.

'England, Papa, England. He says he has a place for us, a good house. But Mama..., what will she say?'

'Leave her to me.' Giovanni and Lucia find themselves back in the village, outside the church. Giovanni looks up. 'We'll tell everyone you had a proxy wedding.'

Lucia gasps. Until this moment, she has not realised the irrevocability of what she is about to do.

That night, Stefan is the topic of another whispered conversation between Giovanni and Antonietta. Antonietta opposes the plan.

'What do we know about him? Where she's going?'

'She's going to a good man,' replies Giovanni.

'A good man? All men are good to you. Until they're not,' scorns Antonietta.

'If I remember, you were in favour of D'Iorio. Land, I believe. You *contadini*, it's all you ever think of, where is your maternal instinct? Your feeling?'

He feels his wife's ire in the darkness of their bedroom, which grows chillier with each thought passing through Antonietta's slow brain.

'What will people say? What will we tell them?'

'We tell them what they need to know.'

Italy: Campobasso  
December 1949

Lucia and Giovanni are in the back room of Foto Ottica Ballanti, Piazza Vittorio Emanuele II, Campobasso.

'Don't smile. Lucia, you mustn't smile.'

The photographer frowns at Giovanni. '*Gentile Signore*, perhaps you would like to sit here, where the *signorina* will be able to hear your instructions? For my part, I am just a humble photographer; my twenty years of experience is happy to accommodate your superior knowledge.'

Giovanni grunts before sitting, as bidden, on the velour seat. Down onto his knees he plonks his large hands. They have been severely scrubbed for this visit to Campobasso with Lucia, his now eldest daughter. He sniffs.

'*Allora, signorina*, present your face a little this way. Do not look so afraid, you are joining your *fidanzato*<sup>82</sup>, yes?'



3.5

Lucia hesitates a second too long; the photographer understands.

'Perhaps a friend then? America?'

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<sup>82</sup> Fiancé



'England, Giovanni snorts. 'She is going to England to join her husband. She will live in a great house with an educated family. Would you like me to repeat that, so you can remember the detail when you gossip with your friends? Or perhaps you prefer to add your own?'

This time it is the photographer's turn to sniff. He proceeds with exaggerated formality until the bill is paid.

'Thank you, the photographs will be ready in two weeks. I hope they bring you what you are looking for, *signorina*,' says Signore Ballanti.

Out on the pavement, Lucia smiles at her frowning father, 'Papa, why did you do that?'

'I have been in the world, daughter, and I have lived in a village. That man lives six kilometers from where he was born, and he still thinks like a eunuch. You give these people anything and they'll massacre you with it. Come, we go. He will send the photographs. I want to buy you a watch.'

---

After thorough examination of the officially marked package - *Repubblica Italiana* – Di Pietro sighs, adjusts his cap and cycles up the hill to the Caruso house for a signature. He thinks how he'll freewheel back down for his morning coffee and how, within hours, the village will be humming with his news. Another leaving. Where to? And, more importantly, how?

Many want to go, that is not in dispute; everyone understands the reasons. But how to achieve it? That is the trick. As far as he knows, the Caruso girls have no connections anywhere. So how did Lucia manage it? 'People are always speculating about that one', he thinks. Perspiration breaks out under his cap as he remembers her lace blouse and tight skirt last Sunday morning; the men waiting outside the church nudging each other as she walked in to take her place in the women's section. By the time they went in, and the gates clanged shut between the sexes, they could see people twisting around in their seats; expressions of shock, at this 'nose in the air' creature. She could have had anyone, and in their jealous hearts they knew it.

'Too good for Jelsi, too good for the school teacher, too good for Don Carlo– so, what does she have between *her* legs that's so special?' Rosa asks him later, 'and who is she saving it for?'

The postman's breath quickens at the thought. '*Merda*, this hill is steep.' He passes the war memorial but today, Giovanni has found work on the roads. 'That big shot from America,' Rosa called him, 'an artisan. Where is his money now, eh?'

'I know,' thinks Di Pietro, puffing, 'Antonietta dressed those girls like dolls - that's where. Now see what she's got: one in the grave, younger ones breaking rocks with their father while the older girls swagger like grand ladies. Yeah, big shot.'

He gets off his bike outside no. 63, pulls down his jacket, adjusts his hat, and raps on the door.

England  
*January 1950*

Stefan paces up and down the platform at Victoria Station. He is dressed for town in his brown demob suit, shoes sparkling. He checks the tickets in his inside pocket for the fifth time. Platform 8 is crowded by the time the boat train from Folkestone chuffs towards him. He's already seen two come and go, and the clackety clack of the arrivals board is beginning to jar. 'Will she be on this one?'

'The train now arriving on Platform 8...' crackles the latest announcement; its ending blotted out by the sound of loudly expelling steam as the train's engine comes to rest. He has it by heart anyway. As coal smoke envelopes him, the noise and movement all around trigger memories of cattle trucks and troop trains, accompanied by fear, hunger, thirst, lice, and death.

Milling crowds get in Stefan's way as he systematically checks each carriage. She is not there. Cursing, he decides to check one last time before giving up. Nothing. The train empties and the people drift away.

Before leaving the station, he checks the waiting room. He sees a young woman in a white blouse and crumpled black costume sitting, staring at the ground, her cardboard suitcase by her feet. She fumbles nervously with a piece of paper in her lap. Her face is deathly white.

Throwing open the swing doors Stefan calls her name, 'Lucia.'

Lucia looks up. 'Stefan?' she asks, searching the man's face for something she might recognise. His civilian clothes confuse her. He looks thinner and paler than she remembers.

'How long have you been here? I've been looking for you.' Stefan's relief is palpable.

'Stefan,' she finally breathes in relief.

'I didn't see you get off the train. I looked,' he says, stepping towards her, letting the door slam shut behind him.

'I wasn't on this train,' Lucia sniffs. 'I've been waiting hours. I didn't know what to do, where to go. I...'. She starts to sob.

Stefan raises an arm towards the door, 'I was here, waiting. On the platform. Didn't you see me?'

'No, I looked. *You* didn't see *me*. A man, uniform, brought me here. Stefan, it was terrible, I've been so sick on the boat.' She sniffles.

Stefan moves closer, widening his arms, but she pulls back out of reach. He grunts, dropping his empty arms to his side. 'Come on then, stop crying. I'll buy you a cup of tea.' Reaching for her case he swings it up easily. With his other arm he takes her elbow and lifts her to her feet. He feels her shaking.

'It's all right,' he soothes, 'You're here now. It's all right.' He puts his arm around her waist and kisses her on each cheek, then on her stiff lips. This time, he remembers to smile, and she returns with a tentative one of her own. 'Come on.'

Out on the noisy platform, a large white hand points towards the arched entrance to the tea room. Stefan ushers her in and finds an empty table. He sits her on a bentwood chair, observing her awkwardness in these new surroundings. 'I get tea,' he says, before approaching the counter, where he fumbles for his money. He tries to count it out nonchalantly, half expecting a challenge from the serving woman.

He returns to Lucia with two cups of tea and a bun for each of them.

'Eat. We get another train. From Paddington. Paddington.' As if saying it twice might make it mean something to her. 'I have tickets. Mr. Kershaw will meet us. Come on, eat.'

---

Eying it sceptically, Lucia reaches for her bun. Its shiny glaze glues itself to her fingers, which she tries to lick without Stefan noticing.

Looking around, Lucia relaxes enough to compare Victoria's worn interior to Roma Termini's vast arena of marble, light and palm trees.

When they step outside the station, it is clear too that its drizzly external grandeur fares poorly against the Italian station's brutal modern facade, last seen sparkling in winter sunshine.

Competing with Lucia's mood, low grey clouds seem to drop the sky to street level.

Stefan pushes her towards a flower seller pitched by the glitzy cigarette kiosk. People rush determinedly in all directions. Lucia, wide-eyed, forgets her pride for a moment, and marvels at how they all seem to know where they're going. She is clueless, but Stefan seems in control. However, as she feels his grip tighten on her arm, she wonders whether it's for her benefit or his. He steers her towards the flower seller and picks out a bunch of snowdrops.

Recalling the golden mimosa of home wistfully, Lucia finds herself soothed by the fresh smell of the cut flowers.

'Half a crown, my son,' chances the seller through a toothless grin.

Stefan passes the flowers to Lucia before diving under his jacket to reach his trouser pocket. This time there is no fumbling or jingling; he fishes out a single large silver coin, muttering something incomprehensible under his breath, and hands it over.

'Bus to Paddington?' he asks the old man.

'Over there, mate, no. 9.' Pointing to a rank of waiting buses. 'Good luck, lady,' he winks at Lucia.

They rush alongside a row of tall, grubby, red buses. Lucia has never seen anything like these, even in Rome. They clamber in and take a seat. It prickles the backs of her knees. She notices that Stefan is slightly breathless and sits very stiffly. She wonders again at his ability to navigate this city alone. Her father had, at least, come with her as far as Paris, reluctantly leaving her on the boat train to Folkestone. But not before he'd checked out everyone in the compartment and commended his daughter to the care of an elderly matron. She remembers his last words, 'Cara, you can always return to your family. There is no shame in that.'

'No shame, Papa,' she thought, remembering his last, ignominious return from America, and the spiteful village tongues. 'Oh no, Papa. This is my life now. Whatever happens.'

Several hours later, they alight at Cheltenham. The station master has already been primed by Mr. Anthony Kershaw to telephone the house for a car.

In no time, a gleaming black saloon pulls up at the small, Cotswold stone, provincial station heralding its arrival with a toot of its horn. A handsome woman gets out and approaches Stefan and Lucia, her arms outstretched. *'Benvenuto, Lucietta. É un piacere conoscerla, finalmente.* Welcome, it's a pleasure to finally meet you.'

Stefan introduces her as Mrs. Kershaw.

'Call me Barbara,' she says embracing Lucia warmly in a cloud of Hermès silk and heavenly Schiaparelli fragrance. *'Andiamo a casa, vieni.* Let's go home, come.' She beckons towards the car.

Lucia bursts into tears. Her last real embrace was her father's and since then she has felt thirsty, hungry, sick, tired and abandoned. The hour and half in Victoria Station's waiting room, she spent digging her nails into her palms, wondering whether to throw herself under a train or onto to a stranger's mercy.

The arrival of the man she thought she knew, only partly alleviated her misery, which was then compounded by an incomprehensible journey. For all the time she spent, largely in silence, clutching a limp bunch of tatty snowdrops, to now be wrapped in a blanket of her own language by this strong, confident woman, feels like home. For a while, anyway.

Barbara looks sharply at Stefan, 'Stefano, what have you done to the poor girl?'

Stefan shakes his head angrily and loads Lucia's suitcase. He tersely instructs Lucia to get into the car, opening the rear door.

'No, you sit in the back, Stefan. Lucietta can ride with me. I want to ask her about Italy.'

---

The ride to Long Furlong is filled with Barbara's reminiscences of pre-war Florence; the wonderfully sensual year she spent studying Renaissance art, and Italian manhood. Lucia's face shows a mixture of entrancement and shock, not least at Barbara's driving. Stefan's occasional cautionary outburst is ignored as the car hurtles through high-banked Cotswold lanes to, finally, arrive at Long Furlong.

Lucia views the vast house suspiciously, as she steps onto the gravel drive. It appears, to her, to be in the middle of nowhere, surrounded by fields and trees. Its dirty Cotswold stone looks particularly dour in the damp season, and its trees seem to finger the louring sky.

Barbara takes her suitcase from Stefan and, guiding Lucia by the arm through the front door, leads her up several flights of gradually narrowing stairs to a small room at the top of the house.

‘This is your room. Nurse is next door and we are on the floor below. You share the bathroom with Nurse and the children. Cook lives in the cottage. When you’re ready, come down to the kitchen, and I’ll introduce you to everyone.’ Then she is gone in a flash of perfume and high heels, clattering down the wooden stairs.

*The kitchen?* wonders Lucia, surveying the room.

Finding herself in the first room she has ever had for herself alone, she timidly opens the dark, scratched wardrobe, only to jump back when confronted by her image moving across a full-length mirror screwed to the inside of the door. Regaining composure, she reviews herself from different angles, running her hands over her hips and down her creased skirt. She removes her jacket and hangs it on one of the five faded pink, padded-silk hangers.

She sniffs at the dark stains under her arms. Quickly, she loosens her blouse, lifting it away from her damp body. She scrubs at the dark-haired armpits with her handkerchief then smells it, wrinkling her nose. Casting about the room for a jug of water, or a towel, she spots a bottle of eau de Cologne on the battered dressing table. Lucia unscrews the top and shakes droplets onto her hand, before rubbing her palms together. The heat brings out a stale smell of Ashes of Roses, which she rubs vigorously under each arm. Satisfied, she wipes her hands with her handkerchief, and starts to unpack her suitcase.

She lifts each item and carefully spreads it onto the pink candlewick bedspread: a white blouse, a yellow flowered dress, a black pinafore skirt, a black cardigan, one petticoat, one brassiere, one pair of stockings, two nightdresses, and four pairs of knickers; all homemade. She smooths out creases in the dress, skirt and blouse, and hangs them in the wardrobe, well away from her jacket.

After refolding her underwear and cardigan, she turns to the dressing table in front of the window. She opens the top drawer, and finds it lined with the same wallpaper that

decorates her room: a textured, faded green, abstract pattern. She groups and re-groups her intimate items until, satisfied with her logic, they are ready to pass an imagined inspection.

When she picks up her hairbrush, however, she hesitates. First, she places it in the drawer beside her nightdress, but seeing a stray hair migrate to the pale satin she hastily removes the brush. She tries the glass tray on top of the dressing table. Then quickly takes it away again, lest someone thinks it too forward of her to colonise this space so confidently. Frowning, she compromises by turning it bristle-side-down on the glass tray.

The dressing table is over-large for such a small room; its bow-fronted, walnut drawers and bevelled mirror suggest better days in grander surroundings. Lucia tilts the mirror until it catches the late winter light. She takes her compact and lipstick and adjusts her face, ready to descend three floors down to the kitchen. But first, from her handbag, she takes an ancient ravioli cutter; her mother's last-minute parting gift. Spinning it with a ting, she drops it back into her bag, clicking it shut.

Shouting and movement from below her window encourages her to squeeze past the dressing table to pull aside a green damask curtain. She sees Stefan and another man – well-dressed – leading a horse into a paddock beyond a walled garden. The well-dressed man is shouting instructions, which Stefan seems to ignore. He has changed into working trousers, shirt and shearling-lined jerkin.

Stefan holds the horse's halter, while the well-dressed man tries to rub down its legs with straw. The horse, meanwhile, tries to reach a bucket, which Stefan holds back in his other hand. The horse jerks and headbutts Stefan's shoulder, invoking more shouting from the well-dressed man. Straightening up, the man throws his straw at Stefan's feet and, waving an arm at him, he storms off across the field. By the time he's reached the paddock gate, Stefan has removed the horse's bridle and holds out the bucket.

Looking down, Lucia recalls the sweet smell of horse sweat on *zio* Nicodemus' mare, and imagines she can hear the snuffling snorts and blows in the bucket of oats of the horse down below.

Stefan, meanwhile, lifts his felt cap and waves back at his employer's dismissive gesture. He has not called any man, 'sir' since leaving the army eighteen months ago. He



ignores the man's unnecessary shouted instructions, and a satisfied grin crosses his face as he hears Anthony Kershaw, QC issue a fine curse.

Lights come on in the house as the January night grows. He sees the dining room curtains being drawn. A quick count tells him which rooms are inhabited and with what activity. Raising his eyes to the casement window in the roof, he sees Lucia's pale face looking down. He waves but she draws back quickly.

Replacing his cap, he slaps the horse's rump and watches as it canters across the field. He picks up the discarded bucket and makes for the back door into the scullery.

By the time he enters the warm kitchen, washed and combed, Lucia has already been introduced to Cook, Nurse and Mr Kershaw. Stefan's arrival precipitates an upstairs withdrawal so that he is left to sit down to a meal with Lucia. Cook hovers around the kitchen, fetching and carrying food to the dining room so they are largely alone.

'Well, what do you think? Do you like your room?' he asks Lucia.

'It is very nice,' she replies.

'Maybe you can show it to me later?' Stefan squeezes Lucia's cheek. He feels her tense.

'Where do you sleep?' she asks.

'Don't worry, far away from you,' he grunts, turning his attention to his meal. 'You shouldn't trust that Nurse, she's Hungarian.' He notes her confused look. 'How much do you know about the war?'

'Stefan, please.'

'Finish your food. I'll see you tomorrow.' And with that, Stefan returns to his room in the cottage. He changes his clothes and walks the three miles to Babdown, where he finds Adam immersed in his cards.

Pulling up a chair, he waits to be dealt into the next game.

'What are you doing here?' Adam raises an eyebrow, as he passes Stefan a cigarette. 'I thought you'd be cuddling in the barn by now.' The other men laugh.

Stefan laughs too. 'Too cold for cuddling. She's frightened like a rabbit.'

'Motkaluk! You in or out?' calls the dealer. Heads turn from the next table, and Stefan stiffens.

'Relax, man, it's okay', soothes Adam. 'They don't know you like we do. Pick up your cards.'

By midnight, having lost all his money, Stefan heads for home, striking across the moonlit fields instead of taking the lanes.

Morning does little to lighten his losses or his mood when he enters the kitchen for breakfast. He sits at his usual place and watches Lucia help Cook.

Nurse arrives for the children's breakfast. 'Bring the tray to the nursery when it's ready,' she instructs Lucia, who looks blankly at her. 'Don't you speak English?' the woman snaps.

'I speak English,' says Stefan, coming to his feet. 'And she's not here to do your work. Carry your own tray.'

Nurse pulls herself up to her full hauteur, 'Mrs. Kershaw will hear about this.'

'She'll hear it from me first,' says Stefan, taking a step forward. 'Go on, go and do your job, and leave other people to do theirs.'

Nurse flounces as best she can, while balancing four bowls of porridge, and leaves the kitchen with her starched white apron flapping. Lucia looks at Stefan, then sits down next to him.

'I will teach you English. You won't get by in this house speaking Italian when Barbara goes to London.'

'*Grazie*,' Lucia says, smiling for the first time since he met her at the station. He feels a timid touch from her hand on his.

Every evening from then on, Stefan puts Lucia through her lessons. Cook helps by finding discarded children's books and lends her copies of the *Mirror*, but only if they are kept hidden from Mr. Kershaw.

On Sunday afternoons, if it is dry, Stefan takes Lucia walking. His attempts to pull her into the woods are constantly thwarted. Lucia, he notes, prefers a bus ride to Tetbury, where she spends a great deal of time examining shop windows.

However, he notices that, every day, she finds time to watch him care for Slim. He takes pride in the horse, tending its glossy coat, and shining its tack.

'Do you want to ride him?' he finally asks, one bright, April morning after Mr. Kershaw has left on the early London train.

'Can I? Won't anyone mind?'

'Of course not, it's only a horse. Anyway, Barbara adores you.'

Lucia looks down at her smart, high waisted slacks. 'She gave me these, and other things. Nurse is furious.'

'Nurse is fat,' laughs Stefan. 'She was after me, you know, when I first came here.'

'After you? What for?' Lucia taunts.

'What do you think,' Stefan says, grabbing her wrist. He plants a hard kiss on her mouth. 'That's why she doesn't like you. Let's show her.'

'No, it's not right. We have to be married. What if something happens?'

Stefan loosens his grip. 'We can't marry yet, I told you.'

'You told me to come here, and we would be married. Now you say we can't. And you won't tell me why.'

'It's complicated. I have to talk to Mr. Kershaw, then we'll see. He knows the law.'

'The law?'

'Look, I have no documents, I told you I was married. Before. I cannot prove anything... I have to talk to him.' Stefan returns to grooming the horse.

Lucia speaks to his back, 'You can kiss me but you can't marry me, is that it?'

'I'll see to it,' he shouts.

---

Stefan's interview with Anthony Kershaw is short. His employer, dressed in evening wear, is already half-way through the first of his pre-dinner whiskys.

'I can't help you with so little information. If you persist along these lines, the way I see it you have two options: either you lie to the registrar, and say your wife is dead – which makes you a bigamist – or you make calf-eyes at that girl until she gets fed up and goes off with someone else.'

Stefan sits, implacable until Kershaw sighs, 'Look, are you sure you can't contact this, this, what's her name, woman?'

Stefan holds the edge of his employer's large desk and leans forward. 'Halina,' he says, tightening his grip on the desk.

'This Halina, then. Just write to her, ask for a divorce and I'll make out the petition. All she has to do is sign it.'

'I can't,' Stefan's breathe comes hard and his brow shines.

'You keep saying that, but you don't say why!' Kershaw bangs the desk, rattling his pen tray.

'I told you,' Stefan says, also becoming agitated, 'It's too dangerous.'

'Look, man, they can't get you here. This is England, the Cotswolds, for God's sake. Besides, you're not *that* important.'

'No, I'm not that important, but ...' Abruptly, Stefan stands, 'If that is all the help you can give me, I'll go to my work.'

'For God's sake. Oh, go on then. Bloody Poles; really.'

Just as Stefan is closing the door, Kershaw calls out, 'And tell my wife to be ready to leave by five. Hear me? Five!'

The Kershaws' bedroom door flies open in response to Stefan's knock. Barbara stands barefoot before him, holding up the front of her evening gown in one hand, and a cut crystal glass in the other. Seeming to have a life of its own, blonde hair wafts over her face.

'Stefan, thank God it's you,' she says.

'Your husband says, five o'clock he's leaving. With or without you.'

'What? Oh, Stefan, you and your jokes. Quick, get Lucia, tell her there's a disaster with my dress. I need her help.'

Stefan finds Lucia in the kitchen, chatting with Cook. 'She wants you upstairs.'

Lucia hurries upstairs to find Barbara slumped in an armchair, one shoulder bare - with a naked breast about to flop out - the other draped in black chiffon. Her smile as Lucia approaches is a little hazy. An empty tumbler sits on a mahogany side table beside her. She peers through smoke drifting from a cigarette clenched between her teeth.

'Ah, there you. You need to help, fucking zip's broken,' she drawls. 'Good girl.'

Lucia picks up the gin glass and replaces it onto a silver coaster; too late to save the polish from a white ring.

'You must stand up, *signora*,' she says.

'*Si, si*, the *signora* must stand up.' Leaning over, Barbara slowly places her cigarette in a glass ashtray. She observes it for a moment before carefully re-positioning it.

'Can't be too careful,' she says, using her arms to push herself up out of the chair.

Lucia quickly covers the now fully exposed breast and pulls the dress strap over Barbara's shoulder.

She turns her mistress round with well-practised authority and brings together the two sides of the bodice. The zip-pull hangs uselessly like an exhausted seagull. Lucia pulls, trying to connect the hook and eye, but Barbara's last pregnancy – her fourth – has done its work.

'It is broken, *signora*,' she says.

'I know it's bloody broken, that's why I sent for you. Can't you do something?'

'Another dress, perhaps?' Lucia ventures.

'This is the only one I can get my arse into, Lucia. Oh God, don't have children, they ruin you.'

Barbara flops back into the armchair, reaching for her glass. She lifts it to her mouth, then lowers it, both eyebrows rising in astonishment, 'S'all gone.'

'Oh, it's hopeless, Lucia, he'll start shouting that I'm late, and there's no time to get another dress from the flat.' Barbara waves a hand, 'I don't want to go to the stupid party anyway, boring people.'

Lucia, familiar with Barbara's dressing table, opens a trinket pot. Tipping out its contents, she picks out three small safety pins.

'I have an idea, *signora*, wait here.' Lucia rushes out of the room.

'Well, I'm not going anywhere like this, am I?' Barbara mumbles. 'Just settle down here.' She lifts her bare white legs high, causing the black chiffon to slip to her thighs. Leaning forward she examines her legs, running her hands from ankles to knees. 'Still smooth,' she murmurs.

Lucia returns, carrying black thread, scissors, and a needle. An open safety pin in her teeth, she raises Barbara and once again turns her. She pulls the bodice together again.

Barbara grunts as her breath is forced out. Lucia overlaps and secures the top of the bodice between Barbara's almost invisible shoulder blades.

She turns her mistress round and pushes her breasts together. Taking Barbara's right hand with hers, she guides it to the side of the right breast to replace it. Then she does the same with the left breast.

'Like this, *signora*,' she says, pressing Barbara's hands together, 'and don't let go.'

Barbara looks down, laughing, 'No fear, these bazongas aren't going anywhere.'

Turning Barbara round again, Lucia pins the bodice together to the waist. She threads her needle and, starting from the waist, she sews tiny stitches through the chiffon and its lining. She cuts off the now dead seagull and finishes by overstitching the top.

'You can put your hands down now, *signora*,' she says.

Barbara slowly releases her breasts, and, as she turns to Lucia, a huge smile spreads across her face. She kisses the young woman vigorously on the cheeks.

'You will have to be careful, *signora*,' Lucia cautions, when she is finally let go. 'I will cut you out of the dress when you come home.'

'Anthony will have to do it, we're staying in London tonight.' Barbara looks down, 'My stockings! I haven't put on my stockings.'

'No, no, *signora*, do not bend. Under no circumstances must you bend. I will do it.'

Lucia rolls fine black silk stockings up Barbara's flawless legs, and fastens them into her suspenders, then guides her feet into gold sandals. Satisfied, she stands back.

Barbara looks at herself in the cheval, turning sideways to check her back.

'You are a darling,' she says. 'Now, lipstick, where... Got it. Pass me my bag.' She applies a slick layer of the red lipstick before replacing its cap with a soft click and tossing it into her evening bag.

Lucia holds a mink stole ready.

She sheathes her mistress's shoulders, just in time to hear Kershaw bawling down the landing, 'Barb, Barb, you'd better not keep me waiting, come on.'

Barbara walks towards the door, then stops and turns to Lucia.

'You like horses, Lucia? Can you ride?'

'Oh yes, *signora*, I rode my uncle's horse all the time in...'

'Okay, good night.' And with that, she swishes through the door.

Lucia tidies the dressing table, and brushes ash from the forgotten cigarette into the ashtray with the side of her hand. A lozenge-shaped burn joins the white ring on the mahogany table.

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Two weeks later, Cook and Lucia are having their morning break together in the kitchen when Stefan comes in from the garden door. Slim is close behind him, and Stefan pushes him back from entering the kitchen.

The women laugh. 'That horse loves you, Stefan,' says Cook.

'It's because I look after him, that's why,' he smiles, reaching for a biscuit. He bites with the side of his mouth, wincing.

'You should see a dentist, handsome man like you,' says Cook, poking him in the ribs.

'Money,' mumbles Stefan.

'No, it's free now. Even for you, I think.'

Stefan looks up sharply, but before he can say, 'even for me?' Lucia is laughing. Anger flares over his face until he feels a heavy nudge to his shoulder. Slim's head is through the open window and the horse is reaching for Stefan's biscuit.

All three try to push Slim's head back through the window, but he won't be moved. Their efforts are enfeebled by hysterical laughter. Cook's eyes stream with tears.

They end up outside, pulling and pushing with uncoordinated effort. Cook gives up, sitting on a stone trough, flapping her rosy face with her apron.

Eventually, Stefan and Lucia back up the horse, and with one each side holding a handful of mane they guide him through the stone arch and out of the garden.

Lucia's eyes sparkle with merriment as she watches Stefan curse the horse, slapping his rump to send him cantering across the field, tail swishing with joy.

Stefan returns to where she is leaning on the gates and climbs up to sit. He taps the rail beside him.

'Come on, sit,' he says.

Lucia climbs up and swings her legs over to sit beside him.

'He's lovely,' she says, resting her head on Stefan's shoulder. 'Look how strong he is.'

Slim has slowed to a trot, shaking his mane.

'Do you want to ride him now?' Stefan asks, putting his arm around her.

'Me?'

'Yes, you.' Stefan squeezes her.

'Mr Kershaw, he's not... Am I allowed?'

'Barbara said you could, if you want.'

'Barbara said? When?'

'A few days ago.'



*October 1950 letter from the family*

Two months after his interview with Anthony Kershaw, Stefan once again finds himself staring at a blank pad of flimsy paper, wondering what to write to his wife. This time he sends no photograph.

Many weeks pass, and it seems that again, there will be no reply. Until the day a cheap brown envelope thumps onto the mat at Cook's cottage. Cook examines the stamps before passing the envelope to Stefan.

'CCCP? What's that then?' she asks.

Stefan opens the envelope, excited to find three photographs between sheets of squared paper that have been pulled from an exercise book. His heart thumps so strongly he's afraid that the its sound will betray him.

He looks at one of the photographs; a beautiful young woman in a dark dress with white jabot, a thick plait coiled around her head. She is posed beside a climbing rose bush, which has been professionally coloured. Her soft gaze is forthright and a gentle smile hovers around her mouth.

Stefan immediately recognises his wife - older – but unmistakably Halina. 'Halka,' Stefan whispers.

'News from home at last?' enquires Cook, feigning disinterest. She reaches for his cup to get a closer look but Stefan slips the photograph quickly under the envelope.

'Canada, my sister writes from Canada.'

'Is that beautiful girl your sister?'

'Yes, that's her, Cesia.' Stefan stands, kicking the table leg, and rattling the crockery.

'She looks very kind,' Cook points to the letter, 'a good sort of person.' She examines Stefan's reddening face. 'You all right?'

'Yes, and yes, she is very good. I go now.' He gathers up the letter, scoops the photographs into the envelope and leaves. 'I read later, I am late.'

He hardly concentrates on his work that morning, dropping tools and tripping over tree roots, until he finds a private moment to read his letter.

Sitting on a hay bale by the open stable door, he smooths the thin fibrous paper on his lap and squints; ink has leached into the paper, and he does not recognise the writing as Halina's. He starts to read.

Our Dearest Stefan!

After so many years we received your letter. God be praised that you are in good health. We can tell you that your mother is well-looked after. The sickness is a little better and she can now do some work.

The blurry words blur more as Stefan's eyes mist up. He pulls a handkerchief from his trouser pocket, turning it round to find a dry place, and blows hard. Slim snorts back in return. He continues to read.

Many changes have happened since you went away. The life here is hard, well it was always hard but we do not have the pleasure of the times you will remember. We are happy that you are safe and well.

Stefan! Your son is a fine boy but, as you can see, life here is hard on everyone. He is a studious child and he has a fine voice. Just like his mother. He works hard at school and is clever at everything and good with drawing and painting.

The family has suffered a great deal, and our dear sister, the most. Halina never lost hope to see you again. She wanted to write but she has suffered so much that we could not allow it. The situation here is terrible.

Your wife, our Halina, for receiving your letter in 1944 received such a brutal punishment that the State deemed fit. They beat her so badly. She tried to escape her punishment by running away and was severely wounded with a bullet. They arrested her. So ill she was in that prison where you were in Czortków. When she recovered she was given to 7 years hard labour in Magadan. We took Teodor, so small. We cared for him, for our dear sister's sake.

She was returned to us, finally in 1946, for good behaviour and because the war. We never heard of such a thing, but she has a good soul. God has made her good.

Stefan, dear brother, you told Halina to make a new life for herself. She always waited for you, but after Magadan. When she came back to us, she

was changed. The child you see in the photograph is Maria. She was born in 1946. She is Halina's child.

Halina is living with her children and with your mother, Karolina. She does not want any man in her life. She says she is married to you. We help as much as we can.

My dear brother, you cannot be with Halina, and it is dangerous for her to be in contact with you. Please forget us. Please do not write to us again. It is dangerous for us to receive anything from outside our country. We have burnt all your letters. Józef's brother will take this letter to Przemyśl to post it so it cannot be traced to us. We don't know, they censor everything.

Please, Stefan, respect our safety, Halina has suffered so much. She is not the girl you remember. With God's help, we will care for her, for your son, and for your mother. We will educate your son as you would wish.

God's blessings on you until we meet again in heaven. Life on earth is terrible but we have a duty to persevere.

Antonina

Stefan looks at the other two photographs side by side. The first shows a shaven-headed barefoot boy of about seven years old – 'lice,' thinks Stefan. He wears a shirt buttoned to the neck – 'typical mother' – and long shorts, pulled high by wide braces. His hand rests protectively on the back of a bentwood chair, on which sits a pretty, fair-haired child of about a year. The several folds of flesh on her legs suggest that she is not yet walking.



3.6



3.7

He peers at her face, to see if he can recognise anything in her features. Nothing comes. He looks at his son, and at this other child long and hard. He imagines Halina, his Halina, with another man. He looks at the small child over and over, searching her face for signs of someone he might recognise. The child looks back, innocent and blank. He looks at the boy – ‘Todek!’ His son, grown so big. ‘Too serious.’

His eyes move to the second photograph; Teodor is older in this one, well-shod in boots with white socks. Unsmiling, a fair quiff flops above one eye. Halina stands beside him, leaning towards him. The boy’s head is pressed into his mother’s bosom. He cannot tell where Halina’s arm is resting but imagines it on Teodor’s back. She wears a good dress, buttoned to the neck, stockings, and good shoes. Her hair is uncovered but he cannot tell if she has cut it.

He holds the photograph up to the light. She is older in this picture, thickened at the waist. He looks at Teodor again. The boy might be nine or ten years old. He is wearing a high-necked embroidered shirt. Stefan looks at Halina’s kind face. The same soft direct gaze, the same lovely mouth. Halina, his Halina. The girl with the golden voice, who sang to the birds as she worked. This woman, mother of his son. Betrayer.

Taking a rolled pad and pen from his back pocket, Stefan flicks to a clean page and begins to write his last letter to Halina:

...It is good you have a girl because when you get old, there will be somebody to give you a spoon of water when you need it.

'Why, *Mamusia*?'

'What?'

Teo lies in bed, gazing at his father's photograph beside him. 'Knowing he has a son, why is he never in touch with him, with me?'

'Eh?'

'I mean, if I had a little boy like me I would want to know what he was like.'

'You are talking rubbish, Teo. If you know what you're like why would you want to find out what you're like?'

'I mean my *Tata*.'

'Teo, stop it. I told you, he can't come back.'

'Yes, but he could write, couldn't he? Even if he can't come, he could write.'

'What would be the point in that?'

He strokes the bottom of the picture. 'He might like to know what I look like. I look like him, don't I, *Mamusia*? *Babcia* says I do. She says I look just like him when *he* was ten. She says it breaks her heart to see me.'

'She's crazy.'

'She said my *Tata* would write back if we sent a letter.'

'You shouldn't listen to everything that mad woman says. She has crazy ideas. She knows no danger, everything is easy for her; she knows nothing.'

'But how can a letter harm him, Mamma?'

'What good would it do you? He still can't come back.'

Teo turns to look at his mother, 'The other boys get letters, presents even. Bogdan got shoes, and they fit! *His tata* knows how big his feet have grown. Do you think my *Tata* would know my shoe size, Mamma?'

'Oh, I see now, it's presents you're after, is it? Well, I'll give you presents if you don't stop. I queue for hours to get you shoes, well-made, strong. We don't have enough bread, and you start this with me. Go to sleep, you have work to do in the morning.'

Halina sees her son blink hard twice to block further words, before turning back towards the wall.

'Good night *Tata*,' he whispers, reaching a small finger to the picture.

'I should move that photograph', she thinks.

'Goodnight, *Mamusia*,' he says.

'Good night *malinka*<sup>83</sup>,' Halina murmurs, resting her hand briefly on his back. 'I entrust you to God and the holiest Virgin. Let your dreams hold you 'til morning brings you back to me.'

As she tidies around the room, Halina glances at the hair starting to curl at the nape of Teodor's close-cropped head. Resisting the temptation to touch it, she sings softly into the failing light<sup>84</sup>:

May you be cursed Kolyma,  
What's called the Black Planet,  
One can't help but go mad,  
From here there's no return.

Don't wait for me, mother and wife,  
Or you, little children,  
It's fallen to me to know, and drink to the bottom,  
The bitter cup in this world.

I know you don't expect me,  
And don't read my letters,  
You won't come meet me,  
And if you come, you won't recognize me.

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<sup>83</sup> Raspberry

<sup>84</sup> Anonymous Gulag song 'Magadan' also called 'Kolyma' Prisoners caught singing or circulating a song could be 'thrown into ice-covered isolation cells for weeks, and have years added to their sentences.' Leong, A. (2002). *Centaur: The Life and Art of Ernst Neizvestny*, Rowman & Littlefield. p253

Through the camp roams scurvy,  
And people roam there like shadows,  
Trucks don't start, there  
Deer wander, stumbling.

May you be cursed Kolyma,  
What's called the Black Planet,  
One can't help but go mad,  
From here there's no return.  
One can't help but go mad,  
From here there's no return...

Although Teo is hiding his face, she sees his knuckles shine with tears and snot as he rubs his eyes and nose. 'Karolina is to blame for this,' she thinks.

The following morning, between a combination of repressed hissing and exaggerated choreography, Halina manages to both engage and avoid her mother-in-law, who is busy bashing cups and plates. She sighs at the noise, rescuing a pan of scalding milk. Her domestic landscape has become a too familiar battleground these days.

Before she has time to rouse Teo, he enters the room, quickly taking in the atmosphere. She notices the way he edges around the maelstrom.

Silently he moves towards the rickety table where young Maria sits with her bread and milk, her dimpled fingers wrapped around a small box.

'Teo, see what I have,' she whispers, 'it's a little bug, but it's sleeping just now. You can touch it if you like.' Maria offers up the box with a glance from her dark, docile eyes, unperturbed by the noise all around her.

The children's interlude is cut short, as Halina retorts to yet another 'observation' from her mother-in-law, 'I told you, he will not come. He is finished with us, your precious son.'

Teo gasps.

'I can wake it up if you like,' says Maria, shaking the box.

'Shh, Maria, can't you see they're angry?' Teo urges his sister.

His mother hears him. She understands his anxiety, and why Maria appears unaffected by the disharmony. 'She knows no better,' Halina thinks, hurling a wet cloth into the basin where *Babcia* is crashing crockery as a pretext for washing it. The old woman twitches.



Halina remembers a happier time, before Maria, when they weren't always fighting. She and *Babcia* used to vie playfully for Teo's affection, ambushing him on his little journeys about the house. They'd take it in turns to smother him with unsolicited hugs and kisses as he squirmed, eager to be on his way. They'd laugh in delight at his giggles indulging their desire to squeeze plump young flesh. In those days they talked freely about his handsome father— how they'd surely get some news soon. And then *Babcia's* warm tears would drip onto Teo's head as she rocked him back and forth, tightly squashing his cheek against her breast so that just one of his screwed-up eyes was visible. Generally, Teo would submit philosophically to these frequent interruptions to his play. 'We *can* do it between us,' Halina used to think, seeing *Babcia* release him, freshly loved, to toddle away on a new adventure. 'With Teo chirruping around the place, we can do it.'

But then it all changed. 'Teo won't remember when,' she thinks, 'but I do.' Suddenly there was Siberia, then Maria's coming. Halina had no energy, the baby cried a lot, and *Babcia* kept taking Teo away, muttering and cursing. Their neighbours gossiped, casting such vindictive looks that Halina stopped going out. She thought there would be no end to her shame. The nuns say babies bring happiness, but Halina knows better. Some babies bring anger.

Things settled. Karolina and Halina found a way, and besides, they needed each other. Maria thrived, and Teo grew.

Then came the day she was dreading: Teo ran in from school, looking excited for a change, like he's solved all their problems.

'Dmitry says *Babcia* is angry because Maria's father is Russian,' he breathlessly offers with up-turned face.

'Maria is your sister! You have the same name.' Halina regrets that first slap on his soft cheek, and the fresh row it raised with *Babcia*. A few slaps down the line though, both her son and her mother-in-law have learnt that questions about fathers, especially Maria's, are best avoided.

What she didn't foresee back then was how Karolina's tactics would change. Now, in place of the open intimacy they used to enjoy, Halina stands apart, watching the morning greeting enacted between boy and grandmother. Karolina's tedious ritual excludes Halina in a way that Stefan's leaving never did.

'Teodor! May heaven be blessed; you have been returned to us. Come to me, my baby tiger, come, give your *Babcia* a kiss. Oh, my little man, how you've grown overnight. Soon you'll be head of the house and able to feed us all.'

Halina sees how impossible Teodor finds it to resist the pull of *Babcia* Karolina's arms. They shake like gnarled branches, enclosing him as he tries to pull his head away from the range of her foul breath. She almost feels sorry for the old woman as she watches her grab the boy's head with arthritic fingers. Bringing her trembling lips repeatedly to his pouched cheeks, Karolina kisses him, one two three, then again, one two three. Red dents from her boney touch appear on Teo's face as she finally pushes him to arms' length, beady eyes scrutinizing his face.

'Oh my *misiu*<sup>85</sup>, my hero. How you suffer my baby, my sweet one. That such suffering should come upon an angel's head. The price will be paid in hell, I promise. Fear not, little tiger, the price will be paid.'

Exasperated, Halina shouts, 'Enough. Can't you see what you're doing to him? Leave him alone, he has work.' She pulls at her son's arm, 'Come here, Dorek.<sup>86</sup> Eat quickly. If you're late, Janek will be angry. Then you'll know suffering all right.'

'But *Mamusia*,' Teo cries. 'The other boys are going to swim in the river today. Can't I...'

'You can swim, or you can eat. You choose. And remember, your little sister will starve with you. Now go.'

Karolina mutters from her chair, 'He works so the bastard can eat.'

'Silence, you witch. She is his sister.'

'Oh, his sister, is she? So, his father is so potent he can impregnate his wife from another country.'

'She is his sister by blood. I should know. With my blood I bought her. And your precious son is not here.'

Finally, Karolina is silenced.

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<sup>85</sup> Little bear

<sup>86</sup> Ukrainian: diminutive of Teodor

Teodor leaves the house, scattering chickens from around the door— their squawking echoes the sound of the women inside.

As he turns to take his leave he sees Maria waving to him, her other chubby hand awkwardly clutching her bug box. He rewards her effort by a briefly raised hand, then cuts across the grass and disappears from sight.

But before heading towards Janek's farm, Teo stops to break a stick from a low-lying branch. He fashions a whip then, like a soldier, he practices his technique, flexing his small muscles as he swings left and right, short and sharp, cutting through the morning air. Finally, he is ready to launch his attack. With each swoosh at the tall cow parsley, a host of little black flies rises up into the warm air, to merge with the sweet smell of crushed vegetation. The flurry of flies about his face encourages him to greater excess with his whip until a trail of flower heads line his route.

Gradually, with each step away from the house, he begins to forget the sound of angry voices. His stride lengthens, his limbs become loose, his swipes weaken. The sun warms the back of his rough linen shirt and his shoulders relax, until he hears shouting.

'Teodor. Todek. Hey, over here'

Teo stops and squints, arching his arm against the glare of the sun. He sees his friend, Oskar, and two other boys emerge from the shade of the trees. They jump through the long grass towards him; long brown legs leaping up and down like pistons, loose shirts beating against their skinny ribs. They look more like a phalanx of flapping storks than boys. They are all barefoot, shoe leather being too precious to waste on play.

'Hello, Oskar,' he calls back.

Oskar beckons, 'You are going the wrong way, my friend. The river is *this* way.'

'I cannot come,' says Teodor, 'I have to work for Janek.'

Coming up to Teo, the boy whistles, 'Whoo, bad luck. You know he beat Bogdan the last time he worked there? His mother won't let him go back. He was black and blue all over. Don't go.'

Teo shrugs, 'I have to.'

'Oh, come on, come with us. Let's go swimming. Who wants to work on a day like this?'

'I can't. Mother will be angry.'

'Your mother is always angry. I know, tell her you went but he wouldn't pay you.'

Teo frowns, 'No, she isn't. Anyway, she's friends with his wife, so she knows he won't cheat me. She'll ask about it.'

'Well, say you went but he didn't need you after all. Come on, don't be a cissy, come swimming. Look, the boys are going.'

'I can't, Oskar. We need the money. You know that.'

'Your loss. See you later, loser.' And Oskar lopes back to his jeering friends.

Teo smiles at the boys, 'See you in school, Oskar. We'll see who the loser is then.'

The sound of squealing assails Teo's ears as he approaches Janek's farm. He notices that the meadow grass around is tipped with the beginnings of seed heads.

Teo casts aside his stick. The last thing a boy needs around a bad-tempered drinker is a handy whip.

Janek has no son of his own, a crime against nature which he naturally takes out on his wife once he's had his vodka ration. If Ulyana had a choice, she would prefer lust to violence, but she frequently gets both. Neither method has produced an heir. Instead Janek has three beautiful daughters: Agata, Krysia and Ewa, whom he resents and adores in equal measure, much as he does his mule or his wife. Agata is named for her grandmother, the only woman Janek respects.

Quiet and pretty, Agata is in Teo's class at school and sometimes she smiles at him. She is his equal in mathematics and his superior in most other subjects. He doesn't mind. He wonders if her work will take her to the cowshed or washing line today.

The pig squeals again as Janek kicks her away. Her piglets scatter in all directions.

'What time do you call this? God only gives to early risers and I only pay boys who do a full day. Here,' he says throwing a bucket at him, 'she's nursing, fill the trough. Be quick mind you, or you'll get it.'

Teo runs to the well. He thinks he sees a flash of colour at the kitchen window, but no-one comes out. Great splashes of water fall from the bucket as he runs back to the pigsty where Janek is waiting.

‘Call that full? Get another, quick.’

Back and forth he goes, the bucket banging against his legs as he picks up speed. The thing with Janek is that he never hits a boy when he’s expecting it. He waits until the boy relaxes then comes at him out of the blue. The only certainty is that he *will* have a go, and the more humiliating the better. Teodor regrets his wish to see Agata today.

The higher the sun climbs, the harder the work becomes, until finally Janek calls a break. They sit on the shady side of the barn, leaning against its rough timber. In a short while little Ewa brings water, bread and sausage, which Janek shares with Teo. To Teo’s surprise, Janek divides the food more equally than usual.

‘Drink,’ he commands, handing Teo a battered jug.

Teo gulps the water, wiping his mouth with his dangling shirt cuff. What was white this morning is now filthy, with dark stains inside his collar. Trickle of sweat run down from his short hair streaking his dusty face with crooked lines before dripping onto his bread. He snatches at the food ferociously.

‘Slow down, you idiot. Do you want to give yourself a stomach ache? Go to the barn and bring some plums. Be careful, don’t bruise them. There’s a bottle behind the crate. Bring that too, hide it under your shirt.’

Teo goes into the cool dark of the barn. The smell of cow dung mingles with the scent of sweet hay and catches at the back of his throat. Streaks of sunlight fall onto rusting, disused machinery lying around waiting for parts that will never come. Even before his tread disturbs the dusty floor, he hears mysterious rustling in the corners. He hears the croo, croo of a pigeon as it flutters and resettles on its perch above his head. As he feels around the back of the plum crate, he raises more dust motes to dance in the sunlit stripes. The effects of hard work, heat and food slow his reactions. A rat shoots out over his foot and towards the back of the barn. He cries out and leaps back, almost dropping the bottle.

‘What the hell are you doing in there? Are you growing those plums?’ Janek’s shadow falls across Teo’s body, which is pressed against the barn wall.

'It was a rat. It ran over my foot,' Teo stammers.

For some reason Janek finds this funny. He grabs the bottle from Teo's hands, unstoppers it and takes several long swigs, sighing with contentment after each one, before, with finger and thumb he pinches his moustache and beard dry.

'So, how about a drink? Or would you rather have a juicy plum, little boy?' Janek laughs.

Teo doesn't know what to say. Either way it could be a trick. That's Janek's way. He decides to reach for the bottle. Janek swipes at his hand.

'Idiot, do you think I'd waste this on a child? Get the plums.'

Teo follows Janek back outside, glad to be away from the barn, where any number of implements could be used to hurt a boy.

Instead of returning to work, Janek sits down again, his legs straight out in front, his boots pointing skywards and his belly falling over his belt. Teo has heard about the belt, and the threat that goes with it, 'next time you'll get the buckle end.' So far he hasn't had either end but that doesn't give him confidence. He wonders whether Bogdan got the buckle end.

Teo sits out of striking distance and waits.

'You like my Agata don't you?'

'*Pan Biała*, I don't know what you mean.'

'You don't know what I mean? Do you like her or don't you?' Louder this time, the vodka getting to work.

'She's a lovely girl, sir. Everyone says so. Clever too.'

'Gah, clever. What good is that in a woman?'

Silence.

'You haven't answered my question. Do you like her?'

Teo erupts in desperation, 'Sir, I'm only ten. I like swimming in the river.'

For a long time Janek stares at Teo.

The boy sees different emotions flit behind Janek's eyes as he holds the man's gaze. Angry flashes alternate with humour, disgust, then something almost resembling intelligence; then back through them all again. Janek throws back his head and roars with laughter.

'I like swimming in the river. Ha, ha, ha. I like swimming in the river. Eeee, ha, ha.'

Janek continues to laugh for a very long time; hands slapping his sides, tears running down his face.

Teo remains motionless, his breathing shallow. He knows he can outrun the heavy man out here, but which direction is his home? He's forgotten where he lives.

As suddenly as the laughter started, it stops. Teo waits. Without warning Janek slaps him on the back so hard that he topples onto his side, squashing a curious hen, which, squawking, adds to his confusion. Is it the hen or he who is running? He waits for the next blow.

'I like you,' booms Janek. 'Pass the bottle.'

Man and boy do no more work that afternoon.

As the shadows lengthen, a pile of plum stones grows against the fence where they have been spat. The chickens are settled, the flies barely buzz. Janek's eyes are half-closed and his large hands rest calmly on his massive thighs.

'Pan Biała, may I ask you a question?'

'Eh, what?' Janek brushes away a fly. In the distance, comes the moody lowing of the farm cow, signaling that her udder is full.

'Pan Biała, sir. Did you know my father?'

'Your father. Of course I did. I know everyone. Everyone knows everyone, and no-one knows anything. That's how it is here, heh, heh.' Janek is amused by his own wit.

'What was he like? Sir.'

'What was he like, he was a fool, that's what he was like. Still is probably, wherever he is. He survived, didn't he? Somewhere in the West, Aga said.'

'Yes, sir. He wrote to my mother. He sent a photograph. He had medals and a uniform and everything.'

'Medals, pah. Every soldier in the army has medals. All you have to do is stay alive, and you get a medal. Trinkets for fools.'

'Can you tell me about him, *Pan Biała*? Please, sir. Mother won't talk about him and *Babcia* just cries every time I ask her.'

'Your *babcia* is mad.'

Teo falls silent. After a long time, Janek begins to talk. It is the longest speech Teo has ever heard him make. He knows to listen quietly; any interruption will break the spell.

'I'll tell you a story about your brave father. Maybe late '39, maybe 1940, I don't know. But it was early morning, I was feeding the pig. Ulyana just finished milking the cow. Agata was grizzling so she took her back to the house. She didn't like being hung on a hook all wrapped up, but it was cold, mind. Heh, heh, I remember, she liked to kick her legs free, that one.'

Teo shuffles a little.

'Anyway, it was late in the season, the meadow grass was long, flattened. There was no-one to help cut it and it was spoiled. Damp nights ruined it, no point in doing anything with it. There was trouble everywhere, rumours from people passing through. People on the move, travelling west. Running away from their neighbours. As if that did them any good. "Always stay in the country," I say. There's no food in the cities. The Jews stayed. After all, who doesn't have land, needs land.

'So, I see a tall man crouching low, coming across the grass. He's wearing a brown coat but if he has a gun, I can't see it. I reach for my spade. Gun or no gun, I'm going to break his head. He calls to me by my name, says he wants no trouble. Well, it wasn't the first time someone came friendly-like, then... Anyway, I hold my spade ready. A hungry man can be a desperate creature.

'Then I see it's Stefan. "*Matko bosko*, is that you?" I say. "Do you want to kill us all? What the hell are you doing here?" I get him into the barn quick, down behind the potato store. I ask him what's going on, if he has any news. Know what he said? He said he'd been in the woods and there'd been talk. Said he didn't have much time and he wanted to see me. He came to see me. Suddenly he wanted to see *me*. Then he starts asking me about the last harvest, had it lasted the year. I told you he was a fool.

'But I can tell you, I was pretty scared at this point. I mean, I've got an idiot Pole in my barn and my wife, child and mother are in the house. I say to him, I say, "Look, if we are going to make polite conversation while the world is falling about our ears, *you tell me*. You must have heard something. Even in the woods they have a radio." He says there's nothing, nothing he can tell me but it's bad and I should be careful. Tells me to get out if I can.



'Just like that, get out. Soviets took my horse, my mother could barely walk, a hungry baby to feed and a cow to be milked. Fool.

"Oh sure, I'll get out," I say, "where shall we go?" He shrugs his shoulders. Can you believe it? The man comes here, puts us all in danger, then shrugs his shoulders. I tell him I'll wait, see what passes. There's no point talking to mad men.'

Teo flinches.

'I ask him about his family. Has he seen them? I tell him Halina's still with her *ciocia*, your *babcia*. We talk about the shop, whether it's safe it is to be seen there. See, first there was the UPA and then the comrades. They don't tell you that at school, do they? The shop could've been targeted.

'Then I come to my senses. I tell you that man could make a saint stupid. I say, "Let's stop this nonsense. You didn't come here to talk about last year's harvest."

'Know what he says then? No? Well, I'll tell you. He starts to ask about your mother and my wife. How close they used to be. Asks me if they still see each other. If they talk.

'I say, "What do you think? Of course they talk. They're women."

'Then he wants to know if Ulyana tells me everything. Then I get it. He risked his life and mine to come here in broad daylight to find out if Halina was expecting his baby or someone else's.'

Teo would rather have a beating than this. He can't bear to hear what might come next.

'Don't worry, the baby was his. That was you. Halina was crazy about him. And he didn't deserve it. I asked him if it was worth the risk, coming here. Know what he said then? "I don't know, I'll tell you when this is all over." Then he tells me to get my wife and child away. He says, "Go now, leave your mother behind." Then he just leaves, goes back the way he came. Like nothing. Leave my mother behind. I tell you, it's a good job he doesn't come home. I'd kill him.'

England: Long Furlong, Tetbury  
*December 1950*

December has been a busy month for the Kershaws; the usual rounds of cocktail parties and dinners in London and the County have been exacerbated by an increase in the number of political invitations. This, after an eventful year.

For Anthony Kershaw, his first attempt at entering Parliament as Member for Gloucester in February floundered. But by the end of the year, speculation is rife that Labour's slim majority cannot carry the country forward. Kershaw is confident that another election is on the cards, and that, this time, he'll be elected. But first he must be re-selected.

Kershaw's temper is running high with the uncertain political situation. He has not taken his defeat well and its impact on the Long Furlong household is immense. Alongside this, international politics are being played out in his home between Lucia and Nurse. Exasperated by the Hungarian's shouting and Barbara's complaints, Kershaw tells his wife to sort it, or he will sack the lot of them.

Barbara calls Stefan to the drawing room.

She is seated in a gold damask winged armchair, a crystal glass and bottle of aspirin at her side. Her shoes lie, abandoned, beside the chair, and she supports her head with her right hand.

As Stefan stands formally to attention before her, Barbara removes her hand from her temple and sighs.

Outlining the many sources of irritation that has brought them to this point, she says, 'I know she's difficult.'

Stefan interrupts with his usual argument about the Hungarian's duties, but Barbara presents a raised palm.

'Yes, I know it's not Lucia's job, but couldn't she...'

Stefan presents Barbara with another complaint.

Finally, Barbara's thin patience snaps. She reaches for her glass and knocks back its contents in one go. Breathing in deeply, she looks at the Polish man standing before her.

'I like you, Stefan, and I like Lucia, but you have to know this.' She pauses. 'Children's nurses are very difficult to find.'

Stefan interrupts, yet again, 'Lucia could...'

Barbara's eyelids flicker down for a second, accompanied by a deep exhalation of breath, '*Qualified* children's nurses are difficult to find.'

Stefan shifts his weight.

'I would not like to be put in a position where I had to choose... Do you understand?'

'I understand,' says Stefan scowling.

---

Later, in the kitchen, gossip has returned to the latest row between Lucia and Nurse. Cook is laying in with her thruppence worth, but Stefan remains broodingly quiet.

'What's wrong with you tonight?' Cook asks.

'Nothing, just stop talking about that stupid Hungarian,' he snaps.

Cook and Lucia query each other with raised eyebrows.

'It's boring,' Stefan adds, 'Can't you women learn to get on?' He taps his thumb and fingers together, 'Always the same, meh, meh, meh, meh.'

'Well, you've got it about you today, haven't you? What's the matter? Had another letter from home?' says Cook.

The women laugh. That is until Lucia catches his furious frown. She gets up quickly to clear the table, ending the conversation.

Walking down the dark lane to Tetbury that evening, Stefan holds Lucia's hand inside the pocket of his shearling jerkin. They are going to meet Adam, and Lucia hopes the men will not play cards tonight. The letter Cook mentioned is on her mind, 'Why didn't he say something?' she thinks.

As soon as they enter the glow of the public bar, Adam peels himself away from his game to greet them. He finds a chair for Lucia while Stefan goes to buy the drinks.

Adam smiles at Lucia, says a few pleasantries in Polish, and Lucia smiles back. There is something about Adam that unsettles her. It's not that he looks at her in an interested way, it's just some feeling she gets when she's in his company; as if he knows something about her. Him, and Stanczek, they've been together a long time, seen things, done things. She's relieved when Stefan returns, and the two men get down to earnest conversation. While they talk, she sips her port and lemon. She winces at its taste, but this is what Cook tells her is an acceptable lady's drink. She knows to make it last all evening; she wouldn't want another anyway.

The warm bar is full of noise and fug from cigarettes and a blazing wood fire. To Lucia's ears everyone seems to be talking with no-one listening but her. *For all the good it does me*, she thinks, because she hardly understands a word.

'*Papieros?*' Adam offers an open pack of cigarettes. Before she has time to raise a hand in polite refusal, Stefan pushes the pack away without a pause in his latest pontification. Lucia takes another sip of her drink and occupies herself in evaluating the barmaid's blouse: black rayon with all-over bright red nasturtiums and green leaves. Its busyness creates a confusion against the background of shiny bottles and optics. Flashes of red appear and disappear as she moves behind the bar in full control of her territory. When she bends for a glass to present to the pump, buttons gape, attracting a wink or two from the drinkers standing there. The cuff on its puffed sleeve flexes and strains as the barmaid's muscular arm pulls down; one, two, three, before landing a frothing glass onto the counter with expert ease.

Money changes hands, and men's voices grow louder. Lucia still has no idea what Stefan and Adam are saying but an hour and a half later, they're still not playing cards so she's happy. She makes her move.

Smiling at Adam, she gently pulls at Stefan's arm. This time, he stops mid-sentence to look at her, eyebrows lifted in surprise and enquiry.

'I am tired,' she says, crinkling her eyes with an empty smile. She presses her thigh to Stefan's, feeling the heat of his worsted trousers.

Stefan puts down his pint and squeezes her small nose between thumb and forefinger.

'Come on, then. Adam!' He rises to shake his friend's hand. 'She is tired,' he says, nodding towards Lucia, who smiles again, more of a smirk this time. Adam kisses her hand.

Outside, she can feel Stefan's unsteady gait through the arm he's flopped around her shoulder. They make their way out of the town into the dark country lane.

The winter night is cold, and damp and they soon feel its chill, and a longing for the cheery bar room they've left behind. Lucia leans in close to Stefan, half to steady him and half to get his attention.

'Cook said letter, what letter did you have? From Canada, your sister?'

'No,' says Stefan, unthinking in his beery haze.

'Who then?'

'She was making a joke. No-one wrote.'

'Why would she say that, though?' Lucia insists.

'Stop talking.' Stefan pulls her round and she feels his mouth wet and hot on her lips. She makes no attempt to thwart him, knowing that he will try it on.

Emboldened, he cups a breast, then starts to unbutton her coat. She stays his hand with hers, all the while coaxing him on with her mouth. Then, suddenly, she pulls back.

'Stefan, I have to trust you. Can I trust you?' she asks.

He returns his hand to her breast, beery breath nuzzling in her neck.

Lucia bides her time then alters her tone, 'No,' she says pulling back again. 'Not like this, in the night like a prostitute. Is that what you brought me here for?'

Stefan pulls away. She can feel the tension growing in him, but her curiosity is stronger than her fear. She reaches for his arm.

'Tell me, please,' her voice gentles again, coaxing. 'Whatever it is, you can tell me.'

Stefan remains silent.

They walk on until they see the lights of Long Furlong twinkling in the distance. Lucia knows her only chance is to get him to talk before the outline of the house appears. She pulls Stefan to a stop and lifts a hand to his stubbled face. Her skin is soft and fragrant. She feels a movement in him, not quite a sigh. Then he places his hand over hers. If a decision could be felt, it would be like this: a release, then a trembling trickle.

'I did get a letter.' The words catch, his voice is coarse. He clears his throat and stands back from her, caressing her hand.

Lucia says nothing, the light fog of her breath hanging in the damp night.

'My wife,' he finally says.

Lucia stiffens. 'Your wife?' Her words are out before she can stop them.

The rest of Stefan's story follows in a rush; its first trickle, once undammed, flows fast. The mother, the wife... the son. Lucia hears snatches, but enough to send her mind spinning.

'A child?' she breathes. Hedgerows either side of her loom longer, darker than before. Dried brambles seem to reach for her.

Lucia has no way to make sense of what she's heard. She repeats, 'You have a child?'

'Yes,' Stefan says. His voice is gruff now, thick, 'I had a child.'

'All these years, you said nothing.'

Her mind starts to catch up, 'I wrote to you. You let me write to you.'

Her thoughts fly to her family, to the village, her father.

'Did you tell Father? Does he know?'

'No! No, he doesn't know. Do you think he'd let you come here if he knew?'

'But *you* did, you called me here.'

'You called me too, remember. Those letters, the photograph. Don't tell me you didn't know what you were doing.' He drops her hand and stands back, aggression creeping into his stance.

'I had no choice,' Lucia starts.

'No choice?' Stefan is on the attack now. '*Saró sempre tuo per tutta la vita?* I am yours for life?' he throws at her.

'No, not like that. I was... I...' her thoughts scramble, 'A child,' she repeats, tears spilling from her eyes. 'A child. What have you done to me?'

She feels Stefan's growing strength.

'You have *me*,' he moves towards her, but she pushes him back.

'I am stuck,' she moans, clutching at her hair. With the growing knowledge of his situation, she realises her own full predicament with horror.

'You're stuck? Is that what you think? Stuck with me?' He turns away from her, fumbling for his handkerchief. In the moonlight, she can see a shiny drop hanging from his nose. That long nose.

They stand for a long time in the cold dark lane until, eventually, Stefan says, 'Let's go, it's getting cold.'

---

Lucia is colder still the next day, and the day after that. She won't look at Stefan. And although Cook does her best to fill the silence, eventually even *she* retreats.

By Christmas Eve, the entire house is suspended in an atmosphere of doomed anticipation, with no-one quite understanding why.

Anthony Kershaw, dressed in riding gear, bellows from the stable yard for his horse, which should be saddled, waiting for him. His friends will not wait for stragglers.

Stefan is in the field, with a bucket of oats but Slim is having none of it. Each time Stefan lunges for his mane, he skitters away. It's as though the contagion has even reached the horse.

Exasperated, Kershaw storms into the field, and wrenches the bucket from Stefan.

'For God's sake, man,' he says, shoving him aside. 'Can't you even catch a horse? What good are you?'

Stefan throws Slim's halter at his master's feet. 'I'll show you what good I am,' he says. He turns his back on the outraged man and walks quickly to the house, shouting for Lucia to pack because they are leaving.<sup>87</sup>

Hearing him shout, Lucia opens the back door to see Stefan walk quickly through the garden arch, holding his cap, and cursing under his breath. His forehead shines with sweat.

As he passes her, he repeats his order, 'Go and pack, I said.'

Lucia tries to restrain him, holding his arm but he shakes her off. 'What is going on?' she pleads, 'Tell me.'

Stefan turns and twists her towards him roughly by the shoulder. 'We are leaving. Ten minutes. If you want to come with me, go and pack.'

---

<sup>87</sup> Anthony Kershaw's future reference for Stefan will read, 'He's a good man, but he left me like a dog.'

Shaken, Lucia mutely walks past Cook, and makes her way heavily up the two flights of stairs to her room. She slowly slides her cardboard suitcase from under the bed with trembling hands as tears start to fall.

She is aware of Nurse standing on the landing, strong arms folded across her starched white apron watching her with a satisfied smirk on her face.

Lucia, shaking and sobbing, slams the door on the woman. She quickly fills her small suitcase and looks around the room that has been her home for the last twelve months. She lines up the padded silk hangers in the wardrobe before closing the door gently, so it will not swing open after she has gone. She brushes flat the pink candlewick bedspread and straightens the rag rug beside the bed. She checks the dressing table with the edge of her hand. But there is no dust.

'Lucia!' she hears Stefan shout from below. The sound of his stamping feet comes closer and louder. Trembling, she puts on her coat. It has not occurred to her to refuse to go with him.

Stefan throws open the door, which bounces on its hinges against the wall.

'Come on, give me your case.' He swings the little case up with one hand and holds tightly onto her upper arm with his other, jerking her away from the room.

Brushing past, he gives Nurse a clout with the case that almost knocks her off her feet. The case is heavier than when Lucia first arrived, stuffed with lovely things cast off from her mistress.

On the lower landing, Barbara is waiting, her arms out as if to stop them. Caroline and Harry are howling behind her.

'Stefan, please, not like this, not on Christmas Eve. You can't.'

'I can't?' He glowers at her.

'Where will you go?'

'You pretend you care?' All reason flying before him, Stefan glares at the woman.

'At least leave Lucia here. It's Christmas... The children...'

'*Your* children,' he shouts.

Then Stefan is gone, and Lucia with him.



Lucia cries all the way to Tetbury, running to keep up with Stefan's long strides. He leaves her sitting on her suitcase under the pillared Market House with instructions to speak to no-one and not to move.

He visits three pubs before he finds Adam, who has started *Wigilia*<sup>88</sup> celebrations early with his fellow Poles. By the time Stefan returns with his friend, he finds Lucia standing in a dignified and brooding silence, her back stiff and straight. Passers-by nod and call Christmas greetings, but of the trio only Adam returns them.

Pink-eyed and swaying, Adam heads for Lucia, arms outstretched, '*Wesołych Świąt, Happy Christmas,*' he calls, lips pursed. Lucia daintily offers her hand.

Adam turns to Stefan, 'We have to get her somewhere to stay. I know a place, a room. But...' he pauses, pinching his lips with his fingers, 'no furniture.'

Stefan nods.

Adam picks up Lucia's case, '*Proszę Pani.*' He indicates the way with a jerk of his palm.

---

The empty room is cold and dusty, but the windows are sound. Leaving Lucia again, the men rush out, all action now, to the furniture store. They get there to find it in Sunday darkness. Banging on the windows, they wave money and gesticulate until the owner comes down and grudgingly opens the door. Ten minutes later they walk out the back with a mattress, laughing congratulations on themselves.

Word gets around Tetbury and Babdown that Stefan has had another outburst. Army blankets and a two-bar electric fire appear during the afternoon.

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<sup>88</sup> Polish Christmas Eve supper traditionally served, after fasting, at the appearance of the first star.

As darkness falls, a pleasant blonde woman arrives with a bowl of warm *bigos*.<sup>89</sup> Stefan introduces her simply as Bogdan's wife. Her name is Davina.

'I must get back to my family,' she says to Lucia in Polish, placing the bowl and two forks on an upturned box.

Lucia looks up from where she is sitting on the mattress. Gently, Davina brushes the hair back over the younger woman's head. She looks through the bare window at the darkening sky, 'The first star, I will come back tomorrow.' She turns to Stefan and speaks rapidly. Lucia can understand that Davina is giving instructions with a wagging finger; maybe orders when she cuts the air with the side of her hand. Then she leaves.

Stefan is alone at last with Lucia. They eat the stew, and cover themselves with the blankets, hiding from the bright stars of the bitterly cold night.

By New Year's Eve, Lucia is a live-in cleaner at Malmesbury District Hospital, and Stefan sees in another New Year alone. He is back at Babdown Single Men's Hostel.

Lucia's domestic duties at the hospital are short-lived due to an ill-tempered exchange between Stefan and Matron. By mid-January, she is cleaning at Oakley Hall Preparatory School in Cirencester.

Stefan visits the school on Sunday afternoons and the two spend a miserable time walking the surrounding country lanes. Lucia looks exhausted and grey. She has been vomiting lately so is relieved when the local off-licence refuses to sell Stefan a bottle of cider. His reaction, however, is predictably irascible.

Three months on, Stefan finds Lucia in tears. In the small school, she has been unable to conceal her condition from the other women any longer. Word has reached the headmaster and she has been summarily dismissed. She is homeless again.

Stefan collects her case and marches her down the circular drive to the bus stop.

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<sup>89</sup> Hunter's stew traditionally made from bacon fat, onion, mixture of sauerkraut (pickled) and fresh white cabbage, and Polish smoked sausage (*kietbasa*)

England: Babbdown Resettlement Camp, Tetbury  
*April 1951*

Davina welcomes Lucia into her wooden hut, dries her tears and gives her sweet, black tea. Two little boys peer from behind the army beds.

‘There, there,’ Davina murmurs in Polish, patting the younger woman. ‘It will be all right, you’ll see.’

Lucia stares, uncomprehending in her misery.

Stefan has gone to seek help from the camp bursar. On his way back from the interview, he meets Adam outside Davina’s hut, and recounts the advice he has been given.

Adam’s response is unexpected, ‘Stefan, Stefan, think man, think.’ He grabs his arm, ‘You can’t send her back to Italy, you’ll lose the child. Do you want that? Another one lost?’

Stefan shrugs off his friend. ‘What else can I do? It has come to this, that I don’t know what else *to do*. In normal circumstances... *Cholera*, Adam, normal circumstances, what are they anymore?’

‘You can’t send her back.’ Adam insists.

Stefan continues, ‘But where is the family to help? A house at least? Do we have to do everything ourselves? This is too much. Too much.’ He starts pacing up and down.

Adam lowers his voice, ‘These are not normal circumstances, Stefan. We have to accept that. The woman is pregnant, you have no home, and you are not married. But you are alive, Stefan, alive, and you have a child coming. Think about that.’

Stefan shakes his head, ‘Pregnant and cleaning floors. Not exactly what I had in mind when I sent for her.’

His mind churns and turns, ‘What did I have in mind when I sent for her? Stay a little while here then move on to Canada to Cesia, to a welcome?’

He notices Adam, waiting patiently for him to catch up in that familiar way of his.

Suddenly, he says, ‘Why doesn’t she get on with the Polish women, Adam? She could stay with a family.’

Adam spreads his palms, 'They're jealous. But she doesn't help, Stefan. She knows they're talking about her. Have you seen the dirty looks she gives *them*? Anyway, she's too pretty to stay here; it's best you keep her away from the men.'

Stefan looks at his friend in surprise. 'You're right,' he says, 'they're always around her, joking and laughing in that way. It's disrespectful to me.'

Stefan paces up and down, pulling his hair back, first with one hand, then with another, thinking to himself, 'I should marry her now. I don't like the way they talk about the girls they knew in Italy.' He stops and looks at Adam again, as a fresh thought enters his confused mind, 'Adam's different, though, a kind man, sensitive, too sensitive. What woman would want him? *Cholera!*'

Adam sighs. 'We need to find somewhere, come on, there are empty huts at the edge of the landing strip.'

---

Stefan walks around the building carefully appraising its deficiencies, chin jutting out. He'll need to convince her it can be done. Well it's her fault for not wanting to live with the Polish families in the main camp. 'What will they say when they find out she's pregnant. How can I marry? What about Halina? Everything's such a mess.'

All well for Adam to suggest it but faced with the reality of a disused Nissan hut, Stefan has his doubts. No running water for a start. And so cold and muddy; 'she won't like that.' The lack of electricity can be managed but a baby needs to be warm, washed - its clothes, nappies - 'how can I get the water here?'

'Well we're alive, aren't we? She surely ought to see that this is what matters most, not how the place looks.'

He steps inside. Only two windows cracked; wire holding the opaque glass together, the walls are unlined corrugated zinc, but the floor is good. 'I can build a partition here; break up living and sleeping space. The round cast iron coke stove is still there. Good, that's a start.' Stefan scrabbles together discarded paper and sticks, and lights a fire

'Born with a sword in one hand and a hammer in the other, that's what they say about us. Well, I have two hands; one to fight and one to rebuild. So now we build but this time not in my country or in hers. Here in this place, wet and mud. Farmer Randall has water for animals only two fields away. If he's a decent man a bottle of whisky should fix him. Who would give an animal drink and let a human die of thirst? After all, what would it cost him?' Stefan rambles on.

Despite the cold and damp, he takes off his jacket; rolls his sleeves practically to his shoulders and gets down to work, grunting each time he throws bricks onto a scattered pile. 'I'll use them to make a dry standing before the house.' Now it's becoming a house, their house. 'No waiting lists for nationals only. I will build our own house, our own life, and this time nothing will take it away.' Optimism surges through him as he works. This he knows – how to work - and it's a good feeling. While he works Stefan can't think, and while he plans he sees only good things coming. 'We are young, strong, we survived. We can make a life until things get better in this country, or maybe go back one day; who knows. But how can I go back to Poland if I marry this Italian?' He redoubles his efforts to banish thinking.

After two hours he is dirty, hot, and sweating but the perpetual anxiety has all gone, replaced with the strength that comes from optimism. Angling back his head as he drinks water from an old brown cider bottle he feels his throat rise and fall with each swallow. The feeling is good, this is how a man should feel. Right now, all will be well.

Returning to his work, he sets about with borrowed tools, levelling the ground and stamping down the mud with his heavy boots. It has stopped raining and his mind is fully occupied now with arranging the salvaged bricks into a herringbone pattern; an echo from the wooden floors of his wealthier neighbours back home. He fashions the broken bricks skilfully using bits of abandoned pig iron to fill the gaps around the edge of his carefully calculated design.

*Cirencester Register Office*  
*June 1951*

'Name?' The grim-faced registrar in his cheap pin-striped suit glares at Stefan's blue identity card. 'How do you spell this?'

Mr Mullings is not having a good day. His deputy, Norah, rattles in with a pale green cup swimming in a saucer of slopped tea, which splashes onto his desk. Huffing, he mops his papers before returning to the surly Pole sitting in front of him.

'Where was I? Age? I shall need more than this,' he says, pointing to the card.

Stefan shrugs, 'I don't have more.'

'How old are you then?'

'Thirty-four.'

'Condition?'

Stefan looks blank. 'What means, condition?'

'Marital status'

Another shrug.

'Are you single, divorced, widowed, or married?'

'Married.'

'Then you cannot marry this woman,' Mullings explodes.

'Dead, she is dead.' Stefan grinds his teeth. 'My wife is dead.'

'Well, why didn't you say so in the first place?' Mullings' pen scratches across his form.

'Now, what have you got for the lady? What *is* this?' He picks up a lined page with two broad margins, heavily typed in double spacing. It bears an official stamp and signature: Jelsi, 8/1/1950 *L'Ufficiale delle State Civile*.

'Birth certificate,' explains Stefan.

'Birth certificate, but what does it say?' Mullings passes it back to Stefan.

Stefan points out a date with his thumbnail, '13<sup>th</sup> December 1925. She was born on the tenth,' he says.

'So,' Mullings scratches, 'Twenty-five years old.'

The official entries are finally completed to Mullings' satisfaction. He writes on a slip of blue paper. 'You come back here on the 18<sup>th</sup> June at ten o'clock in the morning, with the lady, understand? It's on this paper, here, see?'

Stefan gathers up his documents, hands over ten shillings and pockets his change before shaking the man by the hand. He leaves the Register Office feeling slightly lighter than when he entered.

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Saturday, 18<sup>th</sup> June is sunny and dry. Lucia's white blouse hangs loose over her skirt, which is fastened with a length of elastic and two safety pins. The two witnesses smile sympathetically to each other at Lucia's attempts to hold her handbag in front of her. Stefan wears his brown demob suit.

The wedding breakfast is tea and a bun in the Cricklade Street tea shop before catching a bus back to Tetbury. Lucia twists the narrow gold ring around her finger.

Stefan scoops her hand into his. 'You'll wear it out if you keep doing that,' he remarks. He smiles at her. Lucia smiles back nervously. One problem is solved; the marriage certificate safe in her handbag, but she still has a birth to go through.

The next three months pass harmoniously enough. Davina is a regular visitor to their hut, bringing small items for the baby; vests, matinee jackets, nappies left over from her boys. Together the women wash the little clothes, hanging them on bramble bushes to dry. Davina teaches Lucia a few Polish words, but mostly they manage with sign language and laughter.

When Stefan is on nights, it is a different matter. Lucia lies in bed, afraid to sleep. Occasionally she fingers the cold metal sheath of a curved Arab dagger<sup>90</sup> hidden under her pillow. Stefan has explained that the dagger must enter the gut and be dragged upwards in one swift movement thereby disabling any intruder by disembowelling. If anything, Lucia is more afraid than ever.

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<sup>90</sup> Jambya: brought back from Egypt by Stefan, subsequently surrendered in an arms amnesty

The subsequent arrival of Buk, an Alsatian puppy provides both fun and comfort, especially at night when he snuggles behind her back. Buk becomes Lucia's constant companion, following her everywhere she goes; much to Stefan's disapproval.

'He must learn to stay behind,' he explains to Lucia. 'He must know who his master is,' he says, holding the puppy's mouth shut and staring him down.

Lucia tosses half a biscuit onto the grass, whereupon Buk struggles free to gobble it up.

'Lucia! You must take this seriously. This dog can save you.'

Lucia lies back on the grass, the huge mound of her belly warmed by the late autumn sun.

'Stefa, I could have this baby at night, alone in the dark, in this place. How is that dog going to save me?'



England: Stroud Maternity Hospital  
*September 1951*

Stefan stares at his new son. Dark-haired, with dark eyes that look back knowingly, mirroring his soul, the way only a baby's eyes can.

He tries not to remember Teodor. Tries not to remember how the sleeping infant woke screaming when they came for him. Tries not to remember the terror of wondering what would happen to his Todek.

His thinking takes him places he'd rather not go, 'Parents leave, lose their children. War is like that. But a boy, a boy without a father will always be second best, always, for what man would take another man's son?'

Jagging, his mind flips back to look again at the baby in front of him. He sets another train of thought loose, 'A man wants his own son not someone else's; he wants his own. Men don't know their sons. Whose son is this one? Is he mine?' The Italian doctor, there at the hospital where she worked. She talked with him in her language.

'She. Women. They will always betray you. How do I know this squash-head is mine? Look at his dark hair; look at the way he looks at me - anger rising now - a father feels love for a son, I feel nothing. This is not my son. Todek was my son, not this one. I did not protect my son; how can I protect this boy? I don't even know he's mine.'

Looking at Lucia, he says, 'Why is his head like that? Something is wrong, his head is all squashed.'

Lucia lifts her head from the pillow to look at the baby.

'It's because you had typhoid, that's why,' Stefan continues.

Lucia looks at her husband, 'What has typhoid to do with it?'

'You are weak; you did not carry him well,' he says, as his guilt transfers light as a feather in the wind to Lucia. He sits down on the canvas chair. He need not protect another man's weakling child. Whatever happens to this child is the fault of its mother.

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Exhausted and frightened, Lucia drops her head back to the pillow, turning away from her husband.

In the growing silence, she thinks to how it could be, 'Why is he finding fault with my baby? Why my fault? At home, they'd call the priest, they'd be smiling, shouting: "*Un maschio!*"<sup>91</sup>' There would be a celebration. At home, Mama and Concetta would look after me. They understand what it is to be a woman. Concetta!

'Now this nonsense about the shape of his head!

'*O Dio*, this place! Is it not enough I live in a shed, with no water, no electricity? Is it not enough they treat me like dirt under their shoes? Even this man – supposed to be my husband – can't find a good thing to say about my son. My son, I have a boy.'

While Stefan looks idly around the ward, Lucia fumes on silently.

'What I can expect here? English nurses ignoring me. At home, they understand a woman's suffering, a mother's pain. They know how to tell a good birth; the hours of labour, the tearing, and the blood. Screaming, that's what tells a good birth; the more the mother suffers, the more she loves her child. There's is no passion in a cold and silent delivery.'

Her eyes prickle heroically, as she thinks, 'My life is over now. I have a child, pain and suffering is my destiny.'

Lucia brushes away the dampness from her eyes. 'I miss my mother,' she whispers.

Stefan either doesn't hear or doesn't wish to. He says nothing for several minutes.

Eventually, Lucia goads him in retaliation for the silence, 'I want to call him Bruno.'

This time, she gets a response.

'Bruno?'

'Yes, an Italian name.'

'No! He is Polish! Do you want my friends to laugh at me? Do you want them to think I am not his father? He will have a Polish name!'

'Oh! Now you are interested in him! Because of your friends! Oh! Now I see! Of course, we have to make you look good in front of your friends!'

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<sup>91</sup> A boy

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'Shhh, if you carry on like this, you'll have to leave. These foreigners...' mutters the nurse, briskly trotting down the ward towards them, 'Ever since the war we've had to put up with this.'

Trotting on, she thinks, 'Why can't they behave quietly like Mr and Mrs Taylor here; nice couple, and hardly a squeak from her labour, not screaming the place down like that Eytie.'

The nurse approaches the bed next to Lucia's. 'How are you, dear? Oh, just look at your little Jennifer – such a little sweetheart. And what lovely chrysanthus, did you bring these?'

Mr and Mrs Taylor smile in affirmation.

Emboldened, the nurse raises her voice, 'These foreigners, they want to learn how to behave around decent people.'

Mr and Mrs Taylor's smiles do not falter.

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Lucia glowers at the Taylors before continuing, 'I hate shh, shooshing, like Polish names. All shoo, shoo names – Rysiek, Tomasz, Tadeusz. No, no Polish names.'

'Listen, woman, a father names his own son, or would you like someone else to do it for you? Is that it?'

Lucia retreats back into her pillow, realising days and nights - a lifetime - of recriminations that that notion pursued, denied, might form.

'Name him then,' she says, openly crying now, 'but I want Bruno for his second name. Or do I have nothing to do with this child; did I carry him for nine months and go through that pain for nothing? Like I don't matter?'

'All right, all right, be quiet woman. Zbigniew, we'll call him Zbigniew and his second name will be called Bruno, Okay?'

'Okay, it has to be Okay.' Defeated. 'what can I say? Nothing.'

'No, nothing, you are a fish, you have no voice. Look here now, Davina is coming.'  
Stefan rises. 'Be nice and don't make me ashamed.'

He turns with a charming smile to the approaching woman, '*Pani*, come to see my son?' Taking her outstretched hand, he bends to kiss it.

Davina frowns, 'I have come to see your *wife and your son!* Here, Lucia, I brought you some fruit. What has this man been doing to you? Why are you crying?

'I know, I know. Who can have a child in a country like this? They don't know what they're doing. Was it very bad? Yes, yes, I remember when my Marek was born. Twenty-four hours and nothing did they give me for my pain, nothing. But we are strong! Now where is that baby? Hello, hello, he is fine, a strong boy. What is his name?'

Lucia stares uncomprehendingly at Davina, holding the brown paper bag that has been dumped on her lap.

'Zbigniew!' announces Stefan.

'Ah, Zbyszek, Zbychu! Lovely! Will you drive out anger, little one?' Davina picks up the child. 'Someone in your family should learn to do that. You know,' she says, speaking close to the baby's ear, 'your father could have been an officer? Well, what else did they have left after Stalin was finished? You should know these things, it's never too soon.' Raising her head, she turns to Stefan. 'But he couldn't learn to hold his temper and keep his mouth shut.'

'They were all stupid, someone had to tell them.' Stefan sulks back.

'Yes, all stupid but you!' Laughing now, all eyes are on the light-haired woman standing in the middle of the ward with the Polish baby in her Polish arms as if she owned the place.

---

Lucia starts as the hut door opens, letting in a gust of cold air along with her husband. 'Did you do it?' she asks immediately.

'Yes, yes I told you I would do it.'

'Because you have to register, it's the law. We have to tell the police. Let me see the paper then.' She puts the baby down on the bed and goes to rise.

'Why? Don't you believe me? It is an important document, better I keep it safe, with the other papers.' Stefan takes the birth certificate from his jacket pocket and shuffles in a drawer to find a small suitcase key. 'What did you cook today?' he asks.

'Why won't you show it to me,' Lucia says, 'let me see it!' Snatching the certificate from Stefan's hand, she scans the thick, handwriting before holding the paper out to him. 'You said Bruno, you promised! *O Dio!* What this is?' She waves the certificate.

Stefan's tongue flicks over his lips. 'Bronisław is Bruno, Polish spelling. Same thing. He needs to have a Polish name if we go back in Poland. What good would an Italian name be?'

'What good would an Italian mother be, you mean? That's it! You're going to take him away, aren't you? That's what you are planning! I know. Paolo, he took the boys away after he killed Concetta. Is that what you're going to do to me? Kill me too? Well, you better do it soon because I'm sick of living like this, I'm sick of it. Like an animal in a barn. Even in Jelsi they had electric!'

'Electricity, and your stupid grandmother try to light straw from a light bulb. Ignorant people. Yes, you had electricity in Jelsi, and you had Mussolini too. Wasn't that enough for you?'

'What you are talking about? You are clever; you make my head go around. Thank God my mother doesn't see the way I live. I would be ashamed.'

---

A baby is hard work. Add to that, no electricity, running water or money, and it gets harder still.

In Stefan's darker moments, he is convinced the child is not his, and torments Lucia with questions about the dark-haired Italian doctor at Malmesbury. 'Why did you leave so soon, eh? Something must have happened.'

Lucia is exhausted by these regular assaults. 'You are asking me, when you are the one with secrets. At least I don't have a husband and child back in Italy.'

'They are all gone, they're dead, I told you. All gone.' Stefan shouts.

'Why should I believe you when you had her photograph all the time, and you told me it was your sister? Do you even have a sister?'

'Shut up.' The first slap always shocks the most. It shocks him as much as Lucia. He grabs his coat, and leaves her holding her face.

By the time Stefan returns, Lucia is asleep, and he has lost all their money on cards.

Lucia never mentions Halina again. And, for a while, Stefan does not mention the Italian doctor. But every Friday payday, Stefan's first call is to the men's hostel for a drink and a card game. When Lucia remonstrates, he reminds her that he is entitled to spend his time and money as he sees fit, since he has earned it.

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Within two years another baby is born, and Stefan's behaviour is somewhat mollified by a new distraction. He allows Lucia the privilege of naming the girl-child, so she chooses Adelaide<sup>92</sup>.

Davina remains a steadying influence, and a constant support to Lucia. But the single men are many, and their influences beguiling, despite Stanczek's attempts to find good Polish girls for them. Stefan continues to gamble.

One by one, the family groups leave Babdown. Those who can, buy houses, but public housing in the surrounding area is scarce. Bristol offers cheap rooms in shared houses. Encouraged by his friends, and the prospect of better-paid work, Stefan urges Lucia to move. For her part, there is little resistance. With a toddler and baby<sup>93</sup> and a husband who regularly loses at cards, Lucia can't wait to improve her situation. Not least, to get Stefan away from the single men's hostel.

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<sup>92</sup> After Adelaide of Italy whose patronage includes: abuse victims; brides; empresses; exiles; in-law problems; parenthood; parents of large families; princesses; prisoners; second marriages; step-parents; widows.

<sup>93</sup> Adda: eight months, Zbyszek: two years and nine months

England: Bristol

*June 1954*

With encouragement from Davina, Stefan and Lucia plan their move to Bristol.

Finding a job is the easy part – frying doughnuts in a bakery throughout the night – but once there, Stefan finds few landlords will take children, and fewer still will tolerate foreigners: ‘No coloureds, No dogs, No children, No Irish’ and variations on that theme.

But no. 6 Albermarle Road, Hotwells, Bristol 8, is owned by a Polish family, Machowski, who are prepared to overlook Lucia’s foreignness, provided she cleans the stairs daily. They rent the Motkaluk family two rooms; the bathroom and kitchen are shared.

Standing on the pavement, Lucia looks up at the imposing three-storey, Georgian house, with basement, calculating the amount of cleaning she will be required to do.

Stefan has already leapt the three steps to the front door, on which he vigorously knocks, brown paper package under his arm. He turns and indicates to Lucia that someone is coming.

Lucia sees the large door swing open to reveal a tall thin woman with a sharp nose. Stefan starts talking immediately but the woman peers over his shoulder at Lucia and the children left on the pavement. Lucia hears her say something in Polish to Stefan, then she opens the door wider and clicks her fingers, jerking her thumb behind her to indicate they should enter.

Stefan steps inside, still talking, while Lucia struggles to lift Adda in the pushchair up the steps. She feels a little push from three-year-old Zbyszek. But his feeble effort to help his mother only manages to trip him over and he falls hard on the threshold, grazing his elbow. He utters not a sound, his large eyes taking in the high ceilinged, dark hallway, and his father’s grim face. The fat baby in the pushchair grins at everyone.

After struggling to get the pushchair up two flights of stairs, they finally look around their rooms at the back of the house. Once the dusty green velvet curtains are pulled back, light floods in to illuminate a large chenille wall hanging. With its dark landscape and recumbent lion, it dominates the wall above the bed. Eying the lion, Zybsek moves close to his

mother as Lucia unclicks their luggage and starts to unpack. While Lucia opens drawers and cupboards, running her fingers along surfaces, Stefan admires the high ceilings, his hands in his pockets.

As soon as Stefan leaves for his shift at the bakery, Lucia hears *Pani* Machowska and her teenage daughter enter their rooms. Barely acknowledging Lucia's presence, they enter the bedroom, and start sorting through the children's clothes which Lucia has carefully laid out on the bed. They hold up garments smirking at each one.

Lucia's face burns with embarrassment and fury. Both mother and son sense the Polish women's derision.

*Pani* Machowska holds up a woollen sweater to her daughter, pointing and laughing at the little train stitched into it. Zybsek runs forward and grabs the sweater from *Pani* Machowska's hands. '*To jest moje*, that's mine' he shouts.

'*To jest moje!*' *Pani* Machowska mimics the toddler's accent and wrenches the sweater back. Zybsek's tired little legs buckle and for the second time that day he falls.

This time, he cries loudly, angrily beating off his mother's restraining arms, '*To jeste moje, to jeste moje...*' Outraged at being woken from her nap, Adda joins her screams to her brother's.

*Pani* Machowska throws the sweater at Zybsek's head, '*Weź to*, take it then,' she shouts, before turning to go, her lumpy daughter following.

Lucia struggles to comfort both children and can only stare at the open door to the landing.

By the time Stefan returns from his shift, Lucia is ready. He goes to speak with their landlady and returns all smiles.

Lucia fumes as Stefan patiently explains that *Pani* Machowska is a good woman, that she did not mean to be rude, that Lucia misunderstood; she was merely admiring her knitting.

Days turn into weeks and weeks into months. Lucia is constantly frustrated by Stefan's placations, and threats that there are few other landlords who would take them in. That is, until the day he is sleeping off a double shift and wakes to hear the abuse for himself.

The family move to 15 Sussex Place, Bristol 2. In sixteen months, Adda has learnt to walk, and Zybsek is fluent in Polish. At four years old, he is the darling of the inner-city Polish



community, which revolves around the Polish Catholic Church of Our Lady of Ostra Brama in Cheltenham Road, and the SPK club attached to it.

Within a few weeks, Lucia meets Lorna, an Englishwoman married to a jovial Pole, Zbiowski who runs the club. Lorna is a tiny sparrow of a woman, who seems permanently pregnant, and adored by her husband. She cheerily adopts Lucia and her children, and together they conspire against the frequent criticism of the Polish women and the even more frequent drunkenness of their husbands. Lorna tries very hard to pronounce Lucia's name but, it seems, that Lucy is easier so practical as ever, that is what she calls her new friend. It is not long before the novelty of an anglicised name appeals to Lucia, and this is how she introduces herself. Stefan does not object.

England: Yate  
*early 1956*

'Lucy! I met a man. He told me there are houses, new houses, in a village called Yate, not far. Doesn't matter. They've got jobs in the factory there. He said, you get a job in the factory and you go on the list for the house. Because we have two children, we have a good chance; a boy and a girl, see. They cannot be together, they must have separate rooms. The houses are for the workers in Parnalls' factory. They make electric things for the house, irons, cookers and things.'

'What do you know about that? Making cookers? Anyway, they won't give us a house, we're foreigners.'

'What did I know about frying doughnuts? I learned, didn't I? I can learn to work in a cooker factory. How hard can it be? I will go tomorrow morning, give me some money for the bus.'

'I only have ten shillings. It's the key money for the new flat.'

'Give it to me.'

*23 June 1956*

After gathering up the last of their belongings, the Motkaluk family hand back their keys to 15 Sussex Place, Bristol, and walk the long mile to Bristol Bus Station. Stefan is excited, talking all the time about the new house, but Lucy is apprehensive. She took her leave of Lorna, who promised to visit as soon she was settled, but only Stefan has seen the house and, based on her experiences so far, her expectations are not high. The house is tied to his job and his unpredictable temper. She is worried he will jeopardise the roof over their heads.

Lucy places Adda beside her on the bus and she immediately falls asleep to its rocking motion. When it stops by Parnalls' main gate on Station Road, she tries to wake her confused and disorientated daughter. Stefan's strong arms reach down to carry her, half-awake, off the

bus into the fresh air. Once on the pavement, he hoists her limp body over his head and clasps a chubby leg with one hand to steady her. Lifting a heavy bag with the other, he walks quickly away, leaving Lucy to follow with Zbyszek holding onto the handle of a pushchair piled high with belongings. Eyes wide, he trots along Station Road and into Cranleigh Court Road. Lucy watches Adda bounce up and down to her Stefan's heavy footfalls, anxiously listening to his laboured breathing. Adda appears to have no idea what is happening but hangs onto her father's hair as if sensing this event to be momentous. Ten minutes later, they reach no. 6 Gathorne Crescent.

Unlocking the front door with a flourish, Stefan lifts down his burdensome daughter and pushes her inside. Bare wooden stairs ascend in front of her; to the left is a door. Stefan leads his family into the living room, where suitcases and brown-paper parcels are heaped onto brown Marley tiles. For the last week, Stefan has been depositing their belongings every day after work before catching a late bus back to Bristol. Adda's mother immediately starts to cluck over the parcels.

The empty house echoes with the sound of her parents' excited voices. Adda begins to cry, complaining that it smells all wrong, and saying she doesn't like it. Lucia smells fresh plaster and unpainted wood, and no familiar cooking smells. It is noisy and bright, there are many rooms, and after their recent lodgings, all of them seem huge.

Lucy unwraps a plate and sets out four large, sugary doughnuts. She knows their doughy softness are Adda's favourite treat, but the child cannot be coaxed to take one, even though she badly wants to. For once, the toddler is overcome with shyness.

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Bit by bit, the family make their home comfortable. Lucy starts to smile again, despite her constant worry about money. Furniture is bought on hire purchase – another headache for her – walls are papered, doors are painted, and lino is laid. The level of debt increases weekly.

The dilemma over how to hang curtains brings more tension. Technically, she can make curtains easily enough. She buys tape and rail from the haberdashery department of Lewis's on one of the family's weekly bus trips to Bristol.

Stefan constructs neat pelmets, meticulously covered with the same paper he's hung on the walls. Everything goes smoothly until the vexed question arises of whether the curtain pattern should show inside or be viewed from the outside. Neither Stefan nor Lucy has had patterned curtains before; shutters or paper performing the duty of shutting out light and insects adequately. Here now they are presented with yet another example of their inexperience. They know they have to have them, they want to have good ones, but they don't know that the pattern is for their own benefit not that of folk walking down the road. The main problem is that neither is prepared to disclose their ignorance to the other - let alone to seek advice from an outsider, which might have alleviated in part at least, some of the tension during the whole curtain-making exercise.

Lorna's arrival settles everything amicably when Lucy broaches the subject with her new friend in the kitchen. Playing her trump card, Lucy announces confidently that 'the English' hang the pattern inside, and Stefan folds.

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Stefan comes home one evening, calling Adda and Zbyszek to assist him. The children approach, cautiously. Previous attempts at helping their irascible father have not ended well.

'Get me some red,' he instructs, removing a scroll from his grey gaberdine mac.

The children fidget nervously. Zbyszek chews at the edge of his thumb, while Adda hops from foot to foot.

'What's the matter with you? Do you want to go to the toilet? Lucy, take her to the toilet.'

Adda escapes, but only temporarily. She returns to hear her father, shouting now at Zbyszek.

'Red, like this, red,' he stabs his finger at a picture of a white, crowned eagle on a red background. The picture is a crest printed on white paper.

Zbsek starts to tremble, his large brown eyes filling with tears. Lucy steps forward and places a protective arm around his shoulder.

'Stefa, he doesn't know what you mean,' she offers.

Stefan rakes his fingers through his hair, then returns to stabbing the picture.

'He doesn't know what I mean. Is he stupid?'

The tears lingering on Zybsek's long dark lashes overflow, running down his face. Lucy smooths back his hair, and hastily wipes them from his cheeks.

'I want to make this red,' Stefan persists, stabbing at the white corners at the bottom of the paper. 'To go in here.' He indicates a glass frame.

Adda runs to the cupboard under the stairs, returning with a box of wax crayons. In her haste to spill them out onto the table, some fall to the floor. Quickly she chases the rolling crayons and deposits them in a heap in front of her father. Meanwhile, Stefan is pushing them about to find the correct match.

Lucy pulls Zbyszek out of the firing line, and whispers something in his ear. He goes outside to run some spurious errand.

Adda is absorbed now with the crayons, and together she and Stefan colour in the corners of the crest to an approximate shade by layering bright red and brown.

Satisfied, Stefan finds hammer and nails, and hangs the Polish, crowned eagle in the centre of the living room wall. On either side, hang photograph portraits of Zbyszek and Adda.

---

The crowned eagle tells a different story for Stefan to the one it tells for Lucy. She eyes it suspiciously each time she dusts, quickly shifting her gaze to her children's portraits.

Today, she regards her newly-decorated living room from the kitchen doorway with some pride. The wallpaper and grey-painted woodwork still leach the smell of paste and turpentine, filling her nostrils with newness. She brushes her hand along the red piping of the

grey three-piece, arranged around a square of red carpet, barely covering a quarter of the room. Blonde oak dining table, chairs, and sideboard gleam, awaiting guests.

Despite their mounting debts, it is a good time, a happy time. The Conservative government is led by Anthony Eden; Man of Peace, the National Health Service is in its infancy, and the Suez crisis is beyond the horizon, although Lucy does not concern herself with such things. The sun may not have shone all that wet summer, but the family's mood is high. Lucy sends photographs home of her well-dressed children and revels in her new kitchen, where the family's meals are taken around the yellow Formica-topped table.

Most Saturday mornings, Lucy receives instruction on Polish cookery from Stefan. This morning, she endures the horror of an enormous pig's head simmering on her new gas cooker, which Stefan promises will become a rare treat in their lives, if only she would pay attention to the spices. She has been able to produce a few bay leaves, pilfered while passing a bush, and a few black peppercorns. She wrinkles her nose at the piggy smell, as she skims dirty-coloured foam from the pan.

---

Stefan, however, is unstoppable; in no time he digs both front and back gardens, in preparation for the growing of vegetables. He greets his new neighbours as old friends, across the low wire fences threaded through concrete posts.

Two doors down, at no. 10, Mr. Brown is the first to be friendly. Bombed out of their London pub, he is eager to talk. Soon the excitement of decent housing and their exchange of wartime experiences bonds the two men. But next door at no. 4, Mr. Bird responds with a curt nod to Stefan's greetings, his wife hovering in the kitchen doorway. Mr. Bird looks like a man who has had no meaningful wartime experience, Stefan explains to Lucy, when she brings out a cup of tea.

She sits on an upturned bucket, holding his tea, and looks across the barren gardens, dotted by posts and flimsy wires, towards the waste land beyond. A man in grey slacks and

white shirt, sleeves rolled above the elbows, is rattling a rusty mower over the long, lumpy grass.

Stefan looks up from his digging and smiles, but the smile is not returned. Instead, she says to him, 'I don't like it.'

Stefan jams his spade into the red clay he's been struggling with. 'What?'

Lucy looks around the gardens, then back at the house, 'It's not like home. I can't find things I want in the shops, people stare at me. Even the birds sound different here.'

Stefan takes the cup of tea, draining it quickly before throwing its dregs into his newly dug trench. 'You'll get used to it,' he says, handing back the cup.

Lucy takes it and plunges her other hand into her apron pocket. She lowers her voice, 'That woman next door, Bird, she doesn't hang out her knickers.'

Stefan roars with laughter, just as Adda and Zybsek bound up, breathless, to report that Mr. Brown has mown a crease on the waste land and will be organising a game of cricket this Sunday afternoon.

'What is a crease?' asks Stefan.

'It's for cricket, something called cricket. It's a game. They're out there now, practising,' pants Zybsek. 'Throwing and catching, and Mr. Brown says I can have a go,' he announces, planting his feet apart. His face is aglow with excitement and yearning.

'Can I have a go too,' fidgets Adda beside him, more hopeful than confident. She has seen the Brown boys, and they are huge, but she will not be left out. It is also the first time she's seen a father play with his children, and she wants some of that.

Zybsek pushes her aside. 'No,' is his instant response, as he tries to evade his mother's assault on his bouncing cowlick. 'You're a girl.'

Lucy looks from one to the other of her children, then at Stefan. 'What do you think?' she frowns, 'We don't know anything about them.'

The children continue to jiggle up and down. Cricket is a revelation to them, but that Mr. Brown is open to all the neighbourhood children is a bigger surprise. Up to now, their understanding of childhood has been to keep clean, quiet, and out of trouble. They look imploringly up at their father.

Stefan is about to speak when Lucy interrupts, 'They look rough to me.'

The children squeak in protest, promising not to get hurt.

Stefan wipes his mouth with his upper arm. 'Brown, he is a good man. We just been drinking a beer together. Let them play. They are children.'

'Yes, yes, yes,' the children dance around in circles, until Lucy grabs Adda's arm. 'Stop this running about, you'll fall over. Do you want the toilet?'

Adda shakes her head vehemently.

'Zbysiu, you can play,' says Lucy. Still hanging onto Adda's arm, she turns to the child and says, 'You can watch.'

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No. 6 Gathorne Crescent is Lucy's first front door, and she likes to keep it closed. Everything inside is scrupulously clean and polished to a high shine. Not a crumb lands on the floor for more than five minutes before either she or one of the children picks it up. There is a ritual around everything, as if by sheer force of will, she can control her environment against the strange world outside her door.

Stefan, on the other hand, issues invitations to his Polish friends that Motkaluk's house is open to all. He quickly develops a guided tour, where every room is shown, and every stick of furniture described to his visitors, who are mostly single men and families from Babdown. His pride is palpable, and everyone in the family must play their part.

On receiving yet another last-minute warning that people are coming, she explodes, 'When do they come? I have nothing to give them!'

Stefan shrugs. He has instructed Lucy in how to cook Polish food and impressed upon her that empty serving plates must be immediately removed and replaced by full ones.

'They come when they like. It doesn't matter when, they just keep coming,' Lucy protests. She is terrified by the pressure on their finances of spreading Polish hospitality. But she does it anyway, determined not to let herself down.

After their guests leave, she complains, 'I am like their servant, just filling their stomachs. Why don't they ever invite us to eat at their houses.'



Stefan leans back on a kitchen chair, contentedly filling a rough nail with a matchbox.

'Because they don't have a house,' he says.

'But we don't have any money, and we never will if we go on like this,' she retorts.

'You don't understand.' Stefan smiles at his wife's frustration, 'They don't have anything.'

---

Deciding that a mile and a half is too far to walk to work, Stefan comes home with a bicycle; another hire purchase agreement in his pocket. The bike is a fine brown Raleigh with chain guard. Sunday mornings are now set aside for bicycle maintenance, which necessitates the bike being stripped, cleaned, oiled, and reassembled regularly. This, to pre-empt or fix imaginary faults.

He impresses upon Zbyszek, the need for regular maintenance. 'You see, you need to replace parts before they are worn, in case they wear out some other part. It saves money in the long run. Pass me the oil.'

At five years' old, Zbyszek only understands that he must stand still and listen to his father to avoid a pulled ear, or worse.

*September 1956*

One afternoon, shortly after September term commences at the village school, the headmaster, Mr Bolton, pays a visit.

On hearing the front door knocker, Lucy peers from the window to see on the step a thin, wiry man with every appearance of being dirty. His greasy thinning hair lends a shine to his pate matched by the front of his dark trousers, which he frequently rubs with the palms of his gnarled hands.

Gnarled they may be, but what Lucy doesn't know is that they wield a cane smartly enough on small boys.

His standing, did Lucy know it, would permit immediate entrance through the frosted front door, and a seat by the fire. But he looks dirty, so she opens the door cautiously.

'Is your husband home, Mrs. Mocaluc? My name is Mr. Bolton, Headmaster, St. Mary's Church of England Primary School,' he announces.

'My husband is working, he come back soon.' Lucy notes that her visitor is wearing a three-piece suit of good quality, despite its wear. Impulsively, she opens the door wide, 'Please, enter.'

'That would not be appropriate, I will return tomorrow. What time? What time does he return?' asked Bolton.

Just at that moment Stefan rides up on his bicycle.

'What is doing on here? Who are you? What you want? Lucy, why did you open the door? I told you.'

'Mr. Mocaluc I suppose?' says Bolton, appraising the man from head to foot; taking in his grey gabardine mac, strong boots, bicycle clips. 'My name is Mr. Bolton. I am Headmaster of St. Mary's Church of England Primary School and I'm here to talk to you about your son.'

Stefan swears under his breath, and hastily parks his bike against the porch wall. 'Come in, come in. Lucy! We have guest. Zbyszek, come here, see your teacher!' He stretches out his arm, 'Come, come in, please sir, my home.'

Bolton steps gingerly over the threshold as if stepping over a dead cat. Lucy watches him guardedly as he enters the living room. She watches him take in the polished floor and furniture, the new three-piece and the glowing coal fire. She watches him sniff, then soften his face on seeing the household's recent investment: a glass fronted bookcase containing a full set of *The Children's Encyclopaedia*<sup>94</sup>.

'These houses aren't bad,' he says, looking around. 'I see you didn't turn away the encyclopaedia salesman?'

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<sup>94</sup> Arthur Mee

She thinks that what he's said is good but before she has time to compose a response, her warm feeling evaporates. She sees him catch sight of the crowned white eagle on red background hanging in its frame against her ornate wallpaper. She feels his shudder.

Lucy moves to come between Bolton and Stefan, who hasn't yet noticed what she has.

'Sit, sit. Please sit.' Stefan invites, busying himself with hard liquor while Lucy attempts to press for a 'nice cup tea?'

Bolton sits gingerly on the edge of the sofa. He is not here to socialise. He does his duty, briefly, and brutally.

'The boy can't speak English. Miss Mustoe tells me he sits at the back of the classroom, knitting! She doesn't know what to do with him, and frankly Mr. er, er. Well frankly, it won't do. He must learn English and he must learn it quickly or I shall have to report this situation to the education authorities. I can't run a school like this, with pupils turning up speaking gobbledy-gook. What is it you speak here anyway?'

'Polish,' says Stefan grimly. His face has become severe, his lips thin and set with only a slight flex at his jaw to betray his anger. 'And Italian,' adds Lucy from the kitchen doorway, where she's gone to hush the children. 'Zbyszek speaks two languages.'

If she thinks this will impress Bolton she is very wrong.

'It must stop immediately!' He turns to Stefan, 'Do you hear me? Nothing but English must be spoken in the home. It's the only way. Absolutely no foreign languages if there's to be any chance at all.'

Bolton gets up. 'We'll talk again in three months. If there's no improvement, I'll decide what to do then. Good day to you.' Turning abruptly, he heads for the front door.

Stefan makes to move towards Bolton, but Lucy is quicker. She clutches her husband's sleeve, forcing all her anxiety into her face and shaking her head vigorously. She'll pay for this later.

Turning to Bolton, she says, 'Thank you, sir, thank you for the advice. Zbyszek will learn English, you will see. Thank you. I open you the door.'

She steps forward, almost pushing the man through the living room. She needs to make more distance between her husband and the school teacher. After she's ushered him

out, she closes the door gratefully, watching the little man's receding figure before hesitantly returning, swallowing fluttering little breaths all the while.

'He had no right!' Stefan explodes. 'In my own house!'

'Stefa', she tries to placate. 'We live here now. We must do as he says. You want Zbyszek to have a chance to do something with his life. It is the only way. We can't win with these people Stefa, please.'

'In my house!' Stefan storms on. 'In my own house he tells me how I should speak! How I will bring up my *own son*! To forget his tongue! In my house!' Stefan bangs his fist down hard on the table, rattling the ashtray as the frightened children run back to the kitchen trying to understand whether they are responsible for this latest outrage.

Stefan rages on while he removes his coat and bicycle clips and rolls his sleeves. He rages while washing his hands, face, and neck at the kitchen sink, throwing soap up over the window before grabbing at the threadbare towel to dry himself. The friction of every rub seems to add heat to his anger.

Lucy moves carefully around the stove, keeping the boiling kettle safely out of reach as she pours hot water into the teapot.

She holds out a cup and saucer. 'Look, here, take it.' She should have known better, it is too soon.

'Don't give me that shit, woman!' With one sweep Stefan sends the china crashing across the kitchen, hot tea spraying over Lucy.

Adda starts to cry. Zbyszek stares at his father, never taking his eyes off him, shrugging off his sister's trembling hand.

'Shut up! Clean up this mess! Where's the food? No, I can't eat now. Working all day, hungry, I come home to this? Why did you let him in? Eh, why, why?' The slap misses its mark and lands on her shoulder, allowing her to keep her feet. The effort seems to calm him. He sees the children watching, and he flinches.

Tired, hungry, and humiliated he hasn't even enough money in his pocket to storm off to the pub.

'Get my dinner. On a tray!' he commands, walking back to the living room. 'You! Go to bed!'

The children have to pass by him to get from the kitchen to the stairs. They make a dash for it, swiftly, avoiding his awful glare and unpredictable hands. Adda swallows her sobs upon the upstroke, knowing the power of tears to antagonise, knowing that crying never gets her anywhere; least of all when Stefan calls for his belt. She snivels quietly on the way upstairs to bed with no dinner.

Breakfast the following morning is a sombre affair. Stefan and Lucy's night has been fraught with argument, neither of them conceding a point until fatigue calms them into poor sleep. Both are tired, unready for the day ahead.

By seven, Stefan has long since gone to work, leaving Lucy in peace to light the boiler for washing day.

When the children are called down, the kitchen is warm with the steamy, clean smell of soap powder. Lucy plonks large bowls brimming with hot grey porridge on the table in front of them.

'From now on we speak English. Eat! And don't leave any,' she says, and returns to her washing.

The children watch steam curl off its surface with dismay, calculating whether a scalded mouth is preferable to a whack from behind if they don't start immediately.

When Lucy has anger to work off, she is liberal in sharing it. She moves last night's dry pans from the wooden draining board to make way for the wet washing. Everything she touches has its own loud percussion.

When she turns the cold tap to violent full flow, it splatters the sink, curtains, and window with sparkling drops of water to match the dried soap of the night before.

The children eat on and on, working through the cement trough of porridge. She watches their bowed backs, satisfied that what she has provided will keep them from hunger until lunchtime. As if by sheer force of will, she will keep them safe. At least she can control this much in her house.

She turns off the hissing gas flame and flips the lid of the boiler. A cloud of steam envelopes her as she hooks out the first tangled, scalding sheet and flops it into the deep sink of freezing water. Without hesitation her arms plunge in after it, rinsing back and forth, lifting and plunging again and again as she purges all traces of soap from its folds. Satisfied with its

condition, she finds the top end of the sheet and deftly pleats fold after fold from right hand to left until she holds its volume securely. Then she lifts, untangles, lifts, untangles in methodical fashion until, with each smack of the water, the sheet is brought under control and the twisting can commence.

Her bare arms turn and squeeze repeatedly, laying each wrung-out length on the clean draining board. The children watch the firm set of her face in its domination of this hot, wet kingdom as they plough on with their porridge, only looking away to trawl another large spoonful from the seemingly unending mass.

'Quick, you'll be late!' she snaps in a brief interval from her efforts, panting and letting out grunts as she manoeuvres the next sheet.

Demonstration of work is better with an appreciative audience. The village women back home always washed together at the laundry house fed by the fountain in the square; each one vying with the other for displays of strength and technique.

Lucy allows her dissipating anger to wander among those sunny mornings at the trough when she and her sisters snapped the wet sheets between their strong young arms and folded them into regimented creases ready to take home to dry. How long has it been, she wonders, since that erstwhile chore was one of life's absolute pleasures? How long since she felt at one with herself and her neighbours?

She brushes a wandering dark curl from her forehead with the back of her wet hand and blows tiredness from between her lips. The 6 o'clock cigarette and tea are revealing their inadequacies in the face of her unruly domestic enemies: dirty clothes, wet washing, two unreliable children, a dusty house, and a husband to... To what? To care for? And never enough money. Never, ever enough money.

Of the many visitors welcomed to no. 6 are Tom and Gerda. An Englishman married to a German, not unheard of after the war but seemingly incongruous in this company.

Gerda's attempts at glamour fall far short of Lucy's easy style. Gerda's tightly controlled hair is blonde. But gaiety is not her defining feature. Tom is dyspeptic, toothless and works nights. They have one child, Linda, older than Lucy's children. Tom is a disinterested father but Gerda more than compensates with her overbearing parenting. She is constantly on the alert for any slight to her child.

By day, Gerda keeps house quietly and meticulously as a woman does when her husband is sleeping off the night shift. She waits for Tom to wake, and for him to leave the house. Theirs is not a happy union. While he plants himself, belching, in his large armchair, she shrieks obscenities in German from the kitchen. A symptom of Tom's poor posture is his stomach bulging over his waistband. He communicates with Gerda through the love of his life, his budgie, 'Hey, Joey, Joey, hey. Joey, who's a pretty boy? Tell 'er to shut up, Joey. Eh, Joey. Tell 'er to shut up.'

Gerda screams back, 'Schtup, Schtup. You are horrible, disgusting.'

'Tell 'er, Joey, Tell 'er. Tell 'er to bloody shut up.'

As foreigners in the newly built street, Lucy and Gerda are thrown together. Their common language is resentment and an interest in hair styling. Gerda's Teutonic locks do not retain their superior colouring by chance. Her obsession is supported by dressing table, curlers, pointy tail combs, dyes and setting lotions; even a full head dryer that looks like it has recently landed from Mars. Where Lucy's back room is dark and stuffed with practical items and Stefan's bicycle, Gerda's is light-filled and rosy. Gerda's hairdressing supplies are for her sole use. Blonde hair with very dark roots requires regular maintenance.

Lucy is envious of her hair, her set-up, and her furniture. Gerda, for her part, is envious of Lucy's dressmaking skill and good taste. Neither is envious of each other's husband.

'I went to Co-op for sewing t'ings but they didn't have,' opens Gerda. 'They make me say it over and over.'

'What was it?' asks Lucy.

'For the sewing. White cotton.'

'They didn't have white cotton?'

'They had, I could see it.'

'What did you say?'

'Bilko, like you told me.'

'You ask for Bilko?' Lucy starts to catch on.

'Yes, like you said,' replies Gerda, becoming defensive.

'Sylko. I said Sylko.' Lucy laughs.

'Tch, you make me a fool.'

'No, no, they understand you. They try to make us look stupid. If you could see it why you didn't just point.'

'Ach, point, like a child.'

'Well, you have no cotton.'

The women sigh.

Lucy fishes in her apron pocket.

'Here, I have a cigarette but only one. We share.'

Before Lucy can stop her, Gerda picks up her hairdressing scissors and snips the cigarette in two. Little brown squiggles of tobacco fall into her lap. Too late, she realizes her mistake.

'Ach, it's too short.'

'Here.' Lucy takes two needles from her collar. 'We can do this.' She impales each of the truncated cigarettes onto a needle and passes one to Gerda. 'Light.'

They each smoke, and when their fingers burn, they laugh. Sitting in the sun on Gerda's red-painted concrete steps, there are no children or husbands to plague them. When their lips burn and their eyes smart, they hold their needles as far as they can to make the moment last.

'You want to work at Newman's?' Gerda asks.

'How can I with two children?'

'We can do it together. Share one job, they let you do that with children.'

'How?'



'We choose the days we work. You look after Linda on my days and I look after Zbyszek and Adda on yours.'

'I speak to Stefan, see what he says. But I have to wait for the right moment.'

Gerda shrugs, 'I don't tell Tom.'

---

A few days later, Stefan rushes into the kitchen from work.

'Lucy, I invited a man, a Pole. He's coming. With his family on Sunday. Clean the bathroom.'

Lucy looks up from her sewing and sighs, 'The bathroom?'

Stefan continues. 'He is living close in a caravan – wife and two boys. They are coming to us to wash. You must prepare something for them.'

Lucy is proud of her house is not quite ready for the onslaught of another lot of Polish visitors. She is tired of them traipsing up and down the stairs, so Stefan can show off. He doesn't see the way the women look at her, but she does; their contempt, and the way they whisper and sneer. Even the children are on show.

'Not more hungry Poles, Stefan.' It's not the bathroom she minds so much, it's how she's going to feed an extra family of four on their money. There's no time to get the bus to the Polish shop, and she wouldn't go without Stefan anyway. He's quick to complain when her Polish dishes fall short of some past ideal. He's never cooked them, of course, but seems to think that she should just know how they should be because she is a woman. As far as she can tell, Polish food lacks all colour, except pasty grey or shades of beigey-brown. Most of them involve several hours of ritualized preparation.

'I don't have anything to give them,' she protests.

'Don't make me ashamed,' is the answer she gets.

By Sunday, Lucy is not in the best of moods when a loud throbbing announces the arrival of an ancient motorbike and sidecar. Stefan hears it first and rushes to open the door and step out. She follows reluctantly, peering from behind her husband.

A good-looking driver waits for his passenger to swing her long slim leg over the pillion and alight. She wears Capri pants, cut tight. They are sage green, revealing the skeletal ankle of a young gazelle. Her fawn cardigan has leather buttons and its exaggerated collar drapes elegantly across her shoulders.

Lucy prefers to wait until her visitors knock rather than witness this showy arrival. She can feel Stefan's excitement and his eager anticipation worries her. She has already been driven half mad with his fussing and now here she is, unprepared, still wearing her apron, no time to compose herself. She shoos her curious children back into the house. For once, at least, she wants to appear as an adult woman in her own right.

The passenger steps daintily onto the pavement outside no. 6. She looks up and down the street whilst loosening her knotted head scarf. Its silky material slips loose and slides down her glossy blonde hair.

Lucy gasps. This is like no Polish woman she has ever met.

The woman turns towards the house, leaving her husband to lift two gangly boys from the side car. They are dressed in plain neat clothes; long shorts, checked flannel shirts (un-ironed) and hand-knit sleeveless sweaters. Although they are still, there is a liveliness about them. Their father places his arm encouragingly around the shoulder of the younger boy and urges them both to follow their mother.

By this time, the woman has reached the door, her red-painted lips stretched over bright teeth in an open smile. Her nose wrinkles at the top in the American way, suggesting both warmth and insincerity. Lucy takes in her arched eyebrows; she is so fair, she has had to shape them with brown pencil.

'My wife, Elizabeth,' proclaims a slow, deep voice. Lucy shyly extends a hand.

'Call me Betty, everyone does,' smiles the woman, leaning forward to kiss Lucy, who is becoming enchanted by this glamorous creature.

But something in the man overwhelms her. She feels his appraisal fall upon her.

'Feliks,' he introduces himself, taking her hand. With the half-smile of an experienced womaniser, he brings it slowly to his lips. His blue eyes never leave hers. Stefan, she notices, does not notice.

*'Proszę Pani, proszę,*<sup>95</sup> Stefan commends with a sweep of his arm.

'Now, none of that, speak English,' Betty laughs, stepping lightly into the house.

Lucy is in raptures. Hitherto, Polish visits have been conducted entirely in Polish, under the beady eye of the Polish white eagle. The rudeness of this exclusion she has come to expect from most of the women - and some of the men - but she cherishes special resentment towards Stefan, who never translates, or even speaks to her except to demand more of some food or drink item, as if she has an endless supply.

'My boys,' introduces Feliks, with a hand on the back of each one, 'Peter,' he gently pushes forward, 'and Michael,' who also holds out his hand, first to Lucy and then to Stefan.

'Please sit down,' she hazards.

The afternoon passes in a series of baths and wet hair, interspersed with talk, laughter, and food. Feliks especially wants to talk about Italy.

The boys, Lucy notes, are older than her children, and perhaps this is why Betty appears so negligent. Feliks sees to their needs and is deferential to his wife. Although he appears to entirely concur with his wife's parenting style, he is no pushover himself – one severe look is all it takes to correct his sons' behaviour.

Stefan is in his element, showing off his house and boasting about his job.

The story is told, and retold, of how rude the bus conductor was, the day the two men met. What a bastard he was, when Feliks had trouble finding change. The conductor had tutted then called Feliks 'a stupid foreigner who doesn't understand money.' How the people looked when Feliks was lost for words and Stefan – never one to resist interfering - shouted, 'You should thank this stupid foreigner. He saved you from learning German from your children.' It was lost on most of the passengers, shaking their heads, and certainly on the conductor, but it gave Feliks time to slap coins into the open palm of the man looking down at him open-mouthed.

The two men laugh to tell the story, embellishing it with each telling until it reaches ludicrous proportions. And until the women, mystified, raise their eyebrows at each other and make to clear the dishes.

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<sup>95</sup> Please madam, please – an invitation to enter

'You should have told him, I saved him from the coal mines!' says Feliks, downing another drink, and trying to stop Stefan from immediately refilling his glass.

'Or a Russian winter!' booms Stefan, refilling his own.

'Come on, let's wash up,' says Betty. 'Here you two, come and help us.' She throws a tea towel at the youngest children.

Over dirty dishes Lucy learns that Betty is Welsh but not where Wales actually is. Whenever Betty tries to explain, Lucy nods in agreement but her eyes remain unconvinced.

'But you are English,' she persists.

'No! I'm not bally English, I'm Welsh.'

'But you can live here, you can work where you like, and you speak only English,' Lucy continues.

'I speak Welsh *and* English. It's not my fault the English can't learn languages. Ah, and French, Latin and Polish.'

'You learn Polish?'

'Oh yes, *cariad*. I want to know what they're all talking about, don't you? Betty lifts a wayward blonde curl back into place.

Lucy half smiles, placing another clean plate onto the dripping pile. She admires Betty, but she wants to compete with her too.

That night in bed, she whispers to Stefan, 'Teach me Polish.'

'Why, I can tell you what you need to know. You don't need to know it,' he replies.

'Yes, I do. I want to learn.'

'It is a difficult language. Too difficult for you.'

Lucy leans into him, 'Try me, I'll show you.'

---

Every Sunday afterwards, the motorbike and sidecar arrives for the Grzelinski's weekly bathtime. When the occasion arises, Feliks brings his accordion, wedged tight between Peter's feet.

While Betty towels her hair, Feliks, glowing from his bath, slowly unclips his Melodeon Button Accordion.

Stefan rushes forward with a chair, while Lucy places an ashtray at his elbow, and the noise starts to subside.

Aware of his audience, Feliks takes his time in shifting the Hohner's weight on his lap and looking its straps over his shoulders. Shiny silver Bakelite, flashes fake mother-of-pearl. He slips his hand under the side strap. Finally, to the children's delight, he lets loose the bellows' fastening. Flashes of yellow pleats swing in and out as he starts to pump air into the instrument. The first few squeals emerge to quieten everyone now waiting for the music to pour out. Clattering under Feliks' nicotine fingers, the yellow-stained buttons produce the first notes of *Santa Lucia*. Turning to Lucy, Feliks' eyes crease as he waits for her reaction, and are rewarded with a blush.

Stefan leaps to his feet pulling Betty up and between his stomping and Betty's bobbing turbaned head, something resembling a waltz happens in the small living room.

One summer afternoon, Feliks comes over to Yate to ferry the Motkaluk family to his caravan in the country. Lucy takes her daughter onto her lap, while Zbyszek sits in the back. Stefan rides pillion, holding on behind with only one hand. It frightens her. As the plastic window lifts and falls, she can see his trousers flapping and his dark hair blowing. It is an uncomfortable but short ride. The children are over-excited and fidget.

The caravan sits in a field behind a drystone wall. Bright yellow stonecrop tumbles down. Betty is sitting in a swing seat – incongruous in this setting – dressed in salmon pink shorts with a crisp white shirt knotted at her waist. She removes up-tilted dark glasses to flash a welcoming smile. On a Formica side table is a jug of fruit squash and four tall glasses.

'Helloo, helloo, sit down,' she calls. 'Come on, Lucy, you sit here next to me. Feliks, get Stefan a beer and a chair. You, go away and play.' She dismisses Adda with a wave of her sunglasses. The child runs off after the boys like a greyhound out of a trap. 'She'll get dirty, you know, but never mind, at least we'll be able to talk. Here, have a drink.'

Lucy sips the squash and looks quizzically at Betty.

'Well, we all need a little pick-me-up now and then, don't we?' she laughs.

Lucy nods and takes a longer sip. She spots a plate of curling sandwiches in the caravan. Betty has catered.

The afternoon's perfection passes too quickly. When it's time to go, Lucy's children squabble about who will sit where. It is dark, and they are overtired. Stefan shouts absently at them and clambers on behind Feliks, shouting encouragement in Polish to his countryman, 'Come *rodak*,<sup>96</sup> everywhere is fine but home is best.'

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There follow parties and picnics, music, and dancing, with Feliks playing his accordion. Lucy and Betty are always first on their feet. Lucy sparkles, smiling at everyone, her children's behaviour temporarily placed on their own cognizance.

Feliks hardly takes his eyes off Lucy, his lazy smile impossible to read. Deep-planted blue eyes above Slavic cheekbones grow crinkles around their sides so that he resembles a woodland sprite; one who might steal your soul for a merry tune. On and on he plays; music of the south to remind Lucy of her country. *O Sole Mio*, they sing, longing for a warmth and a time just slipped away.

Smoke from the cigarette held between his lips curls up into the accordionist's face to make those smiling eyes squint even more. But he never misses a note, and he never puts a foot wrong as far as Stefan is concerned.

For his part, Stefan is in his element, pouring drinks and pressing food. He leaps to his feet, trying to dance in the overcrowded living room. He stamps his clumsy feet on the soundless carpet and pulls Lucy about until Betty sends him away, so she can dance with Lucy herself.

'We'll all go to the club next week, so we can have a proper dance,' says Betty, twirling Lucy around. 'Hear that, Stefan?' she shouts above the music, 'We're going to the Polish Club next week. Find someone to mind the children.'

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<sup>96</sup> Countryman

Stefan nods enthusiastically.

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The SPK<sup>97</sup> Polish Club is tucked under the armpit of a grand Bristol mansion. Its mean entrance and difficult access opens to reveal a dance hall, complete with bar and stage, and dotted about with small functional tables and chairs. These are largely occupied by the ladies, whilst their menfolk discuss, debate and argue at the bar. It is only when the musicians play that couples come together to dance, seemingly carefree; their semi-submerged hall harkening back to a pre-war café culture long since swept away.

Betty wears her favourite green silk - just a little shorter than anyone else's - slim straight legs cross elegantly at the knee; she twists her ankle behind a chair leg. Brushing back her glossy, gleaming hair with the side of her hand, she surveys the room with casual disdain. Lucy's dress is gathered tight into her waist, brown and purple with wide reverses reaching her bare shoulders. Her lipstick is the red of embers and her wavy hair is luxuriously dark. Other women in the room have done their best, but the life of a Polish wife has not equipped them to shine against these interlopers. They refer to them as 'The Blonde' and 'The Italian.'

The Italian beckons the Blonde towards her. Betty stretches her lithesome body and smiles.

Lucy leans in, 'Does Feliks talk to you about everything, Betty?

In reply, Betty arches a thin eyebrow, then says, 'He says he does but you know that doesn't mean anything with men. How about Stefan?'

Lucy shrugs. She is torn between loyalty and curiosity. Loyalty comes a poor second. 'He says I know everything I need to know about him.'

An unimpressed, 'Huh,' issues from Betty. 'Well at least he doesn't say he can't remember.'

'He says that too, then he gets angry.'

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<sup>97</sup> Stowarzyszenia Polskich Kombatanów: Polish Ex-Combatants' Association

'What is it you want to know?'

'It's like, he doesn't say what things were like. He tells me he was here or there but when I ask questions, he stops.'

'Well don't ask questions then,' comes the abrupt reply. 'Feliks tells me when he's ready.' Betty rolls her eyes. 'Then he goes on for hours. I'm usually asleep before he gets to the end.' She drains her glass. 'Look, they've got enough to talk about now. They never stop.'

Betty jiggles her empty glass towards the masculine gathering at the bar, 'Hey!' Feliks peers at his wife, then casually walks across the dance floor to the women's table.

'Yes, *Madame?*' he drawls, his cigarette held deep between his fingers.

'Two more of these please. Lucy is feeling lonely,' Betty says.

Feliks transfers his gaze to the dark-haired woman, who is now frowning. He notes the way she wipes the edge of her mouth, delicately with her ring finger.

'What is problem? Why you are lonely? Pretty woman like you?'

'Not lonely, I never said that.'

'She wants to know Stefan's secrets,' Betty says.

'Ah, all women think their husbands have secrets. You not understand.' He smiles. 'We are simple men. We go to work, we drink. What you want more?'

Lucy shrugs again. 'It's nothing, just talk.'

'I get you drink. You talk with Betty.' He walks back to the bar, lightly carrying their glasses with a finger in each one.

Lucy turns to Betty as soon as Feliks is out of earshot. 'Why did you say something? He will tell Stefan.'

'Relax, he won't. He knows what Stefan's like, he talks to him. If you want to know about Stefan, you should ask Feliks.

'Come on, let's dance. That lot are too drunk now, and your husband is useless.'

Betty pulls her friend onto the dance floor. Heads turn to watch the two women; one blonde, one dark; both exotically appealing and out of reach.

Lucy and Betty, dancing women, are watched by the gathered company of dour-faced women whose stern husbands try to look disinterested, but find they need to adjust their trousers. They will agree standards with their wives later, but for now they are back in an



Italian bar somewhere when anything was possible, and when fighting for their families seemed easier than living with them.

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A few weeks later, Feliks turns up at the door unexpectedly. Lucy is delighted and apprehensive. The *frisson* between them is manageable in company but she's not sure about his motive for this visit. He should not be here on his own.

'I come to see you. Where Stefan is?'

'At work – he'll come back soon.'

'Good, we talk, then we see Stefan.'

Lucy makes tea for her guest and shoos the children back out to play. She goes to the sink and starts to peel potatoes, while Feliks sits at the kitchen table. Her back is turned to him but she can feel him watching her. Her domestic task does not protect her from either his gaze or her nervous thoughts. 'This is wrong,' she thinks.

After cursory pleasantries, Feliks gets down to the purpose of his visit.

'You want know about Stefan.'

'Yes,' she half turns.

'What you want know?'

'About the war, his life before.'

'What he tell to you?'

'He said his parents went to Canada. They left him. His rich aunty adopted him. He said she bought him things; a bicycle, special one, all silver.'

'Chrome?'

'Aluminum. I think.' She wonders where this is going.

'That is all?'

'He said he had land.'

'He didn't say he was aristocrat?'

'No, he didn't. He said there were enough noblemen in the army already.'

They both laugh at this.

'He said he was educated. He went to *gimnazjum*.'

'Maybe.' Feliks shifts his weight and uncrosses his legs. 'What else?'

'Nothing else, only that he was fighting with the underground and he was arrested. He was going to be shot but there was a nun. She visited him. She showed him how to write a letter to Stalin, and so he got life in Siberia. Hard labour.'

'There was no other kind,' Feliks sneers.

'He had to choose: Russian Army or Polish. He chose Polish.'

'Such a choice.'

'Felik, please tell me. What happened to him?'

'You should ask him yourself.'

Lucy sniffles. 'He won't tell me,' she says, her eyes glistening.

The man looks at her; he thinks deeply before speaking.

'What time Stefan come back?'

'Half past four.'

'Okay, we do it like this. I tell you what happen to me. Same for everyone. More or less. Same thing, bad. The rest you ask Stefan.'

'Okay.' Lucy lifts the heavy pan of potatoes onto the hob and wipes her hands on her apron. She sits on the tubular metal chair opposite Feliks and places her hands on the yellow Formica table top.

Feliks offers a cigarette, lights hers, then his. On his first deep inhale, he starts his story.

'When war start in 1939...' He checks that she is listening.

Lucy taps her cigarette into the tin ashtray and nods.

'When war was start, it has been summer in Poland, late. I been apprentice at printer shop and when he kick me out in corridor, the German, and tell me to go home, I not been looking for job anymore because there not been jobs.

'Germans occupation on one side of Przemyśl, Russians other side. We have River San, run through centre. We been caught between Germans and Russians. Daytime I even saw my uncle going to work when I been taken away.'

'Taken away? Arrested?

Feliks nods.

'Did he see you?'

'I don't think so, but I recognise him. He maybe not recognise me because of beard.'

'You had a beard?'

'Everyone have beard after months in prison, no washing, no nothing. So then, that day I been seeing my uncle, we go to wagons. They shut doors and we, first stop in Tarnopol, 150 kilometres. They open sliding doors, first time, snow everywhere because is winter now. He, guard, take two bodies. Already people is dying.'

'Dying? On the wagons?'

'Of course, what you think? We been hungry, dirty, squashed in prison for months. No enough clean water even for drinking.

'We go on. After Starobielsk we going in cattle wagons, going always east. We only stopping in siding for Soviet army trains who go west, fast. Some time we stopping two, three days.

'Once every day, door is open to take out dead. We see Russian soldiers outside standing with rifles raised,' Feliks demonstrates, 'and bayonets, and with guard dogs. One bucketful of tiny fish – very salty, no bigger than man's half little finger. Was throw to us. Lucky ones grab handful and cram straight into mouth before someone steal from him – someone who had none. Bread: nothing, salty fish, no water to drink after. Such thirst, unbelievable. Some, those who can reach hands to high up window, - is no really window, is slits – try to catch rain in their hand. But Russians outside each corner of every wagon. They shoot any hands that show outside.

'We couldn't believe. So senseless, the cruelty, barbarity.'

'*O Dio.*' Lucy's face is in her hands.

'You want more? No?'

'Tell me everything,' she breathes.

'Was not the way to be human. I been months in goal in Przemyśl – I told you that – before I been sent east. Hundreds of men. In my cell, about eighty, all jammed in. We lay on floor. One turn over, everybody turn over. In middle, large bucket for, you know.'

Lucy nods, horror crosses her face.

'Room been maybe four metres by four metres. Army barracks, maybe for four men. Now eighty sleeping on wooden floor with bumpy knots, stick in you. We have only skin and bones.

'Every night interrogations. And every night questions been the same, "What were your instructions from Germans?" Always at night they do this work.

'When winter come again we march to station. Cattle wagons is waiting for us. I told you this already. We don't have no idea where we going, what is happening. Only that they don't shoot us yet. Plenty they did.'

'But they must have told you something. You needed to let your family know. You had family there, they needed to know.' Lucy says.

'Tell family? When I first been arrested, my father send my brother to bring food, clean shirt. My brother been soft – older than me – mother's pet. I have more ideas. When mother die, I am doing everything to get food. That is how I get arrested.

'Anyway, months I been there. I told you, all beard. Russians clear all shops. Where been full of everything needed for town now was nothing. No bread, no meat, no nothing. Queuing for small ration. My brother, me, been take turn, father also. But he been injured in German bombing and no can walk. We wheel him in trolley so we can get some sleep. Remember, Stefan was living in country, I been in town. You never have this where you been.'

'We were poor and hungry.' Lucy replies.

'No, Lucietta, no. You no been hungry. I tell you what is hunger. Even on train east. Bitter cold, - minus thirty degrees – injured, malnourished. Two months to get to Siberia. So many dead. Just throw bodies on sidings. No-one to bury them, no-one know who they been.

'Tell family? Better they don't know.'

From her seat, Lucy sees a dark shape approaching the small front door. As it nears the knobbly frosted glass, the tick, tick, ticking of a bicycle wheel, announces Stefan's arrival home.

She jumps to her feet with a gasp before rushing to light the gas under the pan of potatoes. One match after another drops onto the hob before the whamp of blue flames sizzle under the wet pan.

Feliks remains seated, watching Lucy bustle around the kitchen, quickly clearing away the overfull ashtray and empty cups. Stefan is loudly parking his bike in the outer room. They watch him bend to remove his bicycle clips and place them carefully onto the bike's crossbar.

A wild energy accompanies his entry into the kitchen, whereupon he moves swiftly to greet Feliks, hardly glancing at his wife. Feliks finally moves to rise.

Stefan places a hand on Feliks' shoulder, '*Rodak*, Sit, sit.'

The two men clasp hands tightly and Stefan pats his friend's arm.

'Lucy, tea,' he half turns towards his wife as he flicks out his belt buckle and unbuttons his grey gabardine mac

'So, Feliks, how is it going? How did you come here?' Stefan is washing his hands at the sink. The bar of soap is carelessly thrown into the plastic bowl as he grabs the threadbare towel that Lucy holds out to him. She glides behind him to retrieve the soap from its scummy grave. Lucy regards Feliks with admiration as he seamlessly moves his attention from her to her husband. She takes her first deep breath since first seeing Stefan's looming shadow.

'Where are the children?' Stefan commands, looking around.

Lucy opens the back door and calls them in. After a cursory glance at his son and daughter, standing apprehensively before him, he dismisses them with a wave of his hand. They scuttle back to their game, leaving the back door open to the garden. Lucy is grateful for the presence of a visitor to reprieve the children from their usual interrogation. 'What did you learn at school today? Were you good?'

'Stefan, how are you?' Feliks interrupts, 'How is work?'

'Good, good. Work, ah, don't talk to me about that place. They are all stupid. Piece-work, you know how it is in the Enamel Shop? The foreman is a fool, German. He sees fault only in my work, no-one else's. Hard to make the bonus. I will leave if I don't die there first.'

'You always have problem, Stefan. You must learn to get on with people. Make life easy for yourself,' Feliks responds with a lazy smile.

'Get on with people? You get on with them if you want to. I have enough of people. They are all stupid.'

The visit passes into harmonious subjects with the men promising to arrange a card game soon. By the time Lucy's cooking has reached a critical point, Feliks rises to leave.

'Stay, stay. Eat with us,' Stefan admonishes.

'No, no, I am on nights. I only came to show you my car,' Feliks replies.

Stefan exclaims, 'Your car?' He is on his feet. 'That car outside? Why didn't you say? Come on, come on.' Feliks follows him out of the front door, leaving it open. A strong draught slams the door shut before Lucy has time to grab it, blowing out the gas flame from her overboiling potatoes. She is left to clear the table again.

'Adda, come here,' she calls to her daughter. 'Lay the table. Be quick.'

Lucy lifts all the pans off the hob. Walking towards the front door, she leaves her red-faced daughter glowering at Zybsek, who is making faces at the back door. She calls over her shoulder, 'Zybsek, leave her alone if you don't want to do it yourself.' She just glimpses a surprised look lighting her daughter's face as she leaves the kitchen.

Outside, Stefan's legs extend from under Feliks' green Morris Minor shooting-brake. The car shakes as Stefan pushes and pulls at its exhaust. 'Is good, no problem,' comes Stefan's disembodied voice.

Feliks stands, implacable, waiting for his friend to be finished. Eventually Stefan emerges, wiping grease from his palms with his white handkerchief.

'Good, is good. Morris, good name,' he says pushing his weight down on the front wheel arch. 'Good suspension.' Stefan continues his noisy inspection.

'I am glad you approve,' Feliks smirks. 'I go now. To work.' He turns to Lucy. Lifting her hand to his lips, he whispers, 'I come again. Tell you more. Yes?'

'Yes,' Lucy lightly responds, something thripping in her chest.

As the green shooting-brake rounds the corner of Gathorne Crescent, Stefan strides back to the house, calling the children, 'Zbyszek! Adda!'

Lucy follows, her hand stilling the bodice of her cotton dress lest Stefan reads her thoughts through its movement.

But Stefan's focus is on Feliks' car and his own transport; a brown Raleigh, cleaned and oiled every Sunday. Its joyfulness is fading.

The meal passes without event. Today there is no complaint about seasoning, lumps or dryness. Lucy washes up quietly, and Adda dries, instinctively placing plates noiselessly, until she is rebuked for slowness. Zbyszek plays with his car on the floor. He runs it at Adda's

ankles before yelling at her to be careful not to step on it, as she jumps in pain. He is disappointed by both his parents' failure to register his outrage.

Stefan, meanwhile, loudly folds and unfolds *The Daily Mirror*, snorting comments, and tutting at the Teddy Boys. His mind returns to parental duties.

'Did you clean your shoes?' he snaps at his children, regarding their clumsy toe-worn slippers. The two leave their bickering and scuttle like a pair of beetles to fetch tins and brushes. Bickering resumes as they lay them out on the back doormat. Possession of the polish brush will guarantee first finish. It is summer, which means their hands will be smeared with brown polish as they try to neatly apply it to the straps of their Clarks' sandals.

Once they have finished, Lucy stands over them to ensure not a trace of polish remains on their hands. Despite their howls of protest at the rasping of the nail brush on their tender skin, she insists they scrub themselves spotless. Now and then, glancing at Stefan, she notes his lack of interest in the nightly ritual, even when the children present their shoes for inspection.

Later, in bed, Stefan makes his announcement.

'We need a car.'

He waits for the expected protest, but none comes. Instead, Lucy says, 'If you want a car, I can help you.'

'You?' comes the answer in the dark.

Lucy lays out her plan to share a job with Gerda.

'You won't manage it.'

'I will, I'll show you. I thought about it,' comes her swift response.

'Show me then. How will you cook and clean, *and* work? Did you think of that?'

Lucy outlines every careful detail as far as she can, making up the ones she can't possibly know about. Everything is accompanied by fulsome assurances that nothing will change the steady order of Stefan's life.

'We'll see,' is as much as she gets that night.

By the time Stefan returns from work the following day, Lucy has spoken to Gerda and they, together, have gone to Newman's factory to enquire about employment, only to be

redirected to the Labour Exchange. The forms Lucy has been given sit expectantly on the kitchen table, awaiting Stefan's attention.

As he enters, Lucy watches her husband carefully for signs he has noticed them. He moves past the table to wash at the kitchen sink. By the time he sits down, she is ready with a steaming cup of tea and a clean ashtray. She hovers by the cooker, watching, as Stefan, taking his time, pulls the paperwork towards him with two fingers. He holds the documents as if they are an enemy. His lips are pursed into a thin line as he reads. As each page is turned, he emits an affirmative half-grunt, followed by a deep sigh. Lucy continues to hover, hardly moving. Oblivious to its part in the kitchen drama, the wall clock's ticking seems to increase in depth, as if, any minute, it will miss a tick or, worse still, stop altogether.

Finally, Stefan throws down the forms as if dispatching an irksome wasp.

'I will do this for you. Are you sure you can manage everything?' he asks.

Lucy comes to sit beside her husband, face forward, her neck craned, eyes glittering.

'Yes, I can manage everything. You do the form? They say to take it back tomorrow.'

'*Tomorrow?*' Stefan sounds hesitant.

'Tom will do Gerda's tonight. We have to do together.'

'All right,' he responds, reaching behind him for a pen from the odds pot on the kitchen shelf. Lucy watches intently as he starts to fill in the form in an elegant hand, hovering his pen to and fro over the paper before each entry. He sighs frequently as if, at any moment, he might change his mind.

When the form is almost completed, he asks, 'What work is it?' before pushing the form towards Lucy, 'Sign your name here.'

Lucy quickly takes the pen and carefully signs her name. 'They say the Core Shop.'

She gathers up the papers and folds them then slides them into a manila envelope that is really too small for the job. The envelope swiftly disappears into her apron pocket.

'What is doing in the Core Shop?' Stefan asks. His shoulders have dropped but his heavy fingers tap on the kitchen table as if he is not quite done yet.

'I don't know. They will show us?'



'You don't even know what you are doing? Ayee, ah,' he sighs, reaching for his newspaper. He shakes it out loudly, knocking his cup and sending its dregs across the table. 'We'll see how long you last.'

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The Core Shop turns out to be attached to the foundry where small electric motor casings are cast. Lucy and Gerda start work at seven in the morning. By the time they finish their shift at four, every muscle in their arms and backs are on fire and screaming. They have shaken out casting sand and brushed the casings clean for eight hours, alongside the heat of the foundry. It is the dirtiest, worst place in the factory, the women's pay is the lowest to be had and the language around them rings with obscenities. Gerda is especially targeted, but Lucy soon learns to laugh along with its casual racism.

Every Friday when the foreman hands over a small brown envelope, Lucy feels the heft of coins and squints through perforated holes at the brown ten-shilling notes and green pounds, carefully layered inside. For a short while, her spirits are lifted. On Friday she smiles at her children waiting for her by the factory wall.

Gerda and Lucy have quickly worked out a system for caring for each other's children. Every afternoon at four, when the factory whistle blows, and men come streaming out through the gates, the women find their children leaning against the hot brick wall that surrounds the mysterious industrial world in which they have been encased. Each day they trot quickly out, avoiding the men, some of whom are running, some using one pedal to scoot along on their bikes. It is as if the weariness of their toils is boosted by this moment of escape, and joy descends upon them once more, before they scatter to their individual homes.

Lucy hurries home with her children so the evening meal can be prepared in time for her hungry husband's return. Once there, she washes her hands quickly, throwing potatoes into the sink and commanding Adda to make tea. Only when the potatoes have started to boil, and she has turned down the gas, does she sit and light a cigarette. She asks her children what they have eaten that day and questions them on how it was cooked. If they shrug their

shoulders, she repeats her question, breaking it down into specifics such as, 'Was it fried or boiled? Did you like it? What meat was it?'

Eventually Stefan returns, and a meal of sorts arrives on the table, plates steaming and piled high. At least three minutes of silence prevails until Stefan starts his own questioning of Lucy's day, 'Did you make your bonus? Have you brought your tickets home?'

When the meal is cleared, Stefan counts Lucy's job tickets. He calculates her piece work rate to see if she has exceeded her daily target. She invariably does. He then calculates her bonus rate and enters the numbers in a small red memo book. He then calculates what she has earned per day. On Fridays, Stefan closely examines her wage slip, comparing it against his calculations to ensure she has not been cheated. But by the following Wednesday, the money is all spent.

The next day, is Gerda's turn to work.

Tom retches once again. His groan flows out of the open front door of no. 6 into the night. Lucy kneels at his feet, at the bottom of the stairs, holding a bowl. Gerda, her disgust almost exploding from her tightly cinched dress, will have nothing to do with her husband.

Lucy, herself trying not to retch at the smell, wipes dripping saliva strands from Tom's cartoon lips. He raises his pink, watery eyes, bound by night-workers' bags. 'You're a good woman, Lucy, a good woman. You know that? You're a good woman.' He let loose another long groan then wipes his nose with his cuff, before glancing contemptuously at his wife. 'She doesn't love me, you know. You don't love me!' he shouts. 'She never loved me. She's ruined my life. You've ruined my life!' He starts to cry.

'Ach!' comes Gerda's guttural response, her arms tightly crossed against her chest.

The hot stream of invective being prepared in her mouth is intercepted by Stefan, 'Gerda, Gerda, come on, dance with me. No-one will dance with me.'

He unwinds the angry woman by grabbing her wrist and raising her arm as if to a twirl. Then he pulls her by the waist away from the staircase where Tom sits, staring fish-eyed at the bowl.

'Come on, Lucy will see to him. Come on, dance.' As he pulls Tom's wife away, Stefan hears the sick man say, 'You're too good for him, Lucy.'

He also catches Lucy's urgent shushing. Her fearful face disturbs him.

It's Christmas Eve and Tom's ruined stomach is suffering the effects of Stefan's desperate hospitality. This year the Poles have stayed away. Stefan has done his best with his English neighbours but Mrs Bird has refused everything and only allowed her red-faced, chubby husband one drink. The Lucas family did rather better but left early for the pub.

The party is doomed but Stefan's optimism prevails when Gerda starts to laugh. He pulls her onto his lap and reaches for a glass of vodka.

'Drink, Gerda, come on, have a drink with me,' he says, pressing the vodka to her lips.

Gerda quickly chooses to drink rather than have spirits splash over her mauve silk dress, her best. 'Ugh,' she tries to struggle free. 'Is horrible, it burns.'

'Ha, ha, ha. Your husband is a fool. Do you hear me, Tom? You are a fool. You don't know how to look after a woman properly.'

Tom groans again from the hall.

'Come here, Gerda, come on.' Stefan cranes his neck towards the captive woman, lips pursed. He splashes vodka onto the floor. 'Give me kiss; it's Christmas.'

Gerda pushes herself up away from his grip. 'No, no, no. I go home. Linda, come.'

Gerda's sullen daughter crawls out from under the table and follows her mother. The child has been crying but no-one notices.

Lucy and Stefan's two children peer out from behind the tablecloth where they have been snatching food in raids on the tabletop.

'Wait,' calls Stefan, 'you forgot your husband. Such a man.'

He goes to the hall and sees Lucy cradling Tom's head. She looks up, 'You shouldn't say such things. Tom is a good man. He works hard. She has everything she wants.'

'Everything, huh? I don't think so. Come on, Tom, I take you home.' Stefan wraps an arm under Tom's armpit. With a well-practiced manoeuvre, he places Tom's other arm around his own neck, grabs his wrist and raises the drunken man to his feet.

Holding his waist, he says, 'Come on, Englishman, I show you how to find your house. The rest is up to you.'

It is a while before he returns. Tom's drunken confidences have taken some time.

Lucy pretends to be asleep as the mattress bounces to her husband's undressing.

He throws back the covers and swings his long, cold legs into bed. He turns to face his wife's back and tugs the bed clothes over his shoulder. He detects a slight change in the rhythm of Lucy's breathing.

'Lucy, Lucy,' he whispers.

No response. He turns her over.

'Lucy, we should have another child.'

He feels her stiffen.

'Hear me. We have another child. I want a baby, come on.'

Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic: Hermakivka

1959

*Teodor kills his father*

The crackling wall-mounted radio suddenly ceases its patriotic blast, allowing silence to descend for a moment over the little house. Teodor smiles at his mother, 'Your instructions are on their way from Moscow, Mama.'

Halina smiles benignly at her gangling son, newly arrived from Latvia. At twenty he still has the narrow frame of a youth. But a mother knows her own work- she can tell by every straining stitch of his shirt that his shoulders and biceps have started to harden. His forestry work has tanned his skin healthy, and his twinkling eyes and ready smile lighten her heart. He looks more like Stefan every day.

'Your instructions will be coming soon, as well, Dorek.<sup>98</sup> Have you thought about what you want to do?' she asks.

Teodor clasps his hands behind his head, 'I have done little else this past year. I have talked to my friends and we all agree, it must be the Navy,' he replies.

'The Navy? But that is four years! You will be away so long.'

'Four years is nothing. I will have leave, we can write. '

'But all the same... the Army would be over in three, then you could pick up your studies properly.'

There is no technology in the Army, Mama. It is all marching, shouting, and mud – hardly changed in fifty years. I want to be a submariner- it is the future – radar, long-range weapons, overseas...'

Halina interlocks her fingers, 'Overseas? You mean under. You will be under the water Dorek. I don't know if I can...'

'The future, Mama. We have discussed it, it can be nothing else. It is what I want. There is one thing, though,' her son adds.

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<sup>98</sup> Ukrainian diminutive of Teodor

'Tell me,' Halina obliges, stroking his hair. 'They will cut your hair, you know.'

'I know,' Teodor says, removing his mother's hand to pull her down to sit.

He shifts his weight in his seat, 'To join the Navy, Mama, it is not easy. The conditions of entry are difficult.' Teodor's brow creases into wavy lines. 'There are obstacles.'

'What obstacles?'

The radio crackles back to life. Halina holds up a hand and cocks an ear to listen. A stream of shouted instructions emanates from the yellow radio. She frowns as it snaps back to silence once more.

'Potatoes. Again. I was three days on potatoes this week already.' She rubs her back in anticipation of her day on the collective farm.

'When I am in the Navy, you will receive special treatment, you'll see. I'll make sure of it,' Teo quickly says.

'What obstacles?' Halina reminds her son.

'Father.'

'Your father?'

Teo glances at the photograph of Stefan pinned beside his mother's bed: British uniform, Polish and British medals. 'Yes. Do you have any letters around the place? Anything that might make difficulties?'

Halina follows her son's eyes to the photograph. 'I burned them all,' she says, rubbing her shoulder with work-worn fingers.

'They may investigate my background – security - you know. What should we say?' Teodor, too, fidgets, nervously picking at the skin on his forefinger.

Halina's response is like a sharp rebuke, 'Say? We say he's gone- they should know, they took him.'

'It may not be enough,' Teo responds, gently taking his mother's hands between his.

It is not enough, and Teo already knows this. His friend, Borys has told him, 'For you to be accepted in the Soviet Baltic Fleet, you must have no living relative outside of the Soviet Union to whom you may be tempted to pass information. Regulations. Ask my father, he knows about these things.'

At the first chance, he escapes his mother's ministrations and takes a walk across the village to the collective farm. Unbeknownst to his mother, he has already explored the possibility of killing off his father – on paper at least, which is what counts most in communist bureaucracy.

He meets Mykhailenko Senior, head of the collective on his way home. 'Sir, may I walk with you a little way?'

Mykhailenko adjusts the sack on his shoulder before looking at Teodor, 'You want something, boy?'

'Well, yes sir, I understand you are an expert on certain matters pertaining to military service,' says Teodor, walking along with his hands behind his back.

Mykhailenko hawks and spits. 'Expert... matters pertaining to military service. Just spit out what you want. How's your mother, by the way?'

'She is well, sir, very well. It's like this, you see. I want to join the Navy, like Borys. We can go together.'

'So, join the Navy, what has it to do with me?' Mykhailenko knows what it has to do with him but is enjoying Teodor's discomfort.

'I need a letter, sir. A letter to say... to certify the recent death of my father, Stefan Motkaluk. An official letter signed by an official.'

'That would be me, would it?'

'Yes, sir,' Teo stops walking.

Mykhailenko drops his sack of potatoes and turns to look at Teodor. 'You want me to kill off your father? A fine son you are.'

Teodor blushes to the roots of his hair.

'I can't do it.' Mykhailenko says.

'Why not?' asks Teo.

Mykhailenko rubs the side of his nose with a dirty thumb. 'Because no-one has told me he's dead.'

Teodor waits.

'Well? Is he dead? Have you received recent news of the death of your father, Stefan Motkaluk?'

'Yes, sir,' says Teodor.

Myhailenko smiles, 'Well, in that case come to my house tomorrow evening. Now go home.'

Teodor takes a long walk in the forest before returning home at dusk.

The following day he picks up an official letter, certifying the recent death of Stefan Motkaluk and his entry to the Navy is secured.

Halina ensures he has the finest clothes she can buy, while Maria makes do with what Halina's sisters make for her. Mother and daughter will gladly sacrifice themselves so that Teodor is not let down by his family.



England: Yate

1959

Whilst only the doctor and Stefan's grander Polish friends have the privilege of entry past the pebbly glass panels of the front door, letters enjoy a radical democracy. Today is no exception. After Zybsek leaves for school, the postman flips in a letter Lucy can do without. On the doormat, below the low-lying letterbox, an envelope reveals familiar round writing.

'More letters pass through that front door than visitors,' Lucy thinks, stooping to pick up the letter.

As she turns the envelope over her mind struggles to understand why this familiar writing should appear on a plain white envelope with a real queen's pretty face in the top right instead of the russet-coloured profile of *Repvlica Italiana*. Confusion can only lead to trouble. With trembling hands, she opens the letter to find familiar squared paper torn from a school exercise book, folded diagonally in her sisters' traditional way:

*Cara Lucietta*

*I hope this letter finds you well and I hope your husband is well. Mother and father are well and send their love and embraces. Carmelina is well. She said to give you her love when I see you.*

*You see, I am well, and I am working in a private school in England. I have been here since September. I work in the kitchen with other girls. There are three from Italy, two I travelled with from Riccia. You know them, the ones who used to rent the land from Capozio. But the one in charge, she is from Romania. She is a devil. She locks up the food. Cara Lucietta, I did not tell you I was coming to England because I was afraid you would tell me not to come. But it is terrible here. I cry every night. I miss everyone so much. I want to go back to Italy.*

*I am living near London I think, Slough. I been here three months. Carmelina was supposed to come too but I wrote to tell her not to come Lucia because it's not what they said it would be. They don't give me enough to eat, and what food there is, is horrible. Really horrible. I am hungry all the time. And I have to do all the bad jobs. I miss you so much.*

*In affection and embraces*  
*Your sister Lina*

Lucy stares hard at the letter as she struggles with churning emotions. Her sister, here, in England. With no warning, nothing prepared. She has to see her, to find out what's going on and, what did she say? Carmelina too. Another one maybe. Lucy's thoughts race, 'They all want to leave but how can I cope with them when I have everything else to fix? And who will look after mother and father? I'll go and see her, tell her to go home.'

She rushes back to the kitchen in time to stop hot soapy water spilling out of the gas boiler. Steam fogs the room mimicking her mind as she tries to formulate a plan. Picking out yet more scalding sheets she glances over to the larder, remembering every item of food she has left. 'It's Wednesday, early closing day,' she thinks, 'But it's only nine o'clock. If I can get through the washing and have it out on the line, the big stuff at least, by eleven then I can get to Williams' shop before they close.'

Water slops onto the floor as Lucy vents her anxiety into rinsing the sheets. Two rinses: lift, gather, double then wring between her two strong arms until the water runs down to her elbows, dripping into the sink and soaking the rolled sleeves of her cardigan. Then repeat. The scrink of her wringing almost makes audible the breaking cotton fibres. There'll be no drips from her washing line even though she doesn't have a mangle.

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'Good afternoon, Mrs Motkaluk,' Mr Williams greets Lucy with exaggerated respect. He doesn't want any of his assistants taking liberties with this dark-haired woman when he isn't around. He's been in Lucy's kitchen Friday afternoon delivering groceries for six months now, and he knows a respectable home when he sees one. 'The place was scrubbed top to bottom; everything in its place, nothing lying around,' he tells his wife. Knowing that Lucy is good for her credit, Mr Williams reaches up to find her red memo order book.

‘Not today Mr Williams, please. I buy to take away today. Just some corned beef tin and half dozen eggs,’ says Lucy. Trying to ignore the child at her side tugging her dress urgently, she hisses ‘Stop it,’ at Adda.

‘Hello!’ Betty comes around the counter with a sweet tucked behind her thumb. ‘I suppose you want to see that grandfather clock again, don’t you? Come on then, Adda, I’ll take you. Don’t worry, Mrs Motkaluk, I’ll see to her. You get your shopping.’ Betty holds the child’s hand guiding her past the counter into the dark recess of the back storeroom, and past the glowing brown grandfather clock in the corner. Squeezing her hand Betty presses a hard sweet into the child’s mouth, who hardly seems to notice as she peers around her in the dark storeroom. Betty spots the moment when sweetness floods Adda’s tongue, twin-mingling with the sight of the clock, and smiles. She checks the time, hoping it will chime when they come out of the toilet. She knows it will make the child’s day perfect.

‘Here she is! All done, good girl.’ Betty returns the child to Lucy, passing her hand. Lucy looks down surprised, then realises she’s expected to take it.

‘Come, we go now. Thank you, thank you Mr Williams, Betty.’ Lucy waits until they are outside before shifting her grip from the child’s hand to its wrist. ‘You shame me. Never do that again! You go before we leave home next time. You only pretend you need toilet to see that stupid clock. Come on.’ She jerks her roughly. Adda doesn’t seem to mind. She shifts the sweet into her bulging cheek and proceeds to tell her mother about the chime.

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By the time Stefan returns, Lucy is ready; cup of tea and ashtray on the kitchen table. She smiles at her husband.

‘Stefan, I had a letter. From Lina, look.’ Lucy holds out the checked paper covered in dense loops, like rows of little black apples. ‘Shall I read it to you?’

‘Let me take off my shoes before you begin, woman. You are agitated.’

Lucy takes a deep breath but does not wait, 'She is in England! We have to go and see her.'

Stefan sits. 'In England, where?'

'She is working in a private school. In this place.' Lucy points to a name in the letter. 'It's London, yes?'

'Slough,' Stefan says.

'I want to see her. She's unhappy. They don't feed her right,' Lucy continues.

'Slough,' Stefan mumbles through heavy lips and sunken cheeks. It has been two weeks since all his teeth were extracted.

Having called the children from the garden some time ago, she refrains from complaining about them to Stefan. Instead, she places a mush of corned beef and scrambled eggs in front of him.

Drawn by the smell, the children come tumbling in to be met with their mother's usual snappy greeting. 'Wash your hands quickly and sit down.' They do as they are told, surreptitiously eying their father as he slops food slops carefully into his mouth.

Lucy waits until he swallows then says, 'I want to see her, Stefan. I have to know if she's all right. It might be very bad, we don't know.'

Stefan, rolling his food against the roof of his mouth, says nothing.

'A servant,' Lucy adds, 'how is she being treated?'

'I am busy. Have work,' mumbles Stefan between more mouthfuls.

'Look, if it was your sister, you would go,' volleys Lucy, throwing the letter onto the table.

Stefan pushes back his chair, sending knife and fork clattering to the floor. 'All right,' he shouts.

The children stop eating, forks hanging, midair.

'We go?' Lucy asks.

'We go next week, when I am on nights.' He leaves the kitchen, groaning.

Lucy wastes no time in arranging for Mrs Barron to look after Adda while Zbyszek and Linda are at school. Gerda will see to them when her shift finishes.

Lucy and Stefan set off early, arriving at the school just after lunch. While Lucy looks around anxiously, Stefan sets off down the long gravel drive towards the front door. 'Stefan,' she calls, 'we should go to the back.'

'Why? Are you delivering something?' He does not break his stride.

He raps the knocker and waits. When the door finally swings open, Stefan asks for Lina. They are asked to wait.

Eventually, Lina enters the cheaply paneled front hall, wiping her hands in her apron. The reunion is tearful for all except Stefan. He watches as Lina throws herself at his wife, before wandering around the hall, examining photographs and rolls of honour. 'Are all these places the same?' he wonders, thinking about Cirencester Royal Agricultural College. The memory is not pleasant.

He returns to patient observance of the reunion. The women are talking rapidly. He sees Lina wipe her eyes and nose with the back of her hand. Without lowering her voice, she asks Lucy, 'Who is that man?'

'What do you mean?' answers his wife, 'That is Stefan.'

'Oh my God, I don't recognize him. He looks like an old man.'

Stefan sighs again. 'Some things do not change,' he thinks.

'Well, are you going to give this old man a cup of tea? We've come all this way to see you.'

The three retreat to the kitchen. Stefan listens carefully as Lina pours out her story, falling quiet every time a workmate enters the room, which Stefan notes is quite frequently.

Eventually Lucy has heard enough, 'If I knew it was like this, I would never let you come to England. But you didn't tell me. Why?'

Lina sniffs in reply.

Lucy continues, 'They treated me bad in the hospital. I could tell you they take people to do the dirty jobs. The English don't want to do the dirty jobs, so they take foreigners. Didn't you know that?'

'That's enough, Lucy,' interrupts Stefan, 'Can't you see she's worked that out for herself.'

'I don't want that for her,' comes Lucy's reply.

Lina continues to sniff, picking at the cake her sister has brought.

'I wanted to help mother and father. You don't know what it's been like since you left. When Concetta died, everything was harder. And that pig took the boys away. Jelsi's not how you remember it, Lucia. People are leaving, all the young ones. Maria's gone, Carmelina wants to go.'

Lucy rubs her forehead wearily. 'So you got out first, is that it?' she says.

'No, not like that.'

'Yes, like that,' she comes back at Lina, 'You didn't tell me because you knew I'd tell you not to come.'

'You said it was all good here,' Lina counters.

Lucy opens her mouth to speak but closes it again quickly. Stefan seizes the chance to interject between them, 'Come on, seven years and you're arguing already. Is this what I'm missing my sleep for?'

The women shrug.

'I thought it would be different,' says Lina. 'I wanted to be close to you. I've missed you since you left, so much. You don't know. I've been working on the roads with father, carrying rocks, mixing concrete. The family's not like it used to be. We were hungry all the time.'

'So, you left them,' Lucy cannot resist.

'Come on,' says Stefan putting on his coat, 'We have to go. Kiss your sister, don't leave like this.'

The women cry on parting. Lucy wipes Lina's tears with the base of her thumb, 'Write to me, I will come again. Try to learn, try to get on with the people,' she says, glowering at the Irish cook, who has come in to spread something yellow onto a mountain of thin slices of white bread.

It is a silent journey home.

---

Three weeks pass with Stefan listening to his wife's entreaties and tears. 'She'll get used to it,' he tells her.

'What? Get used to it, like I did when I was pregnant and sick, and they made me clean it up. I nearly fainted. *You* get used to it,' replies Lucy.

'It would be easier if she just went home,' he tries.

'To what? She never had a life, she never had a childhood. Mother was always at her. I was the only one who stood by her.'

'I don't know what you expect me to do!' he explodes.

'Speak to some people,' says Lucy

'Who?'

'I don't know who,' Lucy says, 'You always say you know some people. Things have to be right or we're all in trouble. They only tolerate us here, remember that.'

'All right, all right,' comes Stefan's exasperated response. 'I speak to some people.'

He shakes his paper to indicate the conversation has ended.

Lina's next letter is more desperate than the last. Stefan returns home to find Lucy, head in hands. He is well used to crying but this time she lifts her head to look at him with dry eyes. Her writing pad is open in front of her, but her pen lies abandoned on the table. There is no smell of cooking food and the house is cold.

Without removing his coat or shoes, he goes into the living room and starts banging in the grate, shortly to return with a tray of grey cinder ash. He opens the back door, carefully turning to exit, back-first, shielding the ash lest the cold December wind should blow it into the house. On his return from the ash bin, he places the tray on the floor, and sits beside his wife.

'I don't know what to write,' she says.

'Show me her letter.' Lucy passes it to him. After a while, he says, 'All right, tell her it will be all right. And wish her a Happy New Year.'

'Happy New Year?' his wife drops her head.

'Leave it. I have a plan.' he says.

'That is all? I have a plan? Please, don't play games, Stefan, this is my sister. If you...'

'I'm not playing games,' he sighs, 'Just tell her it will be all right. And tell her to send me her contract.'

Five days later, Stefan has all he needs. He travels on his next night shift, arriving at Caldicot School during lunch serving. Again, he walks up the long drive to the front door. The same woman opens the door.

'Tell the headmaster I want to see him,' he instructs. The woman scurries away, leaving him, once again, in the hall, whose paneling has not improved since his last visit. He brushes down his damp raincoat. The weather is on the turn. When the woman returns, she tells Stefan that the Head is serving lunch and he must wait. She leads him into the kitchen, where Lina is at the sink.

'Carry on with your work,' he instructs his open-mouthed sister-in-law.

'What are you going to do?' she whispers. Her face reddens, and her trembling hand drops a cup into the soupy water.

In reply, he barks, 'You came here. You shouldn't have come but you did. And now you're not going to stay.'

'I'm not?'

'I worked something out,' he continues, as if she hasn't spoken, 'You'll come with me. But first I have to see the headmaster.'

Stefan enters the headmaster's office. He works through his list of items, each one noted and compared against Lina's contract. After twenty minutes, he returns to the kitchen. 'Go and pack your case. You're coming with me,' he tells Lina.

'What do you mean?' she responds, her flustered hands flapping excitedly from hair to apron and back. Her colleagues hover to catch every word, ready to repeat them to anyone who will listen. And there are plenty who will. News of raised voices from the headmaster's office has hummed around the school.

'Never mind,' Stefan retorts, pursing his lips at the gathering women. 'I will tell you on the train.'

By the time Stefan and Lina walk the long drive away from the school, the winter sky is hanging low, heavy with snow, its grey underlit by a fading sun. Stefan carries Lina's case high



on his shoulder, his long legs striding faster with every step away from the school. Lina trots along to keep up, matching two of her steps to each one of his.

On the train, Stefan starts to explain to Lina, but all she does is smile at him. He settles down to sleep.

They arrive in London late in the day. 'Now,' he says, turning to Lina, as the train hisses to a stop, 'We must go to the Home Office.' He lifts down her case and leads the way out of the carriage.

It is snowing hard by the time they step off the busy London street into an austere building. Stefan approaches a reception desk, exchanges a few words then returns to Lina, who has been abandoned, bewildered, with her suitcase, in the middle of a chess board of marble tiles. He leads her to a wooden bench and places her suitcase on the floor beside her. He remains standing, his grey gabardine raincoat, now unbuttoned to reveal a sharply tailored brown jacket.

When his name is called, he turns to her, 'Hold your breath,' he says, 'either they send you back or you come with me.' With that he is gone.

Fifteen minutes later, he is back, lips drawn over his new false teeth in a smile. He raises two thumbs in front of his chest as walks towards Lina.

'What happened?' she asks.

'It's okay, you come home with me.' He lifts her case once more onto his shoulder.

They rush to Paddington through the snow. It falls heavily now, smothering the street lights.

On the train, Stefan explains to Lina how he persuaded the headmaster to see that the school had broken its contract with her.

'First of all, they didn't treat you right. What they did, they made you do jobs which weren't yours. You were doing your work and somebody else's. Didn't you know that?'

Lina shakes her head.

'And they didn't feed you properly. So, they broke the contract.' Stefan's voice is strong and rapid.

'What did he say?' she ventures, as other passengers turn to look at them.

Stefan raises his voice, 'He was a bit upset. He said you only just came and you must do a year.

'I made him see sense though. When he saw I had everything written down, he saw he wasn't dealing with a stupid.'

'So, you told that to the Home Office? Oh, I don't know these things.' Her eyes glitter at her brother-in-law, who notices.

'No,' he says, 'I talked to the doctor, our doctor, Dr Roberts, good man. I talked to him, man to man. He said Adda needs a guardian, to look after her, because we have to work and she has a bad heart.'

'She has a bad heart? I didn't know that.'

Stefan does not reply.

'Look,' he continues, 'I can't pay you any wages but I will pay your stamp.'

'What stamp?' Lina's face contorts.

'National Insurance. You help Lucy with the house; shopping, cooking, the children, and I pay your stamp. You live with us. Finished.' He sits back, smiling, and crosses his arms.

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Lucy peeps through the curtains then goes back to dozing by the dying fire. When Stefan and Lina finally arrive at no. 6, snow muffles the sound of their feet, but Lucy is alert to the slightest sound in the cold night. She leaps to open the door, peering into the dark. The looming figure of her husband appears.

'It's okay,' he says, stepping aside, 'She's free!'

Lucy clutches her sister, kissing her wet, cold face. She squeezes Lina so tightly that the younger woman cannot reach her arms around her sister in return. Lina satisfies herself by saying, 'I missed you. I missed you so much when you went. You were so good to me. Oh, *cara*, I missed you so much.'

Stefan looks on. He shifts his tongue around his dentures, clacking them up and down until the women notice him. Their sparkling eyes kindle a warmth, which is quickly dashed when he realizes he needs to change for his shift at the factory. Taking a quick slurp of his tea, he grabs the sandwich Lucy has made. Pushing his bike out into the snowy night, he hopes that Raymond remembered to clock him in.

Lucy takes Lina upstairs, planting each foot carefully, and gripping hard on the bannister to pull up her tired body. Four closed doors greet the women on the small landing. Lucy proudly indicates the bathroom to the right before leading her sister left to the matrimonial bedroom.

The room is furnished, like all the rooms in no. 6, courtesy of Mr Morgan's hire purchase agreements. The furniture glows, glossy under electric light, crowned by a cheap pleated lampshade. Lucy watches as her sister looks around, taking in the bone-carved ornamenting on the wardrobe and bedhead. The glass-topped dressing table, with its adjustable mirror, which has never been adjusted, boasts crocheted doilies and a smoked glass vanity set. Tassels dangle from the wardrobe keys matching the satin bedspread on the large bed.

Lucy opens the larger wardrobe and gestures towards Lina, 'Give me your coat and bag.'

Lina fumbles with her buttons, blushing to be in the room where her sister sleeps with the tall, slim soldier she remembers from Italy. Obediently, she removes her camel hair, three-quarter coat, and hands it over. Lucy gives it a proprietorial inspection before draping it over a heavy wooden hanger and placing it beside her own clothes.

'You are fatter,' she sniffs at Lina, 'I thought they didn't give you enough to eat.' Accusation pours over the younger woman, who blushes again.

'We used to go out to eat on our day off,' comes what sounds like an excuse.

'Humph, must have been a long day. Look at your skirt.' Lucy pulls at the seam of Lina's checked, mohair pencil skirt, the way only a sister who is used to making her family's clothes can do. 'It is too tight. When you sit down you will show your knees.'

Lina attempts to smooth down her skirt sides. 'My friend gave it to me,' she offers in defence.

'Give me your bag,' Lucy interrupts, 'it will be safe in here.'

Lina swings her brown leather bucket bag towards her chest and covers it protectively with both hands. 'I have my passport in there.'

Lucy continues to hold out her hand, her face darkening. When Lina meekly hands over the bag, she wraps its strap around it and places it on the top shelf of her wardrobe. She pants from her exertions.

'Stefan will take you to register at the police station tomorrow after work.'

Lina nods acquiescence.

'You sleep with Adda next door.' As Lucy turns, she spots her daughter, eyes wide, staring open-mouthed at her aunt. 'Close your mouth, you catch a fly,' she snaps at her.

Lina smiles at the little girl. 'I have a present for you.'

'Not now, is time for sleep,' Lucy retorts.

The child, who has sneaked out of bed without permission, shrinks back, eying her aunt's brown leather bag in the open wardrobe.

'You like it?' a kindly voice suggests. The child nods at her aunt. 'When you are older, I give it to you.' The skinny girl's eyes shine with pleasure as she smiles shyly.

Lucy, observing this interaction, quickly closes the wardrobe door before locking it with a decisive click. Although she leaves the key in the lock, everyone in the room is left in no doubt about who can turn it, and who cannot.

'Come, the bed is ready,' Lucy announces. She leads the way into the room next door, where a three-quarter bed, large enough for aunt and tiny niece to share. A framed Madonna hangs above the bed, facing the door. A door to be shut tight on the night and as far from the two sleeping virgins as can be; icon and door providing dual protection from both thought and deed.

Opposite the door, stands the dressing table, ornamented not so much for practical use as for representing the rituals of Lina's new life; brush, comb and mirror set but not to be used in case it gets soiled with human detritus. Lucy has provided a glass trinket tray for the use of rosary beads.

There is no chair, for this is not a room for sitting. The single wardrobe will store away their clothes nightly. Within this small and regimented chamber then, only the private world of dreams and prayers may enter. Lucy leaves.

Lina smiles and reaches for Adda, who shrinks back. 'Come on, I am your aunty,' she says taking her hand. 'See, we sleep together now, it will be nice. Let's go to bed.' She is rewarded with a smile, as Adda climbs back up to find her warm place. Lina turns out the light before undressing to her petticoat. She climbs in beside her little niece, who rolls towards her voluptuous body. Very soon both are breathing long and deep.

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On waking the next day, Adda listens to the soft deep sound of her aunty's regular breathing. Against the child's mean and slight frame, Lina's heavenly gorgeous flesh is reassuringly comfortable in the bed they will now share. And the woollen Witney blankets are freed from their usual nightly maternal lock down.

Through the window to the left, hung with unlined curtains, early light announces the start of a new day accompanied by the sound of a hammer being slowly winched, then dropped with a crash onto the iron ore below: early shift at the foundry preparing the new day's castings. Adda has lain awake some time, thinking about her mother's hands lifting those blocks from sand casings to clean them off. Her mother's broken hands and aching shoulders, lifting from seven 'til four, returning home too exhausted to lift a child upon her knee.

Lina, stirred by the child's fidgeting, rises smiling. Aunt and child wash and dress quickly then go down to the kitchen, where Lina is relieved to see Stefan has already gone to sleep off his night shift. She jokes with Zbsyek and Adda, who both vie for her attention, while Lucy fusses over their breakfast.

'You can take them to school,' she says as she removes empty porridge bowls.

Shock arrests Lina's joking. 'But I don't know where it is,' she protests.

'They will show you,' Lucy snaps.

'How will I get back?' the younger woman wails.

'The same way you go. You are the clever one, aren't you? Anyway, the people here must see you are helping. Remember that.'

Lina goes to help the children with their coats.

'Not like that.' Lucy pushes past her sister to take off Adda's scarf. She folds it in half before placing it precisely onto her daughter's neck. She checks that both ends are equal length before crossing the scarf across the child's chest to bring the ends under her arms and around to her back where it is tied, tightly. Next, she feeds the child's fingers nimbly into gloves, squeezing each finger to ensure it has occupied only one aperture. A knitted cap is then tied tightly under the girl's chin then, finally, a heavy navy duffle coat. She pulls the wriggling child to attention as she fastens the toggles, then turns to perform the same ritual on her son. Lina's protest that, it is sunny despite the snow, is met with rebuke, 'This is an English sun, it has no heat.'

Lina puts on her own coat and, taking each child's stiff arm, she turns to look pleadingly at her sister. Lucy turns angrily away.

The long walk to St. Mary's Church of England Primary School is a happy one. Lina and the children chatter all the way invigorated by the sparkling snow. Adda and Zbyszek, point out landmarks to aid their aunt's safe return home. Lina asks sensible questions about what can be bought in the sweet shop, if there were to be an unexpected appearance of pennies. With this wondrous aunt around, anything might be possible. Adda never takes her eyes from Lina's face but Zbyszek engages more seriously in his aunt's education. He points out the Phelps family house with its garden full of rubbish, the maisonettes, where the poor families live, and the doctor's house on the corner. Very soon they reach the main road houses with neatly tended, long, long gardens. Zybsek brings his aunt's attention to these with much gravitas because he knows they are the gardens his father envies the most.

As they continue to walk the lane alongside Newman's factory, Zysbek informs his aunt that this is where his mother earns her bonus. By the time they reach the end of the high brick wall surrounding Newman's and turn off the main road, Lina stops counting her steps and muttering reminders. With relief she sees children coming from all directions and streaming towards the church tower. She hardly notices the Adda's and Zybsek's growing excitement as

they both point out the grand white house, where they were allowed to scump for apples, provided they knock, and 'ask first.'

The last building before the school is The White Lion. Here the children break free. Lina, nervously lets them go, watching as they run towards the insistent sound of the school bell, ringing furiously in the snow-covered playground.

She stands a while, whispering landmarks back to herself in reverse order, small clouds of mists rising from her mouth. As she turns, she sees a man smiling at her from the pub yard.

'Nice day,' he says.

'I no speak English,' Lina hesitates, her reddening complexion enlivened by her smile.

'You just arrived then.'

'Yes,' she replies.

'Looking for work?'

'Work, yes, work. I come to work.' She is encouraged by her progress.

'Got a cleaning job 'ere,' he shakes a filthy, wet, grey mop at her. 'Can you clean?'

'I no speak English,' Lina repeats.

'You don't have to talk to the dirt, just clean it,' he explodes.

'What you laughin' at, out there?' comes a rusty voice from the darkness behind the man.

'Girl here, lookin' for work.'

A large bust wrapped in a floral house-coat, topped with a candy floss blonde head emerges. The woman has one arm crossed over her chest, its hand tucked into her armpit to keep it warm. She salutes Lina with a cigarette held aloft in the other hand. 'Well, you look strong enough, I'll say,' she addresses Lina, looking her up and down. 'Do you want a job?'

Her glossy, red nails catch Lina's attention. 'I, I ask. My sister. She come. Today, here. Later.' Lina points to the school.

'All right, but don't leave it too long. I got people interested,' rusty voice replies.

'Today, today.' Lina affirms.

'Bedrooms, bars and toilets. That's the deal. Ten shillin's a week.' Her ripe lips smirk as her husband's surprise quickly turns to a smile.

Lina smiles back, 'I ask my sister.'

'Go on then. See you later.' Candy floss head melts back into the dark, leaving a trail of smoke and the sounds of hacking phlegm.

---

'Lucia, Lucia. I've got a job. A job!' Lina announces, barely able to breathe through terror and excitement.

The women sit down to discuss this rapid development. With Lina in the house, money is tighter than ever.

'Stefan will have to speak to him. He'll have to check if it's all right,' Lucy announces.

'But it will be good. Money, they pay ten shillings.' Lina remembers the old days; no work, the scramble for money. She strays back to the manual work she and her father did, carrying rocks to build roads. 'It's indoor work, cleaning,' she pleads with her sister.

'We ask Stefan.'

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Stefan's response takes both women by surprise, 'No! Absolutely not.'

'But it's perfect, think of the money. She can take the children to school, do the cleaning and be home by lunchtime.'

'Not in that pub,' Stefan growls.

'Why?'

'You ask why? She's your sister, she's just arrived. You want people to talk about her? About us? We have to send her out to work because we can't put food on the table?'

'She's always worked. I've always worked. Why is this different?' Lucy pleads, as her careful plan recedes.

'Because it is, that's all you need to know.' And there the conversation ends.



Lina quickly settles into the rhythm of no. 6. The children thrive under her care, especially, Adda, whose relationship with toothpaste has always been fraught. 'Aunty, can you start me off?' she says every morning, holding out her toothbrush. Lina patiently saws the brush over Adda's little teeth before turning her attention to Zybsek's face cloth.

Lucy, as overall manager, labours at the factory on her working days, and hands out daily orders to her young sister on her non-working days. Linda, who has always preferred no. 6 to her own home, is even more present, even when Gerda is not working.

The job share continues to work well for the two women, until Lucy becomes pregnant. With Lina at home, Lucy continues in the foundry but as tiredness and money worries arise, cracks start to appear.

Initially, Lina is anxious to please. The house sparkles, and the ironing almost meets Lucy's exacting standards. The cooking, however, is a disaster.

Eventually, as yet another abomination is placed before him, Stefan explodes. He takes two mouthfuls of curiously dark mashed potato, before throwing down his fork in disgust, and pushing away his plate. The children immediately freeze like little animals, noses twitching and eyes darting.

'How can you burn potatoes?' he roars.

Lina's eyes moisten. 'I was looking after the children,' she snivels, scooping up a forkful of the ill-fated mash into her mouth.

Stefan feels Lucy's restraining hand on his arm, but he shakes it off. 'Can't you teach her? he turns on his wife. 'Call yourself a woman? I never seen anything like this. *Cholera.*'

Lina is, by this time, crying quite loudly. Lucy tells her sister to be quiet before assuring her husband, with a smile, that things will improve.

Stefan looks at Lucy's face. He picks up his fork and pulls back his plate, muttering. The children's shoulders drop and, at a warning look from their mother, they continue to eat.

'Tell Williams you don't want any more black potatoes either,' he says, glowering mischievously at his sister-in-law.

Lina sniffs, and rubs her nose with the back of her hand. 'I can't do that. I don't like shopping anyway.'

Stefan laughs. 'You don't like shopping. What kind of a woman are you?'

Lina checks with her sister before continuing, 'Well, they laugh at me. I went to buy pepper and they give me a paper. I was so embarrassed.'

Adda and Zybsek grin broadly, heads down over their plates. Lucy is not so restrained.

'Why you laughing at me too? It's not funny.'

The children explode, sending bits of half chewed food across the table. Lucy and Stefan join in until, finally, Stefan halts the merriment when his new teeth start to drop.

'Okay, okay, I give you lessons. Lucy, where is that book? The one from the army?'

'I don't know, gone somewhere. It was falling apart.'

Three weeks later an envelope arrives from the School of International Languages, Padua addressed to Stefan. He turns it this way and that, examining every detail before he is ready to open it. The children jostle for position at his elbow until he pushes them back.

Carefully slitting the envelope with a kitchen knife, he gives it a shake and out slides a slim, green book. Stefan purses his lips, pulling at them with thumb and forefinger. He flicks through the pages, examining the contents, then turns to page one. and calls Lina. She arrives to find him pressing the side of his hand down the centre of the book. 'Fetch paper and pen, we start now.'

Every evening thereafter Stefan instructs Lina from the green primer. Every now and then he asks Zybsek a question. The child stutters in reply until Stefan waves the boy away. Lucy watches from the sink, clanking pans and clattering cutlery.

Stefan does not spare his pupil, 'Again, repeat, again. No, not leek, say, "like." Say it again.'

'But it says leeka,' Lina protests.

'This is not Italian, you do not speak as it is written. English is harder. Say it again, "I like to go to the park."'

He notices that Lucy's pan-crashing has stilled.

---

Lina's education extends to cycling. Leaving Lucy at home to rest, Stefan takes his bicycle, and accompanied by Adda, Zbyszek and his sister-in-law, he walks to the waste ground behind the houses, where a gravel road waits for new constructions.

Lina hoists up her skirts to get her leg over the Raleigh's crossbar, as she twists the handlebars up and down. It is a large bike and Lina is a short young woman- consequently, once she achieves her manoeuvre, her only option to keep her left foot on the pedal is to hop along on her right leg.

The children shriek with laughter. Lina joins in, enjoying her incompetence enormously. Stefan becomes angrier and angrier, shouting instructions. Eventually, he lifts the stout woman onto the saddle himself and, without hesitating pushes her off down the road, shouting, 'Pedal, pedal, go straight, straight.'

Poor Lina wobbles away, red-faced, terrified, and grinning like a demented creature. Inevitably, she turns her head to see behind her and goes crashing to the ground, gravel flying. She lies in a heap, tangled in the bicycle crossbar, flapping her arms, and struggling to get up.

The children are helpless with laughter now, and despite Stefan's anger, they cannot stop laughing at this extraordinary and wonderful aunt who has come into their midst, bringing so much fun.

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Eventually Lucy's advancing pregnancy forces her to give up her job. Although Newman Industries is happy to allow pregnant women to work in their foundry, the company's chivalry leaps into action when they faint in the heat.

Stefan, Lucy, and Lina sit at the yellow Formica-topped table to discuss their changing fortunes.

Stefan starts, 'We either cut back or I get another job.'

Lina's hand, halfway to the plate of biscuits, is quickly withdrawn.

Lucy's swollen stomach is pressed hard against the table edge. She glances nervously from her husband to her sister. 'But we got the house with your job. What will happen to us?'

'I mean a second job,' says Stefan.

Lina pipes up, 'I can work. I can do your job at the factory.'

She sees something pass between her sister and brother-in-law, and slumps back into her chair before adding softly, 'Well, I can do some work somewhere.'

Lucy leans as far forward as she is able. 'I can sew.'

Stefan pulls at his ear. 'What do you mean, you can sew?'

'I already do things for people, for a favour. I can charge them. They like how Adda looks, many people ask if I can make a dress for their children.'

Stefan's chair scrapes harshly on the blue and white Marley tiles. 'Where? Where will you sew?'

'Where I do now, here, in the kitchen. Or you can make me a place in the back room there,' she looks towards the side lobby where Stefan parks his bike.

Everything's happening too quickly for Stefan. 'No,' he says, 'we can't have people coming here day and night.'

'Not night,' Lina chimes in.

Lucy throws her a thunderous look.

Stefan stands up, 'No, I said, it can't happen.'

Lucy changes her face to one of pleading, as she rubs her stomach. 'Why, Stefa, why not? What harm can it do?'

'Didn't you hear me? I said no. The authorities, we don't want to attract attention...'

Bright expectation fades from Lucy's eyes. She struggles to get up with Lina's help.

---

Finances resolved or not, the baby arrives in early October.

Stefan walks Adda and Zbyszek to Chipping Sodbury. The children are bemused until he stops and points to a white building, where they see their mother waving from a first floor window. She throws something white from the window down onto the Cottage Hospital lawn, which Stefan crosses the road to retrieve. Returning, he passes a bag of boiled sweets to the children. They agree that baby sisters are probably a good thing.

Two days later, Lucy is settled at home, feet up on the sofa with a row of white nappies blowing wildly on the washing line. Red-faced and grinning, Lina rushes to take them in every time it rains, then, with seemingly endless patience, pegs them out again when it stops.

Adda and Zybsek squabble over who will give the child its bottle and pester their parents for a name. They are tired of being asked at school what the little girl is called.

‘Shall we call her Janet?’ Adda asks, having secured the baby for five minutes.

Zbyszek snorts, ‘Janet! That’s a stupid name.’

Lucy looks nervously at Stefan, who says nothing. ‘We have to give her a name, Stefan,’ she says.

He looks at his wife, ‘You don’t like the name I want,’ he says with a shrug of his shoulders.

She pulls a face, ‘I don’t like Caroline. Reminds me too much of Barbara’s girl.’

‘That was Carolyn. I said, Caroline,’ Stefan replies.

‘But why, where did you get that idea from? We don’t know anyone...’

Stefan kneels beside his wife and speaks quietly into her ear, ‘My mother, Karolina.’

Lucy looks at him, she knows she has all the power at this moment. She nods, ‘What about Carol? That way she’s ours.’

‘All right, Carol,’ he agrees.

‘But no funny business this time, mind,’ Lucy warns.

Stefan smiles, ‘No funny business.’ He pinches her cheek.

By the time Lina comes back fresh, and smelling of outdoors, from her latest sortie with the weather, she finds Adda and Zbyszek jumping around the living, shouting, ‘Oh! Carol, I am but a fool. Darling, I love you though you treat me cruel.’

The new baby puts an end to nights out, dancing at the Polish Club. And Sundays are different now that Betty and Feliks spend more time socialising in their new bungalow, with luxury bathroom. They attempt the odd excursions together but Lucy soon realises the effort is not worth the reward. Somehow, the Betty's boys have grown into self-reliant youngsters, but Lucy's children have not. She holds up the Grzelinski boys, as well as locals, Mark and Lisa Rosenberg, as examples of perfection to which Adda and Zbyszek should aspire.

On Sundays, Stefan works alone in his garden, complaining about the soil to his neighbours, whilst indoors, Lucy, Lina, Zbyszek and Adda, gather around the television.

Eyes closed, Carol smacks her fat lips searching for her lost comforter, as the Sunday Matinee film is announced. Lucy reaches across to the pram and replaces the dummy, jiggling it in Carol's mouth until the sound of contented sucking falls into steady rhythm, and the baby's arms flop back above her head.

Lucy looks towards Adda, who, understanding the flick of eyes and slight tilt of her mother's head, starts to rock the pram from her seated position on the sofa.

'Do it properly,' Lucy whispers to her daughter, 'Stand up.'

Zbyszek sits cross-legged on the floor next to his mother. Grey socks peep from the frayed toes of his slippers. His shirt cuffs hang loose from his elbows, which rest on his knees. Chin resting on his hands, he turns a beatific smile on his mother, and is rewarded with her hand on his head. As she twiddles his hair, Zbyszek leans into her legs.

Lina passes a bag of sweets, as a familiar-shaped shield leaps onto the television screen. 'Oh, Warner Brothers,' she murmurs.

Lucy rests her cigarette on the chair arm ashtray and unwraps a sweet. 'Hmm, cowboys,' she says, sucking on her fruit drop.

Lina stands to take over pram-rocking from Adda, gently pushing the girl back to her place on the sofa.

Lucy tilts her head back towards her sister, 'Don't wake her up.'

'I won't,' says Lina.

As the credits of *Silver River* roll onto the screen, the little family become engrossed in predicting storylines, and who starred in what other film, and who is the most beautiful leading lady.

One side of the curtains are drawn against the afternoon sun, so they don't notice a smart blue car pull up outside the house. Before long, shadows flicker across the living room

Lina is first to spot a short stout woman walking towards the front door, following by a tall, stout man, and two scrappy boys. 'Oh my God, the Queen is coming. Put on your white gloves.'

Lucy is out of her chair in no time, 'Eknerova. Quick, tidy up. Take that cup out.' As she leans to switch off the television, Zbyszek jumps to his feet, shouting, 'They're not having my toys.' Rummaging down the side of the sofa, he pulls out his two favourite Dinky cars, and runs upstairs.

'Quick, go and tell your father,' says Lucy. Adda scampers to the back garden.

Stefan rushes in, all smiles, in time to greet his visitors. Pani Ekner is a woman who luxuriates in her own value, and Stefan is complicit with his admiration. He takes the woman's chunky fingers, bedecked with heavy rings, and kisses it. 'Sit, Pani, sit, make yourself comfortable,' he says, indicating Lucy's recently vacated armchair. Mrs Ekner plonks herself down and smooths her skirt. Satisfied, she holds her squat handbag on her lap with two hands.

Turning to her husband, Stefan firmly shakes his hand. Mr Ekner pulls out a dining chair, seating himself at the table, his large legs spread wide, a hand on each knee. His jacket falls open to reveal a thick gold chain across his tight waistcoat. Adda wonders what happens to his body when he removes the waistcoats. She imagines a tidal wave of flesh lumbering out in waves.

Lucy and Lina produce tea and cake, which Mrs Ekner picks apart disdainfully, popping dainty pieces into her sour mouth. Her lips purse like a cat's backside as she sucks the sweetness from the cake. She utters not a word, not even thank you. Everything she is given is received as if by divine right. When she finishes, she holds out her plate for someone to take. It matters not to her who does this.

Stefan attends to Eknerova's every need, summoning more tea, demanding sugar, a napkin.

Her husband, on the other hand, takes up the whole of his cake and introduces it to the inside of his cavernous mouth. Ekner's asthmatic breathing is compromised by his enormous mouthful of food so that he both wheezes and grunts through mastication. Although he has arrived with his wife, he ignores her completely, spraying crumbs whilst asking Stefan questions about his work. Adda waits for the moment he loses control and the whole lot comes splurging out; an altogether explosive threat.

Lucy stays in the kitchen on the pretence of warming a bottle for the baby. She sends Lina out to serve.

Back in the living room, the only people on whom Eknerova bestows smiles are her boys. Rysiek, or Rysiu to his doting mother, and Jurek. Rysiu, the younger, suffers from both asthma and eczema, rendering him a scabby, breathless specimen, and his mother's favourite. Jurek fares better, healthwise, but both are afflicted with their mother's sense of entitlement, and bad manners. *Pani* Ekner earned her privilege simply from having lived in Lwów before the war; a city girl being a special girl.

Adda and Zbyszek marvel at the boys' freedom to roam the house, prying into drawers and cupboards they, themselves, would hesitate to even ask permission to explore.

Lucy's face is a cauldron as she sits in the kitchen, feeding Carol. Her scowl prevents Rysiu from passing through the room to the back room where he knows Zbyszek's meagre collection of toys are kept. She hears Jurek walking about upstairs. Unable to move with the baby sucking hard on its bottle, Lucy fixes her gaze on the ceiling, tracking with her eyes each room the older boy enters.

Like locusts, the Eknors stay long enough to devastate Lucy's luxury food supply then leave with condescending farewells. Rysio screams at the front door. He is holding a blue Dinky car in his hand, which his father suggests he should give back to Zbyszek. Eknerova is already halfway down the garden path, her hand on Jurek's shoulder.

'Take it, take it. Children, they're only children,' Stefan chides, patting the boy's head. 'Goodbye, goodbye, thank you for the visit,' he calls after Ekner and his younger son.



Zbyszek grinds his oversized teeth, lips rigid as he regards his father's betrayal. His eyes glisten but when Lucy pulls him towards her, he shakes her off.

Afterwards, there is the usual row and, as usual, Stefan storms off to the pub.

'I don't understand it,' says Lina, 'Why do they do that? Why doesn't Stefan say something?'

'She has eaten his brain,' Lucy spits out. 'He's always been like that about her. Fine lady, she's supposed to be.'

'Well, she has a big house,' Lina responds.

'Yes, now she has but she lived in a barrack like the rest of us. And shit comes out of her arse like everybody else's.'

'She's ugly,' says Adda.

Lina laughs. 'Did you see her hat? Like a saucepan.' Lucy and Adda join in the laughter but Zbyszek does not.

---

Several months after Lina's English lessons begin, she greets Stefan with news that the Priest has visited.

When Lucy hears, she questions Lina closely on what refreshments the Priest was offered, how long he stayed, and what they discussed. In that order.

'Did anyone see him coming here?' she adds.

Stefan leaves the women to debate who may, or may not, have been glancing out of their windows at the precise moment the black-robed cleric entered no. 6. By the time he returns with his newspaper, the women both speak at once.

'The Priest is coming here again,' says Lina.

'You must change, go and wash,' says Lucy.

Finally, Lina squeals, 'Tonight, he is coming here tonight.'

Stefan shakes out his paper. 'What for is he bothering us here?' he demands, 'Isn't one day a week enough for him?'

'He has found me a job. In a hotel,' Lina responds.

Lucy watches her husband's face closely, but it reveals nothing.

At eight o'clock, Father Murphy arrives to explain that there is a position for chambermaid/general worker at The Grapes Hotel, Chipping Sodbury, and he has recommended Lina for the job. He proceeds to set out the proposal, vouches for the proprietors and tells Lina that an interview is arranged for the following day.

Stefan remains silent until the man turns to take his leave. 'I don't see you at church with your wife and children. Why is that?'

'Work, Father,' is Stefan's gruff response. 'Sunday is my day of rest.'

Lucy interrupts, 'He listens to the service on the radio, Father, and he goes to the Polish Church sometimes, don't you, Stefan?'

'The Polish Church, is it? Well, the soul needs feeding also. You have these blessed children to consider, man. Only three so far, but God is generous. You must lead by example.'

Lucy hustles the Father Murphy towards the door.

'Lead by example? A kick in the backside would be an example,' says Stefan as soon as the door is closed behind the man of God.

Lina's mouth drops open, even as her eyes sparkle with merriment. The children giggle nervously.

---

In no time Lina learns her duties at The Grapes, and is enjoying a handsome income, which she spends lavishly on herself and the children.

Lucy, however, is not impressed, and several arguments ensue, mostly between herself and Stefan. These are usually preceded with Lucy complaining about her sister's behaviour.

'She bought an orange lipstick. Orange, ridiculous.'

'She bought a lipstick, so what?' replies Stefan, sighing.

'It doesn't suit her colouring. And she wants to dye her hair.'

'Let her,' he responds, crossing his legs, and licking his thumb before turning the page of his paper.

Stefan! She'll make a fool of herself. She'll be a laughing stock.'

'She's a young woman. She's got a bit of money in her pocket and it's burning a hole. So what if she wants to spend it. I would if I had any.'

'She should save,' Lucy counters, 'Besides, she's making a show of herself. What will people say about us?'

'Same as they always do. People talk.'

Lucy changes her approach. 'She spoils the children with sweets.'

Stefan finally puts down his paper and looks at his wife. He sighs. 'What are you really upset about?' he asks her.

'There's a man, an Englishman. He's asked her out,' Lucy confides.

'So?'

'Stefan, we don't know anything about him.'

'We will when I speak to him,' says Stefan taking down his bicycle clips from the shelf above the table. He digs deep into his trouser pocket and takes out a handful of change. After pushing the coins from side to side, he replaces the money and heads towards his bicycle.

'Where are you going? Lucy calls after him.

'For a pint,' is all she gets in reply.

When Stefan and Lina later return to the house, Lina is flushed with gaiety. Her eyes flicker hesitantly over Lucy's face. She blushes before saying, 'Lucia, see, this man, he asked me for a date. You know, I told you. On Sunday afternoon. I have to meet him at the clock in Chipping Sodbury.'

Lucy stares hard at her husband. 'I thought you said you would deal with it?'

'I did. I spoke to him. He is a decent man, lonely, unmarried. He has his own house.'

'You mean he bought you a drink? That is decent enough?'

'Lucy!' Stefan cautions.

'What do we know about him, about his family?' she responds.

Lina interrupts, 'You never want me to have fun. You spoil everything. All I do is work and come home.'

Lucy turns to stare at her sister, who continues her tirade, 'You don't like what I wear, how I spend my money. You don't like my friends. You are worse than Mother.' At this final delivery, Lina gasps, as if the words have not come from her.

'You don't dress properly,' is all Lucy has to offer, 'your clothes are too tight. People talk.'

'You mean people look!' Lina flushes, breathing harshly as she hurtles headlong into a storm, incapable of stopping.

'We are here in place of your parents. You should be grateful and take our advice.'

'He doesn't complain,' says Lina jerking a thumb at Stefan's back as he leaves the kitchen.

'What do you mean?' Lucy's face is cold and hard.

'I mean he's more fun than you. You're always miserable, spoiling everything. I can't do anything right.'

By this time, Stefan is stretched out on the living room sofa next door.

'Well then, he can pick up the pieces,' Lucy storms. 'I'm going to bed, I'm tired of this.' She passes Stefan, throwing him a contemptuous look as her skirt brushes his face.

Following her sister into the living room, Lina bursts into tears.

Stefan looks up from the sofa. 'Stop that nonsense and put the kettle on, Lina. She'll be all right in the morning.' He closes his eyes, breathing deeply with his arms behind his head.

Two days later, Lucy waits anxiously for the sound of Lina coming in through the side door. It is more than an hour past her usual homecoming time.

'I'm worried about her, Stefan. It's dark, and she is walking home alone.'

Sober, and having endured two days of silent treatment from Lucy, Stefan sighs and puts his paper down.

'I go meet her, all right?' He picks up his tobacco and matches and lifts his coat from the hook in the scullery.

Walking briskly in the dark, he makes his way along the long factory wall, crossing the road by the school and heading past the cottage hospital in Chipping Sodbury. He pauses to roll a cigarette under the first lamppost at the bottom of Bowling Hill. His breathing is laboured as he makes his way up the hill, each breath seeming to take a second draught of air as his heavy

footstep meets the ground. The Grapes Hotel shines out across Broad Street, spilling light and warmth over the pavement. The last of the drinkers are stumbling out, talking in the too-loud voice of the merry. Stefan pauses in the shadows.

Eventually, Lina emerges, buttoning her coat as she walks, and pulling a shiny headscarf from her pocket. She calls out farewells to the regulars who call back. He notes that they all know her name.

*1960 Lina is married off*

Stefan pulls flimsy paper from a Rizla packet and, holding it delicately between finger and thumb, draws onto it a tender pile of sweet tobacco from his rubber lined pouch. He passes the pouch to the shaven headed man sitting beside him, who waves it away.

'Still no vices, eh? Stanczek, how do you survive this life?'

Stanczek stretches his legs from the rough bench on which they're sitting, leaning their heads against the gritty surface of roofing felt that Stefan has wrapped around his shed. Its tarry smell, heated by the sun, wafts around them. Stanczek breathes slow and deep then points towards Stefan's long garden.

'How do you survive with such lacy cabbages?' Stanczek asks.

Stefan lights his skinny cigarette, waves then throws the match into a plot of ripening strawberries.

'Bastard caterpillars,' says Stefan.

The older man responds, imitating a pump spray, 'Soapy water.'

'I tried, no good. Now they are just clean *and fat*.'

Stanczek smiles again and pats his hand heavily on Stefan's knee.

---

Back in the kitchen, Lina cranes her head from the window.

'Lina,' Lucy calls, 'Come away, they'll see you.'

'Why are they always together like that? I want to see what they're doing,' Lina replies.

'They are doing nothing. Leave them,' is the answer she gets.

Lina moves to the kettle. 'I'll make them some tea.' She pulls off the whistle and clanks the kettle against the side of the sink, as water spurts out from the tap, missing its target.

Lucy continues her sewing, working the treadle in perfect synchronicity with the push of her hands, as she feeds white spotted fabric through the jumping foot; the needle jabbing up and down, up and down. Every moving part of the machine has been so thoroughly oiled that there is no jarring note in its syncopation, just a clacking rhythm sympathizing with the ticking of the clock.

When Lina takes the tea out to the men, she waits to see them drink it. She hangs her arm over the empty washing line, casually bouncing its prop. White butterflies flutter over the cabbages.

'Those cabbages are ruined,' she says, 'you should do something.'

Stefan squints up at his sister-in-law. 'What do you suggest?'

'I don't know,' she says, 'maybe the children can pick them off. I know where there are some jars.' With that she pulls her arm away from the line and sends the prop clattering to the ground.

As she reaches the house, Stefan and Stanczek hear her calling Adda and Zbyszek. Stefan takes a deep drag on the last of his cigarette, which he lets out noisily between lips and noise.

'Does she have a boyfriend?' asks Stanczek.

Stefan shakes his head. 'She's been messing about with some Englishman. Stood him up last week.' He slurps his hot tea.

'I've got someone for her. Good man, strong. Saved enough to buy his own house,' says Stanczek.

Stefan flicks his cigarette into the strawberries. 'Bring him next week.'

The wedding party is small. Lucy has been up since dawn stitching carnations and sprays of asparagus fern to her white damask cloth. Stefan fretfully counts bottles, arranging and re-arranging them in the kitchen as if to increase their number. He has obtained buckets of ice from the local pub, which he tips into a zinc bath by the back door.

Zbyszek sulks in his best clothes, while Adda and Linda chase each other around the front garden. All three are forbidden to go onto the street lest they dirty their clothes.

Linda runs up to the front door where Zbyszek is squatting. 'I hate my mother,' she says, scuffing her brown lace-ups against the doorstep.

'Don't,' says Adda, 'you'll scratch them.'

'I wanted white shoes, I told her.' Linda eyes Adda's canvas sandals and kicks harder.

Zbyszek laughs, 'You're wearing boys' shoes. You're a boy, you're a boy.' Linda grabs the top of his short back and sides, her fingers slipping through Brylcreme. He pushes her away and she falls onto the path.

'Look what you've done,' she says, rising. 'I'm telling my mum of you, look.' She brushes grass from the side of her lemon organdie; hairband slipping over her forehead. Zbyszek laughs louder, 'Boy, boy.'

Adda reaches up to the older girl's head to push back the band, which is threatening to blind her friend. Linda brushes her hand away. 'Leave me alone. I'm telling my mum. I don't want to go to your stupid wedding.'

Gerda chooses this moment to arrive, her mauve satin moiré stretched tightly across her chest. She carries a carnation and, ignoring her daughter's loud protests, pins it to Linda's dress before going into the house.

Zbyszek's pinned floral testimony has twisted to lie head down on his fawn-coloured, sleeveless pullover. Adda touches her halo of artificial pink blossom. 'I wish they were real,' she muses to no-one, ruffling her fingers back and forth over the flowers. One of them lands at her feet. She looks quickly over at his brother. He hasn't seen it. Slowly, she places a white

canvas clad foot over the flower. Zbyszek is called away. Seizing the moment, she grabs Linda's bare arm, 'Look.' She moves her foot.

Linda gasps, her hand flying over her mouth, 'You'll get killed.'

'What shall I do?' pleads the younger girl.

Linda quickly picks up the flower, pushing its petals into her fist. 'We have to hide it,' she says.

'Where?' Adda's eyes are wide, stricken with the memory of frequent slaps on the backs of her legs. With short white socks, they are unusually exposed today. Every atom of wedding excitement rapidly drains from her as she looks helplessly around the garden.

'Here, look.' Linda runs towards a large hydrangea. 'We'll hide it here. It's the same.' She pokes the artificial flower into a fresh bloom.

'Adda, Linda, Zbyszek, come.' Stefan's commanding boom has them running into the house.

Lina stands in the living room, awkwardly holding a small bouquet of pink carnations, white handbag hanging in the crook of an arm. She wears a light grey two-piece costume, white gloves and court shoes and a white cocktail hat with fishnet veil. Her lips are red.

'Isn't she lovely?' breathes Adda.

'I wish my aunty was getting married. I never have anything,' Linda says, kicking her toe into the carpet until Lucy gives her a warning look from behind the baby's head. Carol is dressed in pink cotton lawn with a lemon cardigan.

'She can wear it again, but not the hat,' Adda parrots her mother, never taking her eyes from her aunt's face.

'Come on, come on. We go,' calls Stefan, adjusting his tie with one hand while pulling down his jacket with the other. He ushers his family out, checking the front door is firmly closed.

The bridal party squeeze into Mr. Brown's old sedan, sliding over its cracked leather seats. Zbyszek sits by the open left-hand window to manually operate the sticky trafficator on Mr. Brown's instruction. He pushes his sister away importantly.

The Chipping Sodbury Registrar makes short work of the ceremony, a handful of confetti is thrown, then everyone piles back into Mr Brown's car for the main event of the day.





3.8

In no time, no. 6 swells with Polish guests, all friends of Tony, bachelors with deep pockets. Stefan has left instructions with Mr Bird to tie up the gate with yards of pink satin ribbon. Leading the way, Tony pays the children to cut the ribbons, and each guest follows suit. Lucy relieves Adda and Zbsyek of their takings, and that is the last they will see of them.

Adda, however, has a windfall when Tony lifts her onto his lap. His wet fleshy lips kiss her as his hard fingers dig into her ribs. She leans away, trying not to show she'd like to wriggle free from his spirity hot breath.

'I am your uncle now,' the simple man smiles. He produces a half crown from his pocket and presses it into her sweaty palm.

'Tony! Your glass.' Stefan seems to be everywhere filling and refilling glasses. Food comes in an almost continuous stream from the kitchen. Huge oval platters of thick cut, pink *kielbasa*, bowls of salad, hot potatoes and fat rough textured gherkins, which Lucy was prevented from splitting to make them go further. Cold roast peppers, pickled cabbage, poppy seed bread and thick slices of *zimne nóżki*, jellied pigs' feet liberally doused in vinegar are

consumed under Stefan's watchful eye. Plates and glasses lie abandoned everywhere as if the world had gone mad on rations and everyone is eating as if there is no tomorrow.

Temporarily distracted, Tony raises his glass to Stefan's request, and Adda slips off her new uncle's lap. Clutching her large silver coin, she wanders into the kitchen where Lina is crying, her face pressed into Lucy's apron. The noise, louder now, hurts her ears. She cannot understand why her aunt is crying, or why this man, whom she has only seen twice before, is so happy. Her mother holds Carol, while attempting to pat Lina on the shoulder. Adda rests a hand on Lina's knee. She is rewarded by the damp clutch of her aunt's hand. She feels the wet, lacy edge of her handkerchief.

'Why is Auntie Lina crying?' she asks her mother.

'Because she is happy. Go away,' says Lucy, moving the baby from one arm to another. 'Go and get your father.'

Adda wanders back into the living but the cigarette smoke smarts her eyes so she can hardly see across the room. Lucy has beckoned from the kitchen doorway, and Stefan staggers towards his wife, bumping into furniture and spilling his glass. Raised voices come from the kitchen. Lina wails even louder, and is then quiet. Adda joins Linda under the table.

The party continues until, eventually, Lucy calls the children out from their hiding place. Linda is taken home complaining, while Adda and Zbsek are sent upstairs.

When Adda wakes the next morning, Lina is not next to her. The space is cold and empty. Adda looks around the room. Lina's things are not on the dressing table. Afraid to be caught prying, she steps down quietly onto the cold brown lino, and tiptoes to the wardrobe. Carefully turning the key, she tugs the door open. All of Lina's clothes are gone. Adda creeps back to bed, pulling the bedclothes up to her chin, and tries to arrange them to look like she hasn't got out of bed. She screws the sheet into a tight ball and shoves it into her mouth, sucking and chewing herself back to sleep.

The sound of clearing up drifts upstairs. The radio is on in the kitchen and Stefan is whistling. Adda goes down to the kitchen.

'*Kiciu*, kitten, come here. You're hungry.' Stefan states as a matter of fact.

Adda looks around the kitchen. The back door is open. 'Where is Auntie Lina?' she asks.

'She is with her husband. She is married,' Stefan beams.

'But, where is she?' the child persists.

'I told you, with her husband where she should be,' Stefan responds pulling her onto a chair. 'Just like you will be when you marry.'

'But, where is she?'

Lucy turns from the sink, frowning, 'She is in Stroud, with her husband, all right?'

'When is she coming back?' Adda asks, rubbing an eye.

'She lives there now.' Lucy returns to her dishes, signaling an end to the questions.

The room blurs as Adda's eyes fill. Confused, she looks at her father, who abruptly takes his arm from the back of her chair.

'I take the empty bottles back,' he tells Lucy.

'Good, get some money for them.'

Stefan sits beside Lucy on the bench behind the shed, watching Carol bumble around the strawberry patch. One half of her soggy nappy is hanging perilously close to her feet. 'No,' he says, 'no good, that one.'

The toddler holds up her unripe fruit, carefully pinched between stubby fingers. 'Stawbbies,' she announces.

He goes over to his little girl, and squats down, putting his arm around her waist, 'Karolcia, *kiciu*, darling, you have to pick the red ones. These are no good for you. You will get a stomach ache.' He pats her tummy gently. 'It will hurt here,' he says.

The child looks at him. 'Stawbbies,' she repeats, shoving the unripe fruit into her fat mouth. Her face contorts as its sourness hits her little tongue, but her grimace quickly turns to smiles as Stefan starts to laugh.

Lucy gets up to search for a ripe fruit. Brushing back lush green leaves she finds one. 'Here,' she says, pushing the small berry into Carol's mouth.

'Stawbbies,' Carol says again, this time in appreciation. Red juice dribbles down her smocked dress.

Lucy dabs at the toddler's dress and tries to pull up the wet nappy. As she wipes her hands on her apron, a call comes from over the fence.

'What an angel, just look at 'er.' Mrs Lucas has paused from shaking drips from her daughter's crisp blue Can Can petticoat. 'Look at them curls. Fetch 'er over 'ere Lucy, our Maureen'll watch her.'

Maureen gets up from her chair by the back door and trots down the garden path on white stilettos. 'Yeah, pass her over, we'll play with her for an hour. She loves it 'ere.'

Carol doesn't wait for her parents to say yes. She toddles across the red clay, manoeuvring around pea sticks, dragging her nappy.

Lucy runs to intercept her. 'Wait a minute, I have to change her.'

Mrs Lucas waves an arm, 'No need, just take it off. I told you, she peed in the potty last week. She don't need that nappy no more... do you my lover?'

Lucy turns to look at Stefan, who nods. She whips off the nappy. 'Well, just for an hour. Send her back if she's naughty,' she says, handing the bare-bottomed child over the chain link fence.

Stefan pats the bench beside him for Lucy to come back. 'Sit,' he says.

Smiling at this unexpected invitation, Lucy sits and lets the sun wash over her closed eyes, enjoying brief respite from her constant vigilance.

Stefan is silent, watching as her shoulders relax. He puts his left hand over her right one and lifts it to his lips.

Quickly alert, Lucy opens her eyes to look at her husband. She can hear Adda and Zbyszek playing inside the shed. 'What?' she says.

'I been thinking,' Stefan starts.

Lucy says nothing.

He turns slightly towards her. 'Carol is nearly three. Old enough to be without you.'

'Without me? Two and a half.'

'No, not without you, but to be left,' he continues.

'Left where? Why?' Lucy stares hard.

Stefan squeezes her hand. 'You could go back to work.'

She pulls her hand away. 'And Carol? Who will look after her?'

Stefan jerks his head towards the Lucas's house. 'She can go there, they like her.'

Lucy gasps, 'They are strangers, you cannot put our child with strangers.'

Stefan reaches for her hand again. 'She likes them, they like her.'

'I don't know,' says Lucy, half-aloud.

'Lucy, we need the money,' he says, 'all I do is work, eat and sleep. Isn't it time we had a bit more? Other people do it.'

'Other people have family. Family is different.'

'They're only next door, not far away. They're decent people. Anyway, I already asked Bob Lucas and he's agreed.'

Lucy stands up, 'Oh, he's agreed, has he? What if she gets ill, what's Bob Lucas going to do then?'

Stefan gets up and walks towards the house, 'His wife is sensible, they will send for you. Just, at least think about it. There are things we need.'

----

Within a few weeks it is all settled. Lucy returns to Newman's, winding copper wire into the motor cores. The work is a little lighter than the foundry, and the pay much better.

This time, Gerda is not on hand to help with the children, and as Lucy starts at 7.30 Stefan needs to learn morning childcare. Within days, porridge making is brought back to Lucy's domain, but he has to get the children ready for the day. Adda and Zbyszek for school, and Carol to go next door. Then he can sleep until Lucy's return.

Adda's long dark plaits have already been cut off by the hairdresser. But Carol's bright curls are Lucy's pride. Every Sunday, she washes Carol's waist-length hair, and sits her down with her back to the fire, and a towel around her shoulders. She combs and coils thick strands of hair around her forefinger until a host of dark, wet sausages hang down. Carol is not allowed to move until the curls are dry, so it falls to Adda and Zbyszek to amuse their little sister.

One month into the new regime, Lucy arrives at the Lucas's back door to collect Carol. Mrs Lucas invites her in. 'She's watching telly next door with Raymond. Have a cup of tea with me for a minute,' the older woman says.

Lucy looks around the kitchen to where Mrs Lucas's pots are already boiling on the hob. A smell of beef mince hangs in the air. 'Just for a minute then,' she says, sitting on a kitchen chair. Her hands are still sticky from the plaster tape she's wound around her fingers to protect them from sharp metal.

She notices Mrs Lucas is slower than usual in her tea-making. Finally, the old brown pot is plonked down with its stained knitted cosy.

'Look, love, it's none of my business, but, do you think your husband ought to be looking after the children?'

'What do you mean?' Lucy asks.

'Well, it's not my place but Carol, she's been arriving upset several mornings, and, well, today... You better see for yourself.'

Lucy twists in her chair towards the living room. 'What are you talking about? Carol! Carol, come here,' she calls.

As the little girl walks into the kitchen, Lucy gasps. Gone, are the golden curls, gone is the side ribbon, gone is the little dog hair slide. In their place, is a floor mop of brown hair springing out at all angles. Carol rubs her nose and smiles at her mother.

Lucy scoops the mop-haired child up and runs out of the kitchen her wriggling in her arms. Back in home, she sets Carol down at the table before going out to search through the bin.

She re-enters the kitchen, clutching a luxurious thick finger curl, which she gently lays on a piece of newspaper, flicking wet tealeaves from the golden baby tips of hair. She turns at a sound in the doorway to see Stefan watching her.

'The child was crying every day, it was cruel,' he says.

Lucy presses her lips together, then thinks better of it and says, 'You cut her hair off.'

'Yes, I cut her hair, so what?' Stefan answers. He reaches for the kettle and fills it at the sink, carefully moving around Lucy. 'It's only you who wanted it like that, so you could play with it.' He bangs the kettle onto the hob but doesn't light the gas.

'She loved it,' Lucy replies.

'No, she didn't. She was crying so I asked her, "Shall I cut it off?" and she said yes.'

'She's just a child!' Lucy explodes at last.

'Just a child, another child,' Stefan mutters, leaving his wife to cry over a curl of baby hair.

The next Saturday, Lucy takes Carol to the hairdresser to get her hair trimmed into some sort of shape, and the next Monday morning she goes to work again.

Every week, Stefan checks her bonus and the family finances start to improve but not enough for Lucy. She wants to save. Stefan wants to spend. He is adamant that they buy a car and talks of nothing else. Saturday afternoons, he cruises around local garages until he is on first-name terms with all the salesmen, returning home to report excitedly about the merits of one car over another for hour after hour.

After a few weeks of this, Lucy capitulates, and Stefan wastes no time in researching the ideal family car to fulfil his glowing promises of family excursions. Adda and Zbsyk start to

take extra interest in American movies that show happy, well dressed families travelling to picnics; all white teeth and hampers.

When Stefan finally goes to sign his hire purchase agreement and collect his car, he takes his son along. Lucy, Carol and Adda wait at home. Gerda comes over with Linda to form a welcoming committee. The girls jiggle about so much their mothers shoo them out to wait on the corner for the grand arrival.

Several hours pass and even Lucy goes out to check as if, being on the corner will make her husband and son appear. She returns to Gerda, shaking her head, sombrely.

Suddenly, a car is parked in front of no. 6. The girls run breathlessly from their lookout point to see its domed carapace, gleaming in the sun like a shiny black beetle. Linda and Adda race towards it only to be halted by a raised palm.

‘No! Don’t touch it with your hands.’ Stefan is already out of the driving seat and strutting around the car.

Zybsek slides from its red leather upholstery, grinning widely, his chest thrown out, seeming on the point of bursting.

Lucy’s brow furrows into now familiar lines. ‘What is it?’ she asks.

‘It is German!’ Gerda’s outburst is jubilant. Her bottom row of teeth jutting out but her expression of pride clouds as disappointment passes across her face. She sways like a deranged chameleon on an oscillating rainbow, not quite sure how to respond to the fact that the Motkaluks have a car.

Stefan, meanwhile, explains the finer points of Auto Union engineering to his wife, while Zybsek attempts to corral the girls away from the car. They are touching the paintwork against direct orders not to. Linda’s fingers trace four chrome circles, while her younger friend, Adda, waits for her turn. Zbyszek swipes his sister’s hand away.

Lucy’s face betrays false comprehension of Stefan’s exposition. Stefan raises the car’s bonnet. He attempts to educate her on the workings of the internal combustion engine, and especially the superiority of this particular one, but Lucy’s attention is on a collection of cardboard tags, dangling on coloured cords from the rear-view mirror. Placing a hand on her husband’s shoulder she points to them.



Stefan, who is about to dive once more towards the hot engine ticking before them, raises his head.

'They are winners' tickets. Very good car, has won many races.'

The girls by now have evaded Zbyszek and are both ensconced on the front passenger seat, obscured from Stefan's view by the raised bonnet. They read out the tickets one by one, 'Third, third, second, third, second.'

Zbyszek is the only one who notices his mother's changing expression as realisation slowly creeps across her face, 'You bought a racing car.'

'Not a racing car, fastback.' Stefan's patience with the general level of ignorance he is encountering is still within bounds of containment as he continues his engine tour. 'Look, engine very clean. Good.'

Lucy moves around the car, noting the small rear seats and their tiny windows.

Gerda's expression continues to vacillate with conflicting emotions as her reasoning brain lags behind her visceral reactions. Suddenly, she blurts, 'Auto Union was very good in Germany. The Führer, he ...'

Lucy, turns sharply, seizing the opportunity to dissipate some of her own conflict. 'So,' she snaps, 'good for Hitler, good for us is it?'

In an instant, Gerda's conflict is resolved. She calls her daughter, 'Linda, come.' Her mouth twitches, working out its tension with unspoken words as she grabs the child's wrist. She crosses the road to her house, dragging Linda, with bright sun lighting both their fluffy, pale blonde heads.

'Why you do that?' Stefan asks his now sulking wife.

'She is jealous.'

Stefan sighs, then turns attention to his acquisition. 'I need rag, soft cloth. Very soft, no buttons. Very important to keep it clean, dry, or it will rust.' Only his son hears this last remark.

Lucy and Adda retreat to the house. There is no prospect of the promised excursion today.

By the time Adda returns with a rag, a gaggle of neighbourhood children stand at a distance. Zbyszek takes the rag from his sister and hands it to his father with a smirk. Adda hovers but access to the car is firmly blocked.

The following day, being Sunday, Stefan announces his intention to take his family for a drive.

'I have to do the washing. Take them,' Lucy nods towards the older children. Her lips are compressed as she struggles to pull out the galvanized boiler from behind a gingham curtain. Carol looks up from her game on the floor, oblivious to the drama above her head.

'You don't want to come?' asks Stefan, with only partial relief.

No answer comes from Lucy, who fastens a rubber hose to the kitchen cold tap.

'All right, you get your shoes on.' Adda and Zybsek quickly obey.

'I want to sit in the front,' shouts Adda, running back with her shoes dangling. She fails to notice her brother's leg and crumples to the ground. He steps gleefully over her, grabs his shoes and, banging their soles together to cover his sister's protest, stands in front of his father to ask for the front seat.

'You sit in front on the way there, she can sit in front on the way back,' he throws out, turning to leave.

But there is no way back. Once in the car, Stefan drives without stopping until, an hour later, he returns home.

'Don't slam the doors,' he commands as Adda struggles to climb out from the rear. Zbyszek's left hand is holding the door firmly, his body partly blocking his sister's exit.

'Next time I want to sit in the front,' she whines at her brother, who stands impassively in her way. He places his right hand on her flat, skinny chest and pushes her backwards. Her shout alerts Stefan, who comes around to hurl both children away from the car, before shouting, 'You scratch it.'

Inside the kitchen smells are good and a line of clean sheets can be seen drying in the sun. *Two Way Family Favourites* melts from the radio with Jean Metcalfe's mellifluous voice telling David in BFPO Cyprus that the family, 'look forward to them all being together again very soon.' Lucy stirs gravy as the request floats out:

Now I've got heartaches by the number,  
Troubles by the score,  
Every day you love me less,  
Each day I love you more,  
Yes, I've got heartaches by the number,  
A love that I can't win,  
But the day that I stop counting,  
That's the day my world will end.

'Hear that? That's how I feel', says Stefan.

Lucy continues stirring. The children slip away to play.

‘Letter from Teodor! Mama!’ Maria runs down the dusty road towards her mother, knowing that Halina will receive more joy from this one letter than Maria herself could give her in a lifetime. Nevertheless, the generous-hearted girl is as excited for her mother, as she is for herself.

She pulls up, panting, ready to pass over the precious letter.

Halina straightens up from her weeding and, discarding her hoe, wipes calloused hands down her apron. Taking the letter, she beckons Maria to the well. The women sit, heads together, exclaiming over every line.

Hello my dearest!

I’ve received a letter from you today and I hurry to write you an answer. Today is March 8, it is Women’s day, but I do not have any feeling of a holiday. I don’t know how you celebrate this day, as for me I am at a guardhouse now and I will be on duty during the night, so I decided to write you a letter.

My life is going well and my health is perfect.

Now I want to write you about the teeth in details. The thing is that some time ago I had two teeth pulled out – you remember it, I am sure. Then it was all okay but now the tooth that is next to that extracted one hurts, I mean it is whining. Once I even had a strong tooth ache. Then my 2 front upper teeth and one bottom tooth cracked (cracks appeared on them). I think it happened because of the cold water, and I don’t know what to do with them; it is not very attractive to paste iron teeth so I cannot make a decision; the fact is that they don’t hurt even a little bit but I suppose they will trouble me soon. In short, I think that when I come for a vacation I will have them pasted or we will make another decision at home.

‘His teeth,’ mutters Halina. ‘His father was just the same.’

Now about my vacation – I have already written to you and I didn’t change my mind; if everything goes well I will leave Murmansk at the beginning of June (1<sup>st</sup>).

There is one circumstance though (it is impossible for me to write you about it) that forces me to go on vacation at the end of April that is May, the 1<sup>st</sup>.

‘He’s coming home early!’ Maria exclaims, reading ahead of her mother.

To be at home...I don’t know why but I don’t want to go home so early. There will be nothing fresh in May yet,<sup>99</sup> but in any case, I will consider it once more; if I decide to go in April<sup>100</sup> I will write you, but I am not sure that I will go.

‘Oh, he’s not coming. What does he mean, “I don’t know”?’

Mother! Take care of yourself, I know that you suffer there a lot, but you have to take care of your health.

You write that You have Spring there, warmth, sun; you know it is so difficult to believe it.

We have such a bad weather that it is awful, snow, frost, wind and so on. But no worry – after 1.5-2 months Spring will come to us to the North.

As I know from the letters of Yours many boys and girls get married and I begin to be afraid that when I come on vacation there will be no one to have a walk with.

And now! I liked it very much to be present when the pig was being killed, and sit together at the table after such a mission but what can I do, now All this happens without me I can only breathe a sigh.

How is aunt <sup>101</sup> Tonya, tell her that I will come soon and will certainly demand a bottle of fine strong wine from her, that is because I won’t take moonshine into my mouth (so let her get ready). If you envy Kalutskaya<sup>102</sup> that her Ivanko<sup>103</sup> has come, just write to me and I will come, don’t think that I cannot come on vacation, and even not for 10 but for a little longer period. How are Slavochka’s studies.

I finish, I kiss everyone tightly, Dorek

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<sup>99</sup> Translator’s note: fresh food

<sup>100</sup> Translator’s note: April in Ukrainian

<sup>101</sup> Translator’s note: here he uses a dialect Ukrainian-Galician form of this word ‘tsiotsia’

<sup>102</sup> Translator’s note: surname

<sup>103</sup> Translator’s note: diminutive from Ivan

Halina will not greet her son at the small railway station in Hermakivka; it holds too many painful memories. Instead, she waits patiently at home until Maria comes, excitedly pulling her Teodor through the door.

He first takes Karolina's trembling outstretched hands and kisses his grandmother repeatedly on her wrinkled cheek.

Finally, he embraces Halina, who is happy to just see him in her house. She never takes her eyes off him, not even for a moment.

'You look so handsome in your uniform, Dorek,' she says, brushing flakes of dandruff from his shoulder.

'Yes,' Maria, says, taking off her headscarf, 'you must wear it tonight for my graduation concert. I want everyone to see my handsome brother. And Vira will fall in love with you immediately.'

Teodor smiles, 'Tell me about this Vira,' he says and kisses his sister again.

'She is the most beautiful girl in the school.'

Teodor's broad smile, broadens.

'Not now,' Halina interrupts. 'I want to know something. Why didn't you come home, Dorek?' She scans her son's face for signs of illness but finds only tiredness.

'I was in the hospital...'. He raises his hand to his mother's response. 'It was nothing, compose yourself. Just a little radiation sickness. Doctors said it was nothing, just a precaution.'

Halina's hand is over her mouth.

'It's *all* right, mother, be calm.' He takes her hand. 'We were at sea too long last October, that's all.'

Partly mollified, Halina bids him eat. Maria sits, happily watching, while her brother is plied with the best food they have, telling him all about Vira, her beauty, her blonde hair, clothes, and her father's important job.

But Halina still looks worriedly at her son.

'Teo, sit here by me,' she says when he puts down his fork, 'Tell me everything. I know you're keeping something back.'

Teodor sighs, 'I felt so tired, that's all, headaches and so on, and my teeth. I wrote you about my teeth. We must sort them out on this leave.' He smiles at his mother, but she does not smile back.

'Tell me.'

Shaking his head, he says, 'Promise you say nothing?' Both women nod vigorously. Karolina, out of earshot, is paying no attention.

'We went to Cuba.'

'Cuba!' Maria's eyes sparkle. 'You were there? So far away. I read it, that they didn't let our ships out.'

Halina crosses herself and clutches her son's hands. Speechless, now, she scrutinises his face.

'It was nothing, they panicked, that is all.' He shakes off Halina's grip.

'Crazy Americans, such exaggeration. There was never a problem that they didn't make for themselves.' Teo leans back, hands behind his head, to better address his audience.

'You see, what you have to understand is that Kennedy - these people are not what they seem - the leaders. They *know* what they're doing. It's the uneducated ones who panic. They see a dot on the map and think, "uh ho, we're going to die." They don't realise we only protect what's ours. We are reasonable people.'

Maria positively glows at her clever brother. But Halina looks long and hard at her son.

'Here, eat some more, you look thin. These reasonable people are also not good at feeding.'

Teo raises an eyebrow, 'Mama.'

Halina smiles, smoothing his head down to his shaven neck where she rests her hand.

'Eat,' she says.

He surveys the table in consternation and groans.

'Tell me more,' Maria says.

Teo pulls on her plaits, 'Good you listened to my advice and didn't cut them,' he jokes.

'You want to know the worst thing?'

Maria nods enthusiastically.

‘The smell,’ Teo continues. ‘My God, it was so hot, cooling systems failed, we lacked water for drinking let alone washing. Imagine... 100 men, temperatures over 40 degrees. Rashes all over us.’

Maria’s hands are over her mouth, but her eyes are large as saucers and twinkle with excitement.

‘Now, little sister, tell me more about this girl. Is she smart, or just pretty?’ He smiles at his mother. ‘What about her family?’

Maria quickly folds her hands in her lap, and proceeds to tell her big brother all about the wonderful Vira.

By the time Teo returns to service in Murmansk, he is walking out with Vira and has begun to charm her mother – her father, not so much.

Theo’s correspondence burden doubles as he now conducts both his long-distance romance with Vira, and his filial duties by letter. However, his association with Vira, and through her, her father, results in powerful Party connections which he puts to good use:

104

I thank you very very much for the present  
Thank you mum very very much

Hello my dear!

Yesterday I wrote you that I had received a parcel from you and today I am writing that I have tasted everything from it and there is not much left from the parcel.

Everything is very very tasty, especially your biscuits and honey-pie. I cannot tell how tasty they are, just delicious. The apples are also very good. And it was not bad also to smoke “Verkhovyna”<sup>105</sup> after all.

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<sup>104</sup> Translator’s note: [top of the page, written upside down in Ukrainian]

<sup>105</sup> Translator’s note: [a brand of cigarettes]



Don't send plums as they will spoil. That is for sure.

My life is going ok, as well as You do. The main thing is for you to find the material to cover the house and then I will come home for almost two months and will have an interesting work to do. I would be so eager to help you during my vacation. If you don't have tiles so I won't have any other serious job to do.

Mum! For the Winter you try to get as much coal as you can and go to the superior let him help you. I think he is a human anyway. As for the wood I will try to help you. In short, the mill and the military commissariat will soon receive a letter from our military base and they will have to help you. And if they give you the trash again you will then write to me; and if nothing helps then I will come and beat the faces of this old boar and his assistant Petlevin.

The weather, as I have already written, is awful. The Winter is coming soon.

Write me how is Slavochka doing in his\her studies. Now they are in the 10<sup>th</sup> form it is necessary to study well. If you jump well – try to enter the sports department and you will teach physical education at school, it is easy and attractive, I like it for example.

As for all this sewing and so on – throw it out from your head.

I kiss you all tightly  
Winter – Spring and I will be at home

Kisses, Dorek

Give my thanks to the aunt for the apples and I kiss you mum

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On completion of his military service in late 1963, Teodor is 25 years old. He moves to the city to study engineering at the Polytechnic University in Ternopil. Five years his junior, Vira is already at the Medical School and their romance continues in closer proximity.

Both of their families oppose marriage, on the same grounds but from different perspectives. Vira's, because her family enjoys high status in the Party with its consequent economic standing, and Teodor's for the same reason.

But by 1965, Vira is of age, and the young couple go ahead with a simple student wedding in Ternopil with only Halina, Maria and friends, and a rented room for their party. Vira is resplendent in a sleeveless white mini dress hemmed with a deep band of organza ruffles. Teodor wears a white satin tie with his white shirt and dark suit. A profusion of pink carnations and asparagus fern cheers their austere surroundings.



3.9

Halina gives a small saucepan as a gift. Their party is long, loud, and wild.

Teo and Vira settle to married life in one room at Ternopil's polytechnic hostel with nothing to their name except a few sticks of furniture and their one pot to cook in. Money is so short that Teo switches his studies to an evening course, so he can work in the day as a driver in an engineering company.

Where some would suffer under their hardship, Teodor's optimism never abates. Despite his heavy workload he returns home cheerful to their mean room near the bus station.

One day, coming home to find Vira hot and despondent with her studies, he insists, 'Come on, let's go to the lake and swim.'

'Teo!' Vira laughs, 'it's two kilometres.' But despite her protests, she still pushes away her books and runs to pack some towels.

They walk to the Ternopil's huge city lake to find their friends gathered at the water's edge, waving, and shouting greetings.

They laugh and splash their evening away in the lake's cooling water, in which fresh green weeping willows drip. The lake gradually turns pink from the lowering sun and in the

beautiful park, promenading families make their way home, calling out curfews to chattering groups of single people. It is a good time to be young and strong.

Teodor is offered engineering work, rising quickly through the ranks.

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Meanwhile, in the village, Halina and Maria walk home in the dark from a neighbour's clandestine christening.

Halina sighs, 'She should be pregnant by now.' Her brow creases, remembering Teodor's anguish at Vira's miscarriage last year.

'Do you think it's the radiation?' Maria hesitates. 'No,' she reconsiders, 'she was pregnant once, so it should be all right.'

Halina retorts, 'There are too many strangers in the city, someone must have given her the evil eye.'

'Mama! For an intelligent woman, sometimes you surprise me.'

'I'm worried, Maria. What if you're right about the radiation?'

'Let's forget it.' Maria hastens to alleviate her mother's fears. 'I know, we'll send them a rabbit!'

Mother and daughter share a rare moment of laughter.

A few months later, Teo writes to Halina with news.

Reading by the light of the small window, Halina releases snippets to her sister, Tonina<sup>106</sup> and daughter. 'She is pregnant again,' Halina announces, 'this time the baby is due in June.'

'We must send some fruit, she will need fresh things,' Tonya says. 'And Teo, is *he* all right?'

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<sup>106</sup> Ukrainian diminutive of Antonina, also Tonya

All smiles, Halina reads on, 'He says it will be a boy. He says he doesn't care either way, but it will be a boy.'

'And if it's not?' Tonya laughs.

Halina scans the letter, 'He says, it doesn't matter, as long as it's healthy, but he knows it will be a boy. He says he has made some mechanical toys already.'

'Oh no, that is bad luck,' Tonina crosses herself hurriedly.

Maria chimes in, her filial confidence glowing, 'Oh, Teo, no!'

But Maria's mood shifts swiftly from ebullience to silence as she sees Halina's hand touch her lips. 'What is it Mama?' she asks, taking courage to place a hand on her mother's shoulder.

Halina's mouth moves but no words come as she reads along the lines. She lays the letter carefully down onto the table. 'He's writing some letters to find his father.'

---

In Ternopil, and pregnant for the second time, Vira attends university lectures before returning to the hostel to cook in its shared kitchen. Potatoes, noodles, fish and soup is all she can manage in her single pot, and all that's available on Teo's meagre wage. Oftentimes, she chides him for his exaggerated generosity. They have little enough for themselves, but her husband helps anyone who needs it; optimistic as ever, loving life, and working hard.

'A man who makes metal mechanical toys for a baby has some plans for that baby's future,' she thinks, chopping at onions. 'And searching for his father,' Vira smiles fondly, remembering the letters Teo has laboured over, carefully recording every detail he's been able to glean from Halina. She sniffs at the sting of onions in her nostrils and wipes the back of her hand across her nose. Feeling the flutter of the child within her, she thinks, 'I hope he finds him this time.'

After several months, and many discussions, Vira's parents persuade her to return to Hermakivka, where she can be properly fed and cared for. Within weeks, her weight increases as the baby grows, and on 18 June 1967, Vira and Teodor's son is born. Teo visits every week.

For a month they call the baby, Olek. Then, after standing over the cot for several minutes studying his son's features, Teodor makes an announcement, 'Serigy, I like it better,' he says.

Vira frowns.

Teo pokes his son's fat cheek. 'I knew a man in the Navy. Fine man, had a son called Serigy.'

Vira comes up behind Teodor, placing a hand on his shoulder, 'Leave him now, I just got him to sleep. You're not here all week, you get *your* sleep.'

Teodor pats her hand, jumping to another subject. 'But how can he sleep like that? In full sunshine.'

He leans over to twitch the curtain but Vira gently slaps his hand away.

'It's good for him, the sun.'

'Doctor Mama, you know best.' He kisses her cheek and is rewarded with a sweet smile.

'Teo, I don't want Serigy. There are too many babies called by that name.'

Teo pats her arm again.

The following week, he brings Vira their son's birth certificate: Serigy Motkaluk. Vira tuts and shrugs her plump pink shoulders.

Later that day, they take their son to Halina's house. Handing the baby over to his *bacia*, Vira spots a strange figure moving about in the other room. 'Who is there, Mother, do you have visitors?'

Swaying from side to side, the way women have done for centuries, Halina looks up from the baby. Her face is filled with adoration as she says, 'The priest, for the baptism. It has been four weeks, Vira. If anything should happen...'

Karolina quickly crosses herself twice and kisses her thumb.

'But my father,' Vira starts.

'It's all right, it's not the village priest, he refused. This one's from outside, he doesn't know whose grandson Serigy is. See, that way nobody will find out. After all, who wants to get the wrong side of the NKVD?

Vira forces her forehead into an unfamiliar frown.

But Halina presses on, 'Think of the baby, Vira, would you risk eternity in purgatory?'

Karolina crosses herself again.

Vira smiles thinly, 'All right, but just us, no-one else. Aunt Tonina might blab.'

Jumping on her easy acquiescence, Halina nods enthusiastically. 'No-one else, just us, and Maria. And his godparents.'

Shaking her head, Vira flops onto the settle next to Teodor.

Peering into the dark room next door, she glimpses spotless white cloths lit by glowing candles in the dark. She turns to her husband, eyebrows raised.

'No-one will find out,' Teo reassures her, patting her hand. 'They've covered the windows.'

Halina carries the sleeping baby into of the room, where the baptismal party waits. As the door closes, the sound of the priest's chanting reaches her ears. Teodor beams at her.

'Did you know about this?' she queries.

With a broad smile, Teo says, 'Of course not, do you think I'd keep secrets from you?'

---

As though fortified by his baptism, Serigy grows bigger by the week, and his father grows prouder. Teodor's weekly visits consist mainly of trundling Serigy around the village in his pram, visiting his many friends. He is seldom sober when he returns but Serigy doesn't seem to mind.

Today, Vira's father stands at the gate watching his son-in-law disappear down the road, the pram bouncing on the gravel. 'Where did he get that pram? You never told me,' he says.

Vira's hand flutters to her neck, 'Oh, I don't know, someone he knew in another town.'

'What town?'

'Far from Ternopil, he was gone all day and he just came back with it.'

Her father rubs his moustache, grunts, then says, 'It's a fine pram.'

'Yes,' says Vira.

'Strange thing, though,' says her father.

'What?' she says, fingering her necklace.

'That a man should like pushing a pram. Are you sure he's all right, you know, in all departments?'

'Father!' says Vira, blushing.

---

By Sunday evening, Teodor is loaded down with supplies of food and clean linen from Halina brought over by Maria.

Lingering outside the house, Maria intercepts her brother as he leaves. 'I'll to walk with you to the station, Teo,' she says, 'We don't see so much of you these days.'

Teodor smiles, 'I am a husband and father now,' he says, 'you'll understand this one day. 'Come on, we can talk and walk.'

The pair stroll along the dusty road.

'Have you heard anything about your father?' Maria asks.

Shifting his parcel from one hand to the other so as not to bump his sister, Teo says, 'No, but I'm sure I will if I keep searching. I just have to keep trying.'

Maria, slips her hand into the crook of his arm. 'What made you suddenly start looking?' she asks.

Teodor looks up at the sky, turning violet as the sun sets over Hermakivka. 'I haven't, I've been searching for him all my life.'

Maria squeezes his arm and they walk on silently, accompanied by the sound of crickets and lit by fireflies strung throughout the bushes. They both slow down as the station house appears from the gloom. An approaching train can be heard chuffing in the distance. They reach the platform as the train comes squealing to a stop.

'It'll be easier when you get the motorbike...' shouts Maria over the hissing steam. She hands up Teodor's parcel and stands back as he slams shut the door. The whistle blows, and as the train moves she waves at her brother, who shouts, 'Kiss him for me, Maria. Give him a kiss every night and tell him it's from his *tata*.'

'I will,' she calls.

'And tell him I'll be back soon.'

---

The following Friday, Hermakivka's evening quiet is disturbed by the throttling sound of Glavnodolesstroy's second-best motorbike and sidecar.

On arrival at his father-in-law's house, Teodor runs inside to see Serigy. Young men appear from all quarters and gather around the motorbike. They twist its handlebars and take turns to clamber onto its seats until Vira's mother shoos them away.

Indoors, Teodor regales his father-in-law on the merits of motorcycle travel, describing his many trips to local sites. 'You see, I can arrange to go to Kremenets on a Friday then come straight here, and they don't mind if I keep the bike all weekend. They trust me, you see.'

Vira, noticing her father's drooping eyelids, taps Teodor on the arm. 'Come on, he's asleep.'

They go outside to enjoy the summer moon.

'I love this place,' says Teo, breathing deeply. I live for the weekends when I can see you and Serg again.' He lets out his breath, 'How long before you come back to Ternopil?'



'A few more weeks, then I have to resume my studies, or I'll lose my place. Can you wait that long?' asks Vira, leaning into him.

'I have no choice, do I?' he says. 'I can't wait to show Serigy our flat. You'll love it too Vira, there's three rooms and an indoor bathroom. All on the top floor.'

'The top floor?'

'Yes, a penthouse like the Americans say. But not a skyscraper, it's only four floors. All new. It smells of cement.'

'I can't wait,' says Vira.

Teodor turns to look at her. 'Are you being sarcastic?'

'Maybe a little,' she laughs. 'I can't wait to see it too. We'll need some furniture.'

From then on, every week, little items appear in the sidecar for Teodor to take back to the city flat, but Vira keeps the pot that Halina gave them, lest it should go astray.

---

Eight weeks after Serigy's birth, Teodor has a visit at work from his colleague, Stepan Nykolayishyn.

'Teodor, you going home this weekend?'

'Sure, I'm leaving soon.' Teodor waves at an engine block he has been skimming. 'This is done.'

'I want to visit Ivane-Puste,' says Nykolayishyn.

Teodor smiles. 'No problem old man, ride with me. But I warn you, it's bumpy.'

Nykolayishyn bats away the younger man's remark with his stiff hand. 'Ach, I've forgotten more about motorbikes than you will ever know.'

Teodor laughs, 'Come on then, let's wash and get loaded.'

The long journey is filled with banter between the two men, with Nykolayishyn shouting instructions from the sidecar. They argue at length about who will drive back to

Ternopil. They agree to settle their differences on Sunday when Nykolayishyn gets to Hermakivka.

Vira is waiting for Teodor by the garden fence, holding a very wide awake Serigy in her arms.

'Darlings, my two best ones, look at you,' shouts Teodor, leaping over the fence. 'Give him to me,' he says, pulling at the baby.

'Careful,' warns Vira, 'He's only tiny.'

'Tiny? He's huge! What baby of eight weeks did you ever see this fat? Eh?

'Come here my son, tell me about your week. Are they treating you well here? Never mind, we'll soon get you away from all these women. I have made a home for you- hot water from the tap, eh? Imagine that. Oh, you can't, you're only a baby.' He turns his shining face to Vira. 'I'm starving.'

'Come on in, I've made some *bigos* for you. Two days-old, just the way you like it.'

'*Bigos*? Did someone kill a pig? Hey Serigy,' he says, holding the baby up high, 'it's time you had a taste of meat.'

'Don't you dare put anything in that child's mouth,' says Vira, eyes wide with alarm. 'And hold his neck.'

Teodor's face becomes solemn as he gently lowers the baby, but his eyes twinkle, 'Vira, this child has been sucking milk from your breasts for two months, surely he can suck on a piece of sausage for a change.'

Vira wags her finger sternly at him. 'No more of that. One baby is enough. Come on, it's time for his bath.'

They walk towards the house, with Teodor tickling and poking at Serigy until his gurgles blend with the throaty sound of hens pecking around their feet.

---

Sunday, Nykolayishyn arrives and is introduced to Vira and Serigy. They pass the hot afternoon in the shade of the orchard, where Teodor has hung Serigy's cradle to catch a passing breeze.

August grass reaches halfway up the legs of a battered old table, giving foraging ants an easy route up to the few remaining morsels of food scattered across its embroidered cloth.

Lulled into a sleepy mood, Nykolayishyn, Teo and Vira stretch out on rugs under the trees. Sunlight dapples flutter across their faces, and their lazy conversation is a mere murmur above the dreamy hum of bees.

Finally, Teodor stretches. 'We should go,' he says, reaching to stroke Vira's bare arm.

'So soon?' she says, propping herself up on an elbow. She lifts a heavy lock of hair from his forehead.

Teodor nods, and the lock of hair flops straight back.

Vira reaches for her husband. 'It's been such a lovely day, Dorek, I don't want it to end.'

'Who says it will end, this is the beginning. Next summer Serg will be chasing chickens in the orchard, and we'll be sitting here. Every summer. This will be our *dacha*, and when we are old, we will wait for Serigy to come to us, and we will send him home with eggs and fruit.

'Remember, Vira, whatever else happens in the world, the grass will grow, and the bees will make honey, and this place will be here.'

'Come on Pushkin,' yawns Nykolayishyn, 'there are enough poets in Russia already.'

Teodor jumps to his feet and, with a sweep of his arm, embraces the orchard scene, saying, 'Farewell, leafy groves, farewell, world of fields.'

'Farewell O *Faithful* leafy groves, and *careless* world of fields,'<sup>107</sup> corrects Vira, lifting Serigy gently from his cradle. 'At least try to get it right.'

'I remember songs better than poems,' smiles Teodor walking with her to the waiting motorbike beside the house.

'I'll leave my heart here for you to take care of.' He kisses Vira and Serigy, returning repeatedly to look at the baby's sleeping face until Nykolayishyn shouts for him to hurry up. They have yet to decide who will drive.

---

<sup>107</sup> 'Farewell, O, Faithful Leafy Groves!...' Aleksandr Pushkin 1817

The decision is finally made on the toss of a coin, and Teodor waves goodbye to his lovely young wife and baby son, calling, 'Stay well, my darlings, I'll see you next week.'

The motorbike roars off down the wide gravel road, stones flying in the dust.

1968 Last letters

To regional prosecutor of Ternopil city  
from the citizen of Germakivka village, Borshchiv district, Ternopil region  
Motkaliuk Galyna Yosyfivna<sup>108</sup>

Application- Complaint

On August 19, 1967 on the road from Ternopil to Chortkiv, not reaching Myroliubivka, my son Motkaliuk Theodor Stepanovych<sup>109</sup> ~~died~~ was killed. My son Motkaliuk Theodor Stepanovych, born in 1940, Ukrainian, ~~member of Komsomol~~, poor. After finishing 10 grades of Germakivka secondary school he entered and graduated from Kremenets technical school of forest technology and from it he was directed to work in Latvia Soviet Republic, Jekabpils city. After working 6 months in Latvia he went to Navy. In the navy in the North fleet<sup>110</sup> he served for 4 years without 3 months as he tried to enter the polytechnic institute in Ternopil.

During all his military service he ~~was not~~ was not only at the ship but also at a submarine. He was often honored among other sailors and ~~besides he was a submar~~ and that is why he was chosen as a delegate for the IXth Komsomol Congress Conference of the North Fleet in Severomorsk city, the evidence of which being his mandate and a photo which I preserve. A Healthy, young, strong and mentally mature my son successfully passed the entrance exams, entered the polytechnic institute and studied as a full-time student of the 1<sup>st</sup> year. When he married a 3d-year student of the medical institute on May 1, 1965 he started to work at once. First he worked as a driver and simultaneously studied and then when he was at the 3d year of studies he was offered a position of an engineer, because he has been working on different machines\cars and never had any remarks. So he worked as an engineer and soon as a senior engineer at a "Glavnodolesstroy" motor depot. He was given a motorcycle which he drove to reach his sites in Kremenets, Zalishchyky and Chortkiv. For a whole year he was a senior engineer and had no remarks or accidents.

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<sup>108</sup> Translator's note: Galyna – is a very popular name, short form is Galya; the name Anna is also seldom used for Galynas; the name Helena\Olena is a completely different name... was it a kind of family tradition to call Teo's mother Olena? Or she had an official passport name Galyna and an everyday name Olena?

Yosyfivna is a patronymic, it marks the name of her father, Yosyf\Eng. Joseph. Stefan's records show his wife's name as Helena from which comes Polish form, Halina which Stefan would have used. Stefan and Halina's marriage certificate shows Olena but this was issued by Soviet Union.

<sup>109</sup> Translator's note: patronymic, marks the name of his father – Stepan. Stepan is the Ukrainian form of Stefan.

<sup>110</sup> Translator's note: ('sf' I am not sure, but I suppose it is an abbreviation of 'serernyi flot'- the North Fleet in Russian).

On August 19, 1967 his colleague, an accountant, Stepan Nykolayishyn asked him to let him be a driver. He comes from a neighboring village Ivane-Puste and is old, weak and after a surgery. When they left Ternopil my son suggested that Nykolayishyn would drive as well as himself so he sat at the side seat. At a turn somewhere near Myroliubivka (I was not shown this place yet) the driver was not able to control the motorcycle and let it go at a full speed, so my son slipped out from the side seat (as it happens) but the driver himself hold the handlebar tightly

USSR Public Prosecutor's Office

Ternopil region

**PUBLIC PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE**

4 Oktyabrskaya street, Ternopil

March 22, 1968

#3\68 ZH

to  
Citizen Galyna Y. Motkaliuk

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Germakivka village, Borshchiv region

I inform you that your application about the death of your son T.S.Motkaliuk has been forwarded to the prosecutor of Ternopil region for being checked and essentially resolved, and he will let you know the result and the decision.

Head of Investigation Department

Counselor of Justice

V. Bielous

Ternopil, regional publishing office, VIII, 1967, #3712-3000

USSR Public Prosecutor's Office

PROSECUTOR of Ternopil region  
4 Oktyabrskaya street, Ternopil

July 15, 1968  
#3\68 zh

to  
citizen Galyna Yosyfivna Motkaliuk  
Germakivka village, Borshchiv region

I inform you that your application about the death of your son has been considered.

It has been stated that while your son T.S.Matkaliuk was driving his motorcycle towards Chortkiv town on August 19, 1967 he exceeded the speed limit at the road turn and as a result the motorcycle skidded to the sheer drop. As a result of the injuries received your son died in the hospital. As your son died due to his own negligence the excitation of the criminal proceedings has been declined.

Regional prosecutor's office sees no reasons to reconsider this final decision.

Head of Investigation Department  
Counselor of Justice  
V. Bielous



England: Yate

1968

*The call*

It is a normal working day when Lucy receives a letter from Lina. After the usual greetings, Lina asks if Stefan would telephone her neighbour, Mrs Grant, at eight o'clock on Thursday.

Following their evening meal, Stefan and Lucy discuss the implications of the letter. They both agree it can be nothing good.

'If she wants to leave him, tell her she can't come here. There's no room. And you know what happened last time.' Lucy's speculations quickly leap to reality as she remembers her sister's last sojourn with them.

'You don't know what it is,' Stefan replies, standing up. 'I go see Mrs. Wiffen. Better we telephone there. You buy some chocolates for her tomorrow.'

'Why we can't just pay her the telephone money? Always with the extra present.'

'You don't understand the correct way to do things.' With that, Stefan leaves to visit the Wiffen's, the only household in the street with a telephone.

When Mrs Wiffen answers the door, Stefan politely enquires, 'How is your husband, how is his back?'

'Not too bad, I heard from him last night. Don't drive lorries, Mr Motkaluk, they'll ruin your health. Come in, I guess you want to use the phone.'

'Yes, please,' says Stefan, wiping his shoes vigorously on the mat. 'Long-distance driving is hard on a man.'

'Oh, don't worry about your feet, the place is a tip with my boys. Come on in. Not bad news I hope?'

'Thank you, no, I hope not. I need to phone to Lucy's sister.'

'Baby due already? What's she got now, two isn't it?'

Stefan fumbles with a slip of paper, 'Yes, boy and a girl. No, not the baby. Something else.'

'Well, hope it's not bad news. Wonderful instrument, the telephone but I do hate giving people bad news. I'll leave you in peace to make your call. Just let yourself out when you're finished.'

Stefan returns from making his call to announce that they are going to Stroud tomorrow, Friday evening, straight after work. The children look surprised and groan a little.

'No, you're not going. We have to see some people,' Stefan says.

The next day Stefan washes, changes his clothes and rootles in the kitchen drawer for his pressure gauge.

Lucy is unusually nervous, haphazardly preparing food, and surprisingly oblivious to the children's laziness. However, the usual scraping of chairs elicits a high level of irritation.

Stefan continues to rummage in kitchen drawers for his pressure gauge. Lucy tuts openly but Stefan ignores her. Locating the gauge, he goes out to bring the car round from the garage he rents in the next street.

Adda takes her mother's distraction as an opportunity to question her, 'Who are you going to see?'

Lucy absently replies, 'There is a man there, in Stroud. He heard something on the radio somewhere.'

'The radio?' puzzles Adda.

Zybsek is listening quietly, Carol is playing cat's cradle.

Lucy sets a plate of sandwiches on the table, 'Eat, we'll be back soon. Make sure Carol goes to bed at 8 o'clock.'

Stefan returns, his keys rattling in his coat pocket.

Adda, sensing that time is running out, ventures, 'What did the man hear on the radio?'

Stefan, alert, looks at his wife – a long steady gaze – before slowly turning to his daughter. Lucy says nothing.

'Someone is looking for a man with my name. That is all,' he says.

'Motkaluk? Why?' Adda asks, face animated. Her attention is focused entirely on her father. She waits for an answer.

Stefan seems to deliberate with himself, then says, 'They are looking for a family with that name. That is all.'

'You mean, someone who knows who we are? Someone from our family?' Adda's excitement escalates.

'Enough. I told you. That is all. Lucy, come on. We go.'

---

The first few miles of the journey back to Yate pass quietly, until Stefan leans to switch on the car radio.

'Don't,' says Lucy.

He switches it off again. The muscles over his jaw flex as he grinds his dentures together.

'Well, now you've got what you wanted,' he says.

Lucy rubs her eyes, still sore from crying. The sight of her husband's distress at Kaszczyk's house affects her more than expected and disturbs her more than she will admit.

'What I wanted?' she queries, quietly. 'Stefa, this is not about me, this is about your son. And you.'

'Me,' says Stefan, dipping his headlights at an oncoming car. 'My son has been dead to me for eighteen years.' The passing car momentarily lights the drip on the end of Stefan's nose.

Gently laying her hand on her husband's knee, she says, 'No, he hasn't. Eighteen years, you even remember how long since you got that letter. That tells me plenty.'

'Don't try to make something from this that doesn't exist,' says Stefan, crunching down on the car's column change. 'I've never thought of him. It's in the past, finished.'

'You can say what you like, but I know you, you've never stopped thinking of him.'

'How do you work that out?'

'Because you think of him in everything that Zbyszek does, that's how. I've always known it.'

Stefan swings the car right into Cranleigh Court Road. 'Always comparing with other people, Lucy. You'll never be happy.'

'It's not me that always comparing. This country, that country, this food, that food, this son, that son. Believe me, Stefan, I know what I'm talking about.'

'Look, we're home, let's not talk about this now,' says Stefan stopping outside no. 6, and pulling on the handbrake. 'Go in, I'll put the car away.'

Lucy reaches for the door handle then hesitates. 'What are we going to tell the children?' she says.

'Tell them what you like, I'm going to put the car away. I'll be back in half an hour.' Stefan puts his foot down onto the clutch, releases the handbrake and reaches for the gear change.

'All right,' says Lucy, 'I'll tell them it was a mistake, somebody else.'

'Yes, tell them that. Somebody else.'

---

It seems like her parents have been gone forever. Adda has given up waiting by the window but her excitement rekindles when she hears the side door open.

Rushing to the kitchen, she asks, 'So what happened?'

Lucy reaches to hang up her coat before turning. 'Not now,' she says, 'you should go to bed. Go on, go.'

'But what was it all about? I've been waiting to find out. What happened?'

Adda waits as Lucy sits down and picks up her cigarette packet as if it were made of lead. She sees her mother's stiff fingers pick at the gold tag to release its tight cellophane wrapping which she scrunches into the palm of her hand. She watches her flip up the lid of the white and red packet.

She waits but still Lucy says nothing.

Adda's fascination with her mother's smoking ritual increases. She watches Lucy deftly remove the silver end paper and slide out the blue Embassy voucher.

Waiting until Lucy lights one of the pristine cigarettes and inhales deeply, she asks again, 'What happened, Mum?'

Lucy blows out a stream of blue smoke. 'It was a mistake. It was somebody else.'

'Not us?' Adda says, sitting down, her arms reaching across the table for the matchbox.  
No answer.

Adda slumps forward, fingering the matches in the box.

Mother and daughter sit together, Lucy smoking, Adda making shapes from matches. Something prevents Adda from leaving her mother's side. The time for Stefan's return passes, and still they sit, waiting, neither of them speaking.

It is very late when Stefan finally comes back. His face is grim and tight-lipped. Reading his look, Adda slopes off to bed. Something happened, she thinks, but she knows they won't tell her.

And because she knows they won't tell her it gets harder and harder to ask questions about what really happened in Stroud. Her mother is unnervingly silent on the subject, as if she has joined her father for once in some conspiracy.

To Adda, though, one thing is certain, nothing seems quite the same any more.

A heavy silence hangs damp as a foggy wash day about the house. It shrieks with the unspoken. She and her siblings carefully move around its brittleness, careful not to touch the edges of something they don't understand.

Nothing less than a sonorous doorbell breaks its spell, as if muteness can only be broken by a witness. But when guileless breezy callers brave the tension, they afford short respite. Stefan's too hastily proffered thick coffee - something stronger perhaps, an aperitif doesn't seem to hold English visitors the way it used to hold Polish ones. Feliks' accordion is no longer heard. Over the years, Adda realises, the gaiety has fallen away.

---

To Lucy and Stefan, into the piercing silence comes the unspoken knowledge that too many days like this will break them. Too many weeks, too many long Sundays to feel that silent chill creeping into veins and bones. Too many years left to shift and slide around.

Then one day, as if a switch has been flicked, Stefan bursts into the kitchen, tugging something from his pocket.

'Lucy, I've been thinking, let's go to Italy.'

'Italy?'

'To see your family.'

'But it will be expensive,' Lucy protests.

'Not if we drive. I've worked it out, we can get a tent and drive there.'

Lucy goes over to sit beside him. 'With three children?' she says, reaching for her cigarettes.

'Well, we'll need a new car...'

## Afterword

Nearly fifty years later, as I started to uncover my parents' hidden history, the long silent Sunday when they returned from Stroud started to make sense.

Up until my mother's death in 2010, it was mostly she who delivered, with dismissive gestures, the story of the first twenty-seven years of our father's life. Each of the three of us – Carol, Zbigniew and I – received it individually, in fragments, and scattered over many years. A trigger here, a reminder there and the same, well-rehearsed story would come. While our mother took the time to interpret his life for us, the story seemed flat, hollow, and empty as if she wasn't all that interested in Stefan's life. But when she came to talk about herself, her tone changed. And why not? His story wasn't hers. Or was it?

Even when Stefan did tell bits of his own story, I could always detect the ring of authenticity when it was there, and its absence when it was not. Fifty years later I came to understand more about why Stefan's story more often rang like a cracked bell. I grew up with the feeling of something being held back; more than a gap, a void into which I, or any one of us in this country might fall, if what was in there ever became known. Growing up, I *knew* Stefan was lying about something. What I didn't know then was that lies come in different guises. I've spent time lately wondering which is the greater lie: the silence, or the many small lies that fill the silence?

It is the greater lie that formed the greatest barrier in my relationship with my parents, and which spurred me on, through many years of academic scholarship, to try to understand who we all were. It was only once I realised that I had to tie scholarship with creativity to fully make sense of our stories that, in 2012, the journey began.

My first task was to find out where this man came from. Like so many of his peers, he redacted his remaining army documents to prevent anyone accessing his past, and all that he left behind. But the Ministry of Defence did not redact his records.

*What would be the point of keeping an envelope? None, unless what it brings is so very important that to discard any part might threaten the integrity of the whole. To keep an envelope as an object of containment is a measure of the vulnerable nature of its content.*

I go upstairs and close the bedroom door before opening the fat envelope. My fingers tremble as I shed my father's photocopied army records onto the floor. My eyes scan quickly. Time accelerates as I spread papers around with rat-like, uncoordinated movements.

Although I know his booming voice won't precede him up the stairs at any minute - *What are you doing up there? Come down.* - it feels transgressive and I'm shocked at how quickly the old familiar fear of trespass returns. Parents are entitled to their privacy, aren't they? It feels wrong, sniffing around my father's life: like childhood wardrobe-snooping.

My heels press hard into me as I sit back, *Slow down, breathe. He's dead. This is a good thing I'm doing. I have a right to know. It's my story too.*

Stretching forward, I sift more carefully. As my muddled mind relaxes, my wilful eyes start to focus. I read the covering letter. *Good, details of his whereabouts during the war. With dates. That's helpful.*

Items in Polish, I put aside. Then I come across, 'Identification of Motkaluk S. on joining':

Height 176 cms.

Eyes *siwe* grey

Hair *szatyn* brown

Attestation:

5(a) What was your age (in years) last birthday? 29

6(a) Are you married? *tak* yes,

6(b) How many children are dependent upon you? *jedno* one.

Too much. I cannot afford to let too much enter too soon.

I return to the Polish documents; the language a familiar barrier. I pick out the dates easily. *Kapral, yes that's corporal.*



When I turn over the page I am hit with another powerful blow. Swallowing air to breathe I see box 21. *Odcisk palca*, and in it my father's fingerprint, as undeniable as DNA. I search for a date. The latest I can find is, *wait...* 1945. I fold into the floor, stunned by this ghostly image. I am overwhelmed by its intimacy, the embodiment of that print, what it might have meant to Stefan to give it.

He stood before a table, before a British official and gave his personal information: height, eyes, hair, distinguishing features..., next of kin. He signed his name; an immature signature (not like the determined flourish I remember in peacetime). Then he pressed his young finger into a fabric covered ink pad. How could it be that this father of mine, whom I remember as rebellious and outspoken, would give a fingerprint; the stuff of criminality, and record-keeping of a more sinister time. I doubt that, given a dozen more years in peacetime, he would have meekly submitted to it. By the time I was born, he was a different man to the one who pressed his finger there. The only father I ever knew was not submissive. But here, though, here, was a different man.

I look out at the garden. *Best view from up here.* Summer warmth. *He would have loved this; the orchard and the woods beyond.* I reevaluate the ridiculous wood stores, seasoning in air and sun. *Yes, he would approve of them. Not just a leisure garden.* I strive to picture his land. How he might have felt to have had to leave it all. All I've got, though, is how I feel about my own home. *Would I want to leave this place?*

*He was always such a restless man, angry, nihilistic. Did he ever have a contented time?*

Between the bars of shadow thrown across the scattered papers from the Juliette balcony, *stupid name*, I read:

Dear Mrs Morris

**RE: Your father, Stefan Motkaluk**

Born on: 6 April 1917 at Giermanówka, Borzsców, Tarnopol, Poland.

The sun's heat is tolerable, but a different burning rises from within me, melting my core; enough to wet my eyes. *Giermankówka* blurs.

The shadow bars across the paper point beyond the window and further still. Across the garden, across land and water to a phantom place; across years, tears, fear, pain, cold and

hunger. So much pain and loss. *Why didn't he just tell us? I could have touched him then.* I ache for the father I never knew. The beauty of the garden becomes unbearable: *He would have loved this.* My eyes close. Time slows.

Eventually I feel impelled to tell but, once shared, it will become a story of a different kind. I want to absorb it all first, untainted by speculation. I prepare by reading more carefully, all the while anticipating Carol's questions. I must have answers and avenues ready or my sister will take it her own way. I must secure the story I want.

I call Carol.

'It's arrived. Dad's army records. Carol, it's got his wife's name, and his son's. He's called Rudolf.'

'Oh my God. What about his wife? What does it say? How old was she? Because Mum was a lot younger than Dad, wasn't she?'

'Eight years. Helena, her name's Helena Zadrožna. I don't know if that's a Polish name. My God, Carol, we've got a name for our brother, Rudolf.'

'Why Rudolf?'

'I don't know, that's just what it says. It says here that he didn't know where he was born.'

'How could he not know where his son was born? Rudolf doesn't sound like a Polish name to me. It's more German. Why would he call him by a German name?'

'Look, Carol, I don't know. Maybe it's just what the official wrote down, or maybe he deliberately wanted to hide him, so they couldn't be found. You know what he was like.'

'I thought you said they were all dead. Oh God, this is amazing.'

'That's what Dad said, that there was nobody there anymore; that his family were all gone. Well, that's what Mum said he said anyway.'

'Yeah, and he also forgot to mention he had a son.'

'Mm, and he never actually told us himself, did he, Carol? That was Mum as well.'

'Yeah, but I believe her. I mean, the way she said it, "I've got something important to tell you", and Dad was keeping out of the way.'

'He always did though, didn't he? Did she tell us separately, Carol? I can't remember.'

'No, I think we were together. She had her ironing board up, I can remember the hot smell of the sheets. I'm sure that's why I like to iron everything. It always reminds me of that smell. Do you remember, she wouldn't have a steam iron, so she used to flick water over the clothes to dampen them?'

'I remember Dad taking a mouthful of water and spraying it out over the laundry; all seemed so normal then. Can you imagine anyone doing that now? I'm glad Chris<sup>111</sup> has never offered to spit on the ironing. Why didn't we ask questions?'

'We must have asked some, but I don't remember what. Don't know about you but I was quite shocked. I mean, it's not every day you find out you've got another brother.'

'Yeah, one's enough. We never asked Dad, though, did we? I always got the feeling there would be a row if we mentioned it. I always knew he was lying, though.'

'Not lying...'

'Well, if not lying, then hiding something which is the same as lying. A fake, like someone who didn't want to be found out. That time when you and Mum went to Italy. I was supposed to do the cooking. Do you know, he waited for me to come home from work to do it? We had a row because he wouldn't eat boil-in-the-bag cod; said, "What do you think I am?" And I said, "I know what you are." He went very strange, and kept asking, "what, what do you know?" It wasn't like him. He didn't sound confident at all. But even before that, I always felt he was holding back, hiding.'

'Yeah, yeah, you told me, but that was just him. He wasn't exactly a cuddly Daddy, was he? What else have you got?'

My finger hovers over the fingerprint. I pull it away.

'Uh, army movements,' I say. 'Carol, it's unbelievable. He was fighting almost non-stop on these fronts. It was relentless.'

'Well, they don't have weekends off, wars, do they?'

'No, I mean, when was he supposed to be courting Mum? It says here he was fighting from February 1944 to May 1945 from the Southern Apennines, wherever they are, to Bologna with no breaks between operations. There's, one, two, three, four, five, six, seven- seven

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<sup>111</sup> My husband

battles or actions. He would have had to travel miles to see her from these war zones. She used to give the impression that he was around a lot.

‘Well we can’t ask her either. What else?’

‘Oh Carol, you won’t believe this, but I’ve got his fingerprint.’

I’m conscious of how I say it, I’ve got his fingerprint. For now, this is my Dad. I found him. I know I’ll have to share him but not yet. Not quite.

I continue. ‘It says Rudolf was born in 1941 but that’s all. Place unknown. I thought Mum said Dad was in the underground army. How did he manage to pick up a son at that time? You’d think it was the last thing he’d want.’

‘Maybe he got leave from that army as well. Maybe she was a fellow resistance fighter with him and they had sex in the woods. Just because he calls her a wife doesn’t mean they were properly married.’

‘Mum said he was fighting in the woods. She said he came home from the woods to rest and eat. He was supposed to have been washing himself, and someone, some neighbour, told the Russians he was there, and they came to arrest him. That’s what she told me...’

Carol is quick to interrupt, ‘Right, well, Zbig said Dad’s wife informed on him because she was having it off with a Soviet officer and she wanted him out of the way.’

‘He would say that wouldn’t he? He doesn’t like women. They’ve ruined his life.’

‘That doesn’t mean it’s not true.’

I sigh. ‘It also says where he came from. If it’s true, it’s called *Giermakówka*. I’ve done a search but it’s not coming up.’

‘Feliks would know. Didn’t he say where Dad came from once?’

‘Carol, Feliks is dead. Remember.’

‘Well, maybe he told Zbig. Or, whoever it was took his life story. Maybe he mentioned Dad in that.’

‘Why would he? He didn’t meet Dad until after the war. Anyway, I’ve got his life story, Tom sent it to me. It’s only about Feliks.’

‘Look, I’ll scan all this stuff and email it to you, so you can see everything.’

‘No, don’t. I’ll see it when I see you again.’

‘When will that be?’

'I don't know. You know how it is. I've got to go and pick up Sophia now and I have to go to the supermarket first.'

I hang up. Then immediately ring my sister back.

'Carol?'

'What now? Be quick, I have to go.'

'Mum's dog, the spaniel you found for her. When was it exactly?'

'When she came to stay with us in Harrogate, when Dad died.'

'Oh my God, Carol. She knew.'

'Knew what? Look, I'm going to be late and I've got loads to do.'

'She knew the son's name. He must have told her.'

'How do you make that out?'

'She called her dog Rudi.'

'That doesn't mean anything. Look, I've got to go.' Carol laughs. 'It is quite funny though. It's the sort of thing she would do.'

'It's exactly the sort of thing she would do.'

*England 2015*

The call, when it comes, takes me by surprise. For three years, only a standard letter 'nothing found,' then the telephone message. I observe wryly the appropriateness of its timing, coming on the tip of the deep, dark submerged iceberg that is my 30-year marriage.

'Hello?' I breathe into the telephone.

'May I speak to Mrs Morris, please?' comes the response.

'Speaking, who is this?'

'Mrs Morris, hello. Christine Currie, Service Coordinator....'

I cut across the speaker, 'I'm sorry, who? Are you selling something? Because I have to tell you, you are working from an illegal database, my name is on the TPS list.'

'No, no, no,' comes the hurried reply. 'I'm ringing from the Red Cross, International Family Tracing. You contacted us? To trace your family?'

I sit down, all energy spent, 'Sorry, sorry, please, I thought... We get so many... Yes, please, yes, what can I do for you?'

'Mrs Morris. We've received news for you, about your family search.' The caller, Christine, sounds authoritative now. 'I can't tell over the... we need to make an appointment for you to come here. You may bring someone with you if you wish.'

After the call I return to the kitchen where my husband is making coffee, loudly. Every clash of cups, saucers, and teaspoons clatter on my nerves.

'Do you have to make so much noise?' I demand.

'Sorry, I didn't think it was loud. You must be tired. Are you alright? Who was that on the phone?'

'The Red Cross,' I admit grudgingly, taking my usual chair at the table. I don't understand the need to hold back information from him. A habit seems to have developed over the years; normally resulting in each one of us claiming we've told the other something, and the other claiming we haven't until the argument escalates into whose memory is the most reliable, who's understanding most accurate. *Ugh, this constant competition*, I think. *What a complete waste of time. Why do we do it?*

Chris places my cup down carefully. I can see he is trying not to rattle it and that annoys me even more; especially when he too swiftly removes his hand and catches the spoon.

'Well, are you going to tell me?' he asks.

'It was the Red Cross. They've got news. I'm going to see them on Tuesday. Apparently, it has to be face to face, can't tell people on the phone in case it's *bad* news. I'm not expecting anything anyway. I told her I was prepared.'

'Tuesday. I could come with you. If you like?'

I soften a little as I finally make eye contact with him.

'No, it's all right, it'll be all right. It's my search; I want to do it alone. It probably won't be more than I expected anyway. They'll tell me they're all dead. Rudolf won't have survived the transportation. I told you, the babies died first; their mothers couldn't nurse them on what they were given to eat, especially in those winters.'

'They threw the bodies out you know, on the sidings, when the trains stopped. In the Winter, sub-zero temperatures, deep snow. Local people found them in the spring thaw. Imagine, dead people, appearing like that. I wonder what they did with them, if there are graves or anything? No-one would have known who they were.'

'Are you sure you don't want me to come with you? I could rearrange things...'

Chris.

'No, I'll be all right.' I get up too quickly. I head towards the sink with my cup and saucer and manage to lean against its familiar edge before losing my footing. *I'll be all right, I always am.*

Monday's return to work is a blessing. By evening we are both too tired to care about more than preparing a meal, let alone discussing what the phone call might mean.

The next morning, away from the house, I let my thoughts run free as I drive to the Red Cross meeting. I allow myself to wonder what's been found and wonder what it might be like to have a family. To have real living people that actually belong to me, to whom I belong. What must that feel like? For me there's been no family plot in the local cemetery, no cards from grandparents on birthdays, no-one to write about at school, unlike Chris's rambling lot.

My father had refused to talk about his life in a distant, dangerous country that I only learned to fear. He'd been careful to conceal any reference to his place of birth in the only document he'd kept, and even that only came my way after my mother's death. Although I'd held it up to the light and turned it this way and that the black ink cross-hatching was conclusive. The man did not want anyone to know where he came from.

As the motorway filters into various options I navigate into the correct lane, running through the approach I'll take on the roundabout, first exit left, then the right turn into the car park next to the church. Safely parked, I decide against going into the office for a free parking permit. I collect my things, check my digital recorder and notebook. I am ready.

The walk across the car park gives me time to collect myself. These days I need these moments of reflection when moving from one activity to another. It helps me to prepare.

The receptionist is polite and efficient and in no time, Christine Currie appears, energetically shaking me by the hand before leading me upstairs to a consulting room. She seats me in a chair facing the window.

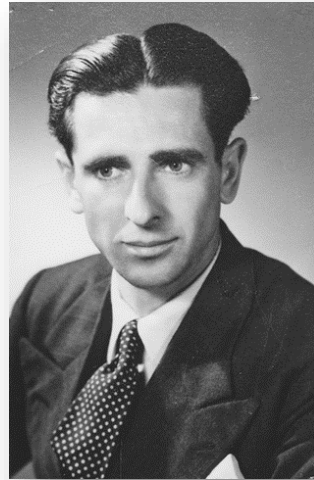
Christine is good. She is professional, but I detect her excitement. After checking my identity, and that I'm okay to receive the news alone, she proceeds to disclose little by little everything that has been discovered. I observe her technique critically, as she builds to the big reveal. I conclude that Christine watches genealogy programmes. Perhaps there's special training for feeding news in manageable bites.

'Your father's son died in 1967 but he had a son, Serigy. He also had a half-sister Maria Rudka. They are happy to be contacted. Mrs Rudka sent a photograph. She says her mother kept it next to her bed all her life.'

Christine gently places the photograph of a handsome man, my father in formal uniform, bearing medals, on the table between us; a photograph I've never seen. I remove one of my father in civilian clothes from my file and place it beside Christine's photograph. Without doubt, it is the same man.



3.10



3.11

Involuntary sobs convulse my body. Mindful that Christine is watching me closely, I quickly cover my face with both hands. The ambush that has taken me lasts a long time, long enough for me think things through. I marvel that I can be both emotionally overcome and rational at the same time. Finally, I remove my hands and look again at the photograph that lies between us.



'Would you like some water?' asks Christine.

'Yes, please,' I say, still gazing at the photograph. I feel I ought to say something. Christine is waiting. She gently places another photograph, 'His son.'



3.12

I pick up father and son photographs, searching for similarities, searching for me.

'Isn't it wonderful? He was born on the 14 October 1940 so that would have made him 75 years old this year. But he had a son, who's open to contact. And you didn't know anything about him?'

'No, the first I knew he was even called Rudolf, was three years ago when I contacted you, the Red Cross I mean, to find him. The annual update letters always said nothing had been found. I never expected this. I thought he'd have died as a baby or been moved elsewhere. How did they manage to stay put in the same place? Hardly any of them did, unless... Well, some of them maybe with the right names.'

'His name wasn't Rudolf, it was Teodor,' says Christine. 'I'll get you that water.' She leaves the room, closing the door softly behind her.

*Teodor?* I check the photographs again. There's no doubt this is the right family. Left alone, I imagine the life Rudolf/Teodor must have lived, abandoned by his father, under a communist regime. I imagine the photo of my father pinned to a dirty kitchen wall. Squinting into my imagination, I see buildings in the background, wooden barns, weathered boards.

Outside, a car horn honks. *Unbelievable, still in the same village. They weren't displaced. Not, 'all gone' as my father had said. They were always there. That's not how I imagined it.*

Christine returns with the water which I sip gratefully. I marvel that there are no residual after-sobs from my outburst. This is not how I remember crying when I was young. Then, it was all blotched forehead, trembling and heaving until I fell asleep exhausted. I've lost the knack over the years.

Christine is patient, but I am dutiful; there is a limit, after all, to a person's time. Besides, I want to retreat, to calculate what to do next. I observe the appropriate protocols, listen as Christine passes over contact details for the family over there, and describes some of the important work of the Red Cross. On cue, I promise to make a handsome donation. As I reach for my coat to signal the end of the interview, Christine asks if I'd like the Red Cross to send a standard postcard to Teodor's family to acknowledge that contact had been made. I decline. I prefer to write myself.

Driving the familiar route home, I again allow my thoughts to roam. I imagine the letter I'll write, how much information I'll reveal, how slowly. I think about the political situation over there, how I might plan a trip, what conditions might be like when I get there. Because, for sure, I'll be going. This is easy now; something I can manage. I'll need an independent base, an independent interpreter; after all they're unlikely to have much English. They'll welcome me of course, that much is certain. After all they've agreed to contact. But what sort of welcome? What will they want to know about me, about my life? And bigger still, what will they think of Stefan? When and what do I tell them about Lucia? And there're the others. Teodor married, he had a son, my nephew. Does he have children? Do I have great-nieces and nephews? After all this time, I'll have all these people that belong to me. And I'll be ploughing into their lives to plunder information. I'll owe them something.

Chris's car is in the drive when I get back even though it's only midday. I'm not ready, I need more time with my thoughts. By the time I get out of my car and turn towards the house, Chris is standing at the open door.

'Well, how did you get on? Come in, I'll put the kettle on. Come on through and tell me all about it.' He turns towards the kitchen before I've even taken off my coat. 'Come on, I've been waiting. I thought you might have phoned. Well?'

*Ukraine April 2016*

I've spent much of the last two hours alternating between states of anxiety and excited anticipation. I realise the division between the two is becoming blurred.

Eventually, I decide to unfriend my imagination and concentrate solely on the state of the roads. My driver, for his part, has demonstrated skill at avoiding potholes. His beautifully preserved Renault Beverley will prove to be as reliable as its owner, but I do not yet know this. At present, I'm mortified by my inability to fully believe that he understands me, given some of his bizarre responses to my questions. We are both nervous.

In time we will laugh about the potholes, but not yet.

The further we drive from the city, the further the distances become between villages.

They fill me with a nostalgic longing for a past I don't possess. Fruit trees blossom at the front of gardens that line the wide roads, as if decked out for a glorious wedding procession. I marvel at their whiteness, hardly noticing the squat, low dwellings behind. Horse-drawn wooden farm carts reinforce a sense of rural gaiety. For a time, I give way to pastoral naivety. I place my characters into sentimental domestic scenes among the blossom.

But my imagination becomes troublesome; once more I press down on its insistence by more prosaic musings. I wonder if they painted their fences blue in Stefan's time. Of course, I know the answer: this virulent blue reflects a more recent nationalism, seen ubiquitously in cheap turquoise and yellow polyester flags hung from buildings, churches, and roadside shrines everywhere. Typifying the country's agricultural heritage, the blue for sky and gold for wheat ironically evokes its terrible famine. But the symbol of a gold trident on the blue background disturbs me more; Poseidon in the sky maybe, but my mind sees something squirming impaled upon it.

I have read too much. It is no longer possible to approach this country with an open heart. My mind flits dangerously to dark places.

I snap back to wonder whether anyone has quantified the volume of blue paint consumed in the country; say in one year, or in the last five years, or since 1993. A picture of a bar chart tracing the rise and fall of nationalism by quantity of blue paint amuses me briefly. I'd like to take some home, just to capture its essence, a glimpse somewhere in my garden. But that would be a betrayal; I have temporarily forgotten my allegiance to the red and white of Poland. *That* history, I am learning, is not wanted here. *Stupid idea about the blue paint anyway*, I think of a paint-spattered suitcase interior. Like local wine, it won't travel.

These thoughts occupy minutes of the tedious journey until I spot a stork's nest. I exclaim my excitement to Andriy, who shrugs. It will be some time before he understands our differences, but he is an intelligent and sensitive man.

*Chekhov country; it's the Cherry Orchard, it really is like that.* My surprise surprises me; another reminder that my European parentage has conferred little in the way of first hand cosmopolitan experience. I fake it of course: the English are easily impressed by foreignness and love a bit of exoticism, if it doesn't come too close. Here, though, I feel English.

'Tell me when we are approaching Hermakivka, please. I want to...' I want to say, 'savour' but, not for the first time, I realise language must be kept simple. 'I want to see what it is like approaching.'

I want to know how it would have looked to my father. But, of course, he wasn't approaching, he was always inside here. His experience would be more about leaving. I check my point of view, aware of my otherness, my outsideness. Will it never end? We children of immigrants grow to become voyeurs on the lives of others; our great strength, and our greatest weakness. We must take what we are not given.

As the car descends, Andriy nods at a sign. The power of all my senses are channelled through my eyes, I hardly hear him say, 'This is it.'

'This is it?'

The road's wide grassy verges are dotted about with spring flowers. Huge May bugs, bent on their suicidal course, bounce off the windscreen; as they have been doing for the last half hour, as they did in my father's time.

'Is bugs for this season,' says Andriy, 'is looking for wife.'

We pass buildings, a shop maybe. No one in sight. Skirting the edge of the village we pass a church.

'The church,' I breathe. It's the only one I've seen, and I have no way of knowing how large the village is.

Andriy stops the Renault in front of a school. Reaching for cigarettes and mobile phone, he gets out.

The school building disappoints me: modern, square. Its brutal communist architecture imposes itself on my nostalgia. Interferes with my time travel, with the possibility that, if everything was still as it was then, I might see my father walking these roads as a young man. *Did I really think I'd get close enough to see him?*

The blossom here is no different from countless other villages we've passed through but as I step from the car's air conditioning, I am held in its warm scent. Other senses return as distant Orthodox plain chant drifts on the air.

Old women walk by, laden with arms full of pussy willow, fresh with Easter blessings. They cross themselves when they see me and call out a greeting, laughing as they pass. I want my sister here to help me hold this moment. For all my misplaced imagining years ago in Krakow that our father may have lived there, this humble dirt road is the one that bore his youthful steps, and his missteps. He trod this place in that other life, and now I am trespassing on it: the very thing he didn't want us to know. I have found it out.

After ten minutes, a tall man arrives. My womanly confusion returns. I wonder, *who is this person shaking hands with Andriy, kissing my hand, peering so intently at me?* We all get into the car and drive.

'Where are we going?' I ask.

'To your relatives' house. They waiting there.'

They *are* waiting: a woman who appears old, no teeth, dressed in black, like my grandmother, steps forward. Maria is 73 but looks 85. She is the matriarch, I learn, in a family of strong women. And with a strength that belies her looks, she grabs both my hands fiercely with one of her own and pulls me hard towards her. Three kisses; left, right, left. Then, turning my palm upwards, she places a walnut into it. Its shell is warm. She has been holding it a long time.

'This come from the tree your father planted,' Andriy repeats after her unintelligible greeting.

I turn to my driver with an appeal. I am afraid he has mis-translated with his basic English.

'My father planted the tree? The same tree where this walnut came from? Is that right? It's still there?'

Andriy is beaming and nodding. Everyone is beaming. I start to sob. It is the right thing to do, they approve my reaction. I will do.

I am taken into a small house. Food is brought. More people arrive. I don't know who they are. I drink delicious chicken broth.

'Is this Stefan's house?' *How to ask?*

'No, no, we go. We go another place.'

Any idea of mastering the village topology disappears as the Renault bounces its way down dirt track after dirt track. We stop at a house, the one in the picture I was sent.

'Here, here, you father lived.'



**3.13**

## Chapter 4 Methodology

### Interplay of theory and practice in research

Having presented 'Remember this man?' (hereafter RTM) and its cast of characters, I now outline the mechanical aspects of its structural and conceptual construction.

The answer to my main research question is embedded in RTM. In showing how to present Stefan's traumatic history and the way he formed a new identity in a new culture, without drawing undue attention to myself or being displaced by it, I was aided by a range of tools within a flexible research framework.

The following outline of my investigative framework and describes why my approach is suitable for a critically-creative research project of this nature.

The title of the project, 'Remember this man?' was written on the back of a photograph and said to represent a pivotal moment in my parents' lives. It led to my being so there was inevitably a high degree of subjectivity in my research, and ultimately, in the creative outcome. Accordingly, my chosen methodological approach was exploratory - anti-positivist - being based in a relativist framework of a range of critical theories.



#### 4.1

My research was an epistemological exploration of the established facts which governed the lives of Stefan and Lucia. When placed alongside an orthodox socio-political overview of their historical period their points of view could be creatively constructed. Primarily, information came from a critical historiographical review of salient events, combined

with face-to-face interviews and exploratory analysis of existing cultural material covering the period under investigation in Poland, Italy, and England.<sup>112</sup>

In analysing these texts and in drawing attention to moments of aporia for Stefan, Lucia and, latterly Teodor, some of the basic beliefs that normative historical facts and family myth had the power to produce, were challenged by reifying anecdote in the creative work using a range of theories. As Susan Sontag writes of Walter Benjamin, 'one cannot use the life to interpret the work. But one can use the work to interpret the life'<sup>113</sup> and that formed my core approach.

This method resulted in new knowledge being produced in a creative outcome from the combination of information *and* ideas (the work and the life) that arose from both primary and secondary research. Ideas and concepts embedded in the critically creative work are primarily philosophical in nature, allowing readers to engage deeply with a range of issues. Hence the creative outcome - the knowledge produced by my research - is what Adorno called, 'the dialectical construction between myth and history – within the intellectual field of the materialistic dialectic: namely the dialectical self-dissolution of myth...'<sup>114</sup>

Establishing research paradigms

In classical research terms, this flow chart (Fig 1) illustrates how primary and secondary data moved toward the creation of new knowledge. Various elements and threads of enquiry

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<sup>112</sup> 1937 to 1968

<sup>113</sup> Introduction to Benjamin, W. (1997). One-Way Street, Verso Classics. pp7-28

<sup>114</sup> 'Letter to Walter Benjamin' Adorno, T. W. and E. Bloch (1977). Aesthetics and Politics, Verso. pp120-6



illustrates its linearity.

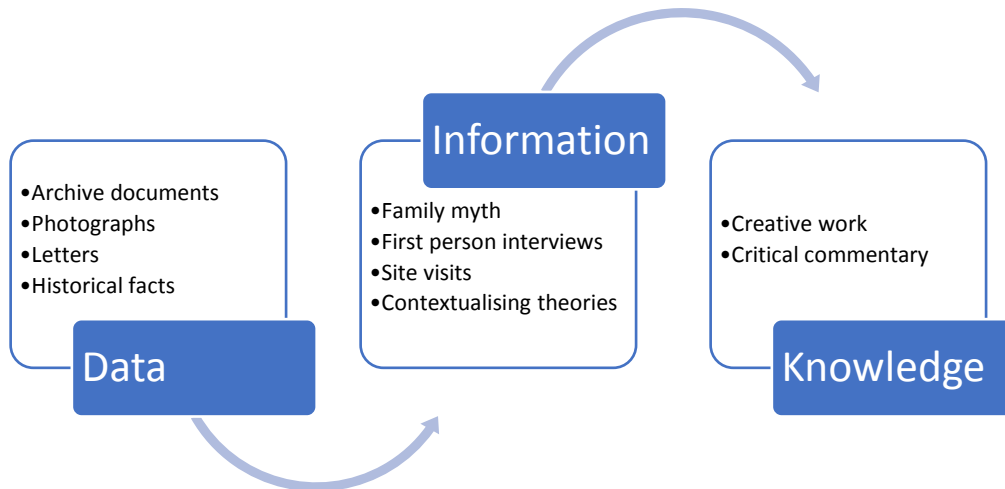


Fig. 1

However, there were challenges in operating within the two paradigms that a critically creative work demands: that of the objective process involved in collecting and analysing primary and secondary data, coupled with creative interpretation of emerging results in a symbiotic relationship with the application of theory.<sup>115</sup> Staying for the time being with a linear process, this combination of objectivity with subjectivity inevitably found in creative form leads to a new story, a neo-narrative, being constructed because, as Barrett and Bolt point out:

... the processes that inform the conditions under investigation are designed to enable such a reconceptualization. This bricolage of approaches is situated by information gathered from the field [...it] may be gathered from history or theory books and articles, personal journals, letters, artworks, catalogues, conversations, observations, and other sources.<sup>116</sup>

Almost from the beginning major new pieces of information were revealed that meant I would need to make durational decisions on how they would impact on the creative work. Researching the past in two overseas countries - especially a past that was deliberately hidden

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<sup>115</sup> Hoffman describes her need for 'an objective subjectivity, a laser beam that concentrates ... energy, and uses the collected light to illuminate and reflect the world.' Hoffman, E. (1998). Lost in translation: a life in a new language. London, Vintage. p213

<sup>116</sup> Barrett, E. and B. Bolt (2010). Practice as Research: Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry, I.B.Tauris. p131

in one case - required a large degree of flexibility in its research paradigm because of the timescales involved.

What quickly became apparent was that it was not a one-way-street. Over the six years of my research new material was uncovered which not only presented new creative openings but also subverted much *a priori* reasoning.

Fig 2 illustrates how I designed my research paradigm to accommodate subjective decisions resulting from new information, and to develop new lines of enquiry for the creative work.<sup>117</sup> These decisions included the use of a range of theoretical positions to develop characters' ontologies to understand how and why their points of view were altered. They are also reflected in my developing plot and research ontology.

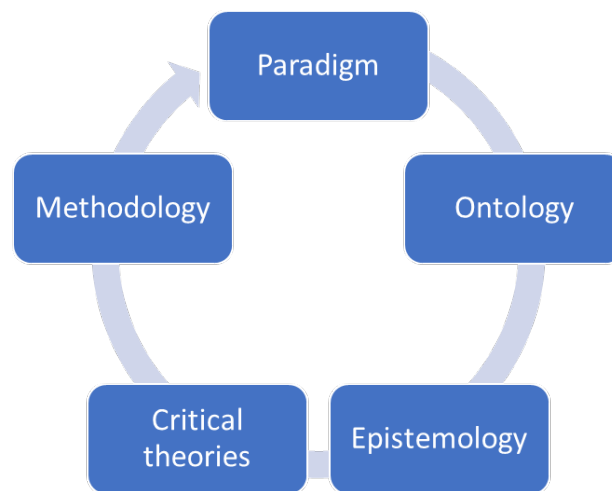


Fig 2

Because the border between the critical and creative is both permeable and malleable, the extent of authorial presence, readers' potential perspective, and ethical considerations were also considered in every decision made.

The circularity of my process allowed incremental growth in the neo-narrative, with each topic of enquiry adding layers of additional meaning to the final work: a hybrid post-

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<sup>117</sup> And occasionally simple pragmatics due to time and cost restraints.

memoir.<sup>118</sup> In this iterative method, as new fragments were revealed about Stefan's life (which impacted on both his and my ontology), renewed epistemological exploration was required using different critical theories. These then impacted on my research methods, depending on what they demanded and what was achievable within time, budget and other resource constraints.

For example, my starting point was to find out as much about Stefan's pre-war life as possible. Beginning with his existing ontology, I set about analysing it within a theoretical context of Walter Benjamin's 'Angel of History', written during the Second World War in 1941 and contemporaneous with Stefan's arrest:

A Klee painting named 'Angelus Novus' shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.<sup>119</sup>

Growing up with conceptions of time co-existing as three states of permanent awareness (before, during and after the war) gave me a starting point to test my existing knowledge within Benjamin's idea of the terrible events of war, which leaves the angel impotent to 're-establish everything, bring the dead back to life and allow a new beginning.'<sup>120</sup> I was seized with the idea that in Stefan's building of a new life in England, with all the material trappings he acquired, he was caught, driven impotently into the future by a storm of progress he was unable to resist. But at this stage I was still in a vacuum of knowledge about the debris of his past life.

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<sup>118</sup> I needed to make editorial decisions on what to include/rewrite to complete RTM. See Chapter 6 Findings.

<sup>119</sup> Benjamin, W. (1999). *Illuminations*, Pimlico. p249

<sup>120</sup> Leslie, E. (2014). *Derelicts: Thought Worms from the Wreckage*, Unkant Publishers. p161

I interviewed people who knew Stefan before, during and after the war. What emerged from initial interviews subverted Stefan's established ontology, consequently I needed a new research paradigm to add depth to the new information I was receiving and to understand how it could be synthesised into the creative work. Simultaneously, and sometimes unconsciously, the critical theories I was using became creative devices, especially towards the latter cycles of research when the structure and plot of the creative work became solidified. Illustrative exploration appears in the Chapter 7 Discussion.

To fulfil the remit of my research needs, a flexible mixed-methods approach was necessary consisting of primary and secondary research on the areas outlined below.

### *Chronology*

My first task was to establish an organic chronology to ground and contextualise my research findings. Plotting dates and activities taken from Stefan's and Lucia's surviving documents, alongside key historical events, identified gaps that needed further research, or led to new lines of enquiry; either personal to them or to provide historical context. This created a baseline against which to evaluate subsequently acquired archival data. It was a valuable touchstone for checking dates and events for my characters as I was writing. I learned early on that having a ready-reference saved time and distraction resulting from scouring archive documents for relevant dates at critical writing points.

### *Interviews*

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a purposive sample<sup>121</sup> in Italy, England and Ukraine of respondents who knew Stefan, Lucia, Halina or Teodor. I also conducted short, ad hoc interviews with Feliks Grzelinski's son, Peter, who gave permission for *verbatim* use of his father's memoir.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> A purposive, judgemental, selective, or subjective sample of respondents based on the objectives of my study. In the case of World War Two survivors and their relatives I interviewed everyone relevant to my research.

<sup>122</sup> RTM pp204-206

*Key theories impacting on the creative work*

Walter Benjamin's writings and his personal history (himself both migrant and refugee during the Second World War) have been omnipresent throughout this project in many ways. The fragmentary nature of his writings, never quite joined together but brilliantly sparkling at points of intersection, produced the light I needed to illuminate my kaleidoscopic pieces. For me, Benjamin the philosopher, the man, was never quite there, almost always out of reach, but unfailingly delivering utility for my project.

Particularly useful in shaping my methodology, and for discussing the narrative understanding of people's lives is his 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in which he concludes that 'the use of only one theory might obscure knowledge of other aspects or facts that are occurring.'<sup>123</sup> For my investigation this concept works beyond the minds of the original storytellers to encompass the minds of a contemporary audience for my creative work. I employed the concept when seeking to apply theoretical perspectives to the ontological processes of Stefan's subjectivity, signalling his own teleological journey: how history (the time in which he existed and his particular set of circumstances), influenced how he became and why; why he constructed his identity in the way he did, and through that construction, what he passed to subsequent generations, and what knowledge will ultimately be passed on to a wider readership.

The way that memory works to shape stories was fundamental to the creative work, and runs through, between and under every page. I particularly wanted to retreat from the notion of universal truth, therefore developed a style which would reveal individuated memories, forgetting and seeing within, alongside and against community and social memory. Thus allowing readers to draw their own conclusions as to the 'truth' of a matter. The concept of double dialectics was especially useful in constructing a text that resisted traditional Westernised binaries found in the single dialectic.

Claudia Moscovici summaries one major difference between the single and double dialectics:

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<sup>123</sup> Benjamin, W. R. T., ed., Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, trans, Ed. (March 30, 2002). The Arcades Project, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

The single dialectics creates a binary hierarchy where *only* one term acquires value by negating the value of the other. Universalists create “objective knowledge” by eliminating all subjective circumstances and opinions. Likewise, relativists produce subjective knowledge by dismissing the possibility of founded agreement. By way of contrast, the double dialectics enables both interrelated terms- the particular and the universal- to attain what I would call “positive identity”. By positive identity I mean that both terms are defined through the simultaneous incorporation and negation of the other term.<sup>124</sup>

In Benjamin’s 1931 ‘A Short History of Photography’, he discusses historical and philosophical questions surrounding the use of photography. Key to my research project, from which it derives its title is a single image, a photograph which contains the notion of being procreative in the transitive sense and forward-looking.<sup>125</sup> Benjamin encapsulates the power of this image for me, when he writes that, in the distinct qualities of photographs:

...seared with reality [it is possible] to find the inconspicuous spot where in the immediacy of that long-forgotten moment the future nests so eloquently that we, looking back, may rediscover it.<sup>126</sup>

The idea that one image can hold two opposite aspects – pastness and immediacy – relying on a ‘tiny spark of contingency’ works well for the seminal image of Stefan in his pyjamas which opens the creative work and allows my troubling sense of omniscience free rein because only I, in the present, can recognise its contingency. Or, more accurately, constantly changing contingencies: from a supposed snapshot of a soldier recovering from wounds in hospital, a love token with sexual undertones to the intermediary manipulation of a pivotal moment which led to a procreative process unlikely to have been imagined at the time of its taking. In short, it is the ‘optical unconsciousness’ colliding with the instinctual unconsciousness of the photograph that intrigues and allows a new reality to come into existence. The creation of meaning surrounding the image creates a new and greater aura and a different relation to the history that produced it.

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<sup>124</sup> Moscovici, C. (2002). Double dialectics: between universalism and relativism in Enlightenment and postmodern thought, Rowman & Littlefield. p55

<sup>125</sup> As opposed to Roland Barthes’ ‘prose picture’ response to the winter-garden photograph, which results, ultimately, in contemplation of his own mortality; notwithstanding that for Barthes, writing means life and the photograph’s flat surface represents death.

<sup>126</sup> Benjamin, W., M. W. Jennings, et al. (2005). Selected Writings: 1931 - 1934 / transl. by Rodney Livingstone and others. Ed. by Michael W. Jennings, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press. p510

As well as recognising Benjamin's need to read the material conditions already inscribed within photography, leading to its re-functioning,<sup>127</sup> I developed a new relationship with it by drawing on the work of Marianne Hirsch, who refers to imagetexts that:

'resist the conventions of family photography and hegemonic familial ideologies [...] and disrupt a familiar narrative about family life and its representations, breaking the hold of a conventional and monolithic familial gaze.'<sup>128</sup>

I was particularly interested in the notion of an image that the family 'live up to, an image shaping the desire of the individual living in a social group, [and how it] dominates lived reality, even though it can exist in conflict with it and can be ruled by different interests.' I used this concept to show how the image has survived 'by means of its narrative and imaginary powers.'<sup>129</sup> Hirsch notes the power that photographs hold when they occupy a space between family myth and the lived reality of the family. Where Roland Barthes regards photographs as portents of death, I move to seeing their creative and procreative properties in the way they are deployed, and as Benjamin recognised, as an object that can be released from its moment in time.<sup>130</sup>

Photographs were also used as textual interventions throughout RTM. I show the 'familial gaze'<sup>131</sup> at work when Stefan looks for likeness in the photograph of his wife's illegitimate child, Maria.<sup>132</sup> The familial gaze is especially prominent in the opening pages of the creative work, where Adda, the fifteen-year-old adolescent daughter, is seen to unwittingly challenge the mythology of the idealised family that Lucia has invented. Adda's liminality between child and fully sexualised adult, adds a further challenge to the photograph's antecedence.

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<sup>127</sup> *umfunktionierung*

<sup>128</sup> Hirsch, M. (1997). *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory*, Harvard University Press. p8

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.* p8

<sup>130</sup> The unconscious optics, which, when exposed, releases the image from a moment in time.

<sup>131</sup> Hirsch, M. (1997). *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory*, Harvard University Press. p11

<sup>132</sup> A notion borrowed from my primary research: the way that the residual members of Halina's family looked for a likeness to their Teodor in the post-war photographs I showed of Stefan and his post-war descendants.

I also used photographs as ekphrastic exercises to add authenticity to different scenes, such as when I needed to show Stefan's pre-war network of friends.<sup>133</sup>

Marianne Hirsch's term, postmemory was useful in outlining my position as a memoirist, or rather, a postmemoirist. Hirsch calls those of us who have a living connection with a traumatic past, the 'hinge generation' because post-memory is a 'structure of inter – and – trans-generational transmission of traumatic knowledge and experience.'<sup>134</sup>

Michael Rotherberg's development of Hirsch's work outlines postmemory as constituting a version of multidirectional memory, which as a whole is constructed out of '...networks of spatially and temporally differentiated "moments"'.<sup>135</sup> The concept of multidirectionality served as a structural function in RTM insofar as the story moves between different voices, times and locations, presenting a non-binary non-linear narrative.<sup>136</sup>

Therefore, post-memory works to include a range of points of view, moving a mechanical process-design towards a structural outcome: a hybrid post-memoir, which utilises the functional concept of multi-directional memory to tell an old story in a new way.

### *Critical reading*

For an understanding of where my creative work might be situated,<sup>137</sup> a critical analysis was undertaken of a range of biographies, auto-biographies, memoirs, and fiction written about pre and post-war periods in central and southern Europe to inform method, style, content, and tone. Whilst this broad reading cannot be considered tangential to the core aims of my project, the scope of a full analysis is too great to be included in this thesis but is touched on in Chapter 5. Knowledge gained from these texts influenced the direction, structure, content, and style of RTM.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> RTM pp67-71

<sup>134</sup> Hirsch, M. (2012). The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust, Columbia University Press. p2

<sup>135</sup> Rothberg, M. (2009). Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization, Stanford University Press. p271

<sup>136</sup> A disrupted narrative portraying events in different places or times, or from different points of view.

<sup>137</sup> Not just in an academic arena but potentially a commercial one.

<sup>138</sup> List of generalised reading around themes, places and periods under investigation can be found in the full bibliography, Volume 2, Appendix 2.



## *Historiography*

Ad hoc historiographic data was drawn from a range of sources as and when needed to supplement scenes in the creative work, and to identify or check historic details. Locations under investigation were Poland, Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, Siberian gulags, western Ukraine, Persia (Iran), southern Italy, and England in the period 1937 to 1968.

However, it was the qualitative difference between historical facts and first-person accounts that provided the richest seam for my critically creative project. I used emplotment as defined by Hayden White to bring life to reported incidents from the past, as Robert Doran explains:

White held that while historical facts are scientifically verifiable, stories are not. Stories are made, not found in the historical data; historical meaning is imposed on historical facts by means of the choice of plot-type, and this choice is inevitably ethical and political at bottom.<sup>139</sup>

Decisions on where to begin, what I thought were important points in the middle, and where to end the memoir, were based on what the plot required to tell the story. Although driven by historical events, it was the story that carried the history not the other way around.

Hayden White remarked on the awesome but necessary responsibility of, not just remembering the dead, but in doing 'their remembering for them,'<sup>140</sup> which brings me to reflect on the ethical consideration of what I have done.

It's my story too: ethical considerations

A personal reiteration of one's parents' life narratives can feel like a betrayal of how they themselves might have preferred to see it written; if indeed they had wanted to see it written at all, especially in Stefan's case. I found myself in a situation similar to two cases

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<sup>139</sup> Robert Doran succinctly summarises 'emplotment' in Hayden White's obituary: Genzlinger, N. (2018). "Hayden White, Who Explored How History Is Made, Dies at 89." Retrieved 1 May 2018, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/09/obituaries/hayden-white-who-explored-how-history-is-made-dies-at-89.html>.

<sup>140</sup> White, H. and R. Doran (2010). The Fiction of Narrative: Essays on History, Literature, and Theory, 1957–2007, Johns Hopkins University Press.

reported in The Guardian newspaper; that of writers who have chosen to mine the richness of their family folklore for their creative work.

The first appeared in a problem column<sup>141</sup> and concerned an unpublished author whose mother was refusing to speak to her unless she agreed to delete any reference to her (the writer's) great grandmother. For me, this raised the question: to whom does historical fact belong? Does the writer in this case have less entitlement to write about her own great grandmother because her relationship is separated by her mother's generation?

In David Lowenthal's discussion of generational displacement, in his chapter entitled 'How do we know the past: memory',<sup>142</sup> he deals with the seeming incontestability of earlier generations' experiences who were the 'sole eyewitnesses of their own earlier years' and whose interpretations diverge from younger generations, 'who share the past with them'.<sup>143</sup> These examples suggest a prevailing unspoken protocol which, certainly in my experience, prevents younger generations from questioning the truth of what has been decided to be told within a family.<sup>144</sup>

Barbieri responded publicly to the writer's dilemma by saying, 'What is it you have to say in this book that is so important that you risk losing your mother's friendship?'<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Barbieri, A. (2012). My mother has stopped talking to me because I'm writing a family memoir. The Guardian. Manchester, Guardian Media Group. p7

<sup>142</sup> Lowenthal, D. (1985). The past is a foreign country. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. p209

<sup>143</sup> From Kastenbaum, 'time, death and ritual in old age' pp24-5 in Halbwachs, M. and L. A. Coser (1992). On collective memory. Chicago London, University of Chicago Press. pp68-9.

<sup>144</sup> Rita Goldberg recalls an account from the child of a Holocaust survivor whose father refused, not only to talk about his experiences, but insisted that she had no right to even ask about them: 'He said it was nonsense that she should have a part of his history, since his life and hers were separate.' Goldberg, R. (2014). The trauma of second-generation Holocaust survivors. The Guardian. Manchester, Guardian Media Group. This position may be contested by a 2002 scientific study of twins that indicates the heritability of trauma exposure: Murray B. Stein, Kerry L. Jang, et al. (2002). "Genetic and Environmental Influences on Trauma Exposure and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Symptoms: A Twin Study." American Journal of Psychiatry **159**(10): 1675-1681.

More recently, Mount Sinai Hospital, New York published findings that show induced generational effects of Holocaust exposure: Yehuda, R., N. P. Daskalakis, et al. "Holocaust Exposure Induced Intergenerational Effects on FKBP5 Methylation." Biological Psychiatry **80**(5): 372-380.

<sup>145</sup> G. Thomas Couser writes: '...genre is not about mere literary form; it's about force – what a narrative's purpose is, what impact it seeks to have on the world.' Couser, G. T. (2012). Memoir: An Introduction, Oxford University Press, USA. p9. In Nicole Stamat's 2013 review of Couser's work, she notes that one of his most compelling chapters is 'Memoir's Ethics' in which he discusses hoax memoirs,

Although the writer's subject was two generations removed from her, her own mother became estranged from her because she felt that her daughter, in reporting the fact of her great-grandfather's infidelity, had somehow trespassed on territory to which she felt a greater and closer sense of ownership; something which resided only in her possession.

If this is the case, what is the place of witness in our lives? On the notion of deriving oneself from the past, Beverley Southgate's assertion it is that is in:

...the apprehension of, or laying claim to, a cluster of memories, that serves to underpin our individualities and identities – our every notion of our otherwise free-floating selves. It is in them (those evidential traces of our pasts), and in the carefully constructed narrative chain for which they each provide a link, that we find a root; and from that root, we may hope to find the potential for further growth and development.<sup>146</sup>

This provokes yet another question: who owns *family* history? Are succeeding generations less entitled to early generational experiences? Barbieri engages with one person's right to write<sup>147</sup> what they want and another's right to feel what they want. The issue then arises of what happens to a creative work once it has left the author and the question of displaced subjectivity. In 'The Storyteller', Benjamin addresses this issue through the notion of the story holding its own strength; it 'preserves and concentrates its energy and is capable of releasing it even after a long time.'<sup>148</sup>

The second case concerns Norwegian novelist, Karl Ove Knausgaard who has, apparently, 'given away [...his] soul' by writing a 'six-volume literary epic based on his family, in particular his relationship with his father.'<sup>149</sup> Knausgaard reflects on his own naivety in sending

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and that 'readers will think more critically about the things that memoir does – not simply to know what is it, of course, but what it does and how it influences what we think it does – is the ultimate goal of [his] book.' p169: Stamant, N. and H. E. Bollinger (2013). "Reviews." *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies* 28(1): 167-174.

<sup>146</sup> Southgate, B. (2009). *History Meets Fiction*. Great Britain, Pearson Education Ltd. p95

<sup>147</sup> In this can be seen Homi Bhabba's argument for the 'right to narrate' which suggests that, in 'all those forms of creative behaviour that allow us to represent the lives we lead, question the conventions and customs that we inherit, dispute and propagate the ideas and ideals that come to us most naturally, [...we] dare to entertain the most audacious hopes and fears for the future. He sees freedom of expression as an individual right, an ethical form and narrative as a sign of civic life. From 'On Writing Right' in Gibney, M. J. (2003). *Globalizing Rights: The Oxford Amnesty Lectures 1999*, Oxford University Press. pp162-83

<sup>148</sup> Benjamin, W. (1999). *Illuminations*, Pimlico. p90

<sup>149</sup> Henley, Jon 'I have given away my soul.' *The Guardian* 10 March 2012 pp4-5

a copy of the first volume to his living relatives before publication; the family threatened to sue both writer and publisher to stop what it considered was an exposé.

It is notable that, while both these dilemmas are concerned with writing, they appear in the newspaper's Family Section, and perhaps that is because families make stories. If we are fortunate, our stories start in families or, not so fortunate, there is a lack of them, or our families decide what can be told. What is apparent to me is that families can also start in stories.

As my methodology involved interviewing my mother's living relatives – those who experienced Italian war-time deprivations and were witnesses to her life – they could corroborate or provide alternatives to my anecdotal material. In Ukraine, where information was third-hand, mediated through interpreters,<sup>150</sup> and where even the area's history had been mediated through generations of communist influence<sup>151</sup>, I resorted to creative pragmatism in what I chose to write.

I realise that in some respects my early review of the debate between verisimilitude and creativity within an academic setting was grounded in institutionalised ethics literature; strong on obtaining informed consent and safeguarding the rights of research subjects but less enlightening on the researcher's personal struggle with the ethics of re-writing someone else's history. I consequently encountered multiple tensions between artistic integrity, the importance to a reader of an immediate sensed experience, academic research (which required historical accuracy), and respect for family feeling in telling its history.

Jen Webb's position on writing about her own family poses a similar ethical dilemma to mine, 'how ... can [we] write, or more so, how ... can [we] live, as writers in a way that is ethical?'<sup>152</sup> Webb subjectively supplies the necessary permissive visa for my writerly passport from her own son, Caleb, and academically via Wittengenstein. Caleb tells his mother that she can write about their mutual experience because it's her story too.

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<sup>150</sup> One of which was of dubious quality

<sup>151</sup> And since 1992, rising Ukrainian nationalism

<sup>152</sup> Webb, J. (2011). "Ethics, Writing and Splinters in the Heart." The Ethical Imaginations: Writing Worlds Papers - the refereed proceedings of the 16th Conference of the Australasian Association of Writing Programs Retrieved 20 February 2018, 2018, from <http://www.aawp.org.au/publications/the-ethical-imaginations-writing-worlds-papers/>.

In citing Cora Diamond's view that reduces Wittgenstein's work to 'a particularly lucid account of the Tractatus',<sup>153</sup> Webb quotes Diamond's proposition as:

- i. What is it that I am doing?
- ii. Should I not be doing it? and
- iii. If the answer to that is not necessarily something to stop doing, am I doing it well or badly whatever it is I am doing?

Upon this premise, it appears ethically permissible to write about my parents because, not only is it my story too but the institution within which I am writing provides the necessary support to ensure I do it well. However, as I have already acknowledged, it's not just my story; it's the story of my siblings, my living relatives, and Teodor's surviving relatives. The story belongs to many people, and there are many versions of it.

Furthermore, I am wary of what Geoffrey Galt Harpham describes as 'rendering mystical and grand [our] own private interests and desires.'<sup>154</sup> Harpham goes on to discuss the Westernised binary of good and evil, wherein good conscience can be preserved in the name of global necessity, even though one may be 'overriding or delegitimizing the claims of others.'

I would argue that, private interests and the desire to understand one's own origins can contribute – through intellectual endeavour and through the use of double dialectics - to possibly escape some of these Westernised binary models. As a result, the re-iteration of one's parents' narrative can feel *less* like a betrayal of how they themselves would have preferred to have seen it written (if it was ever known what they would have articulated, given an opportunity to do so) and *more* an opportunity to inform a wider audience about the impact of their experiences. The stories we tell our children are, after all, likely to be very different from the stories we tell ourselves. It is impossible to escape a subjective view or, indeed, subjective artistry. But by presenting a polyphonic text, I do not present readers with preconceived judgement in the shape of Stefan as hero or anti-hero. Rather, readers are liberated to draw their own moral conclusions from all the motivating factors contained in the story. My characters are shown to have had choices, albeit limited choices, but choices nevertheless.

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid p4 from Diamond, C. 'Ethics, imagination and the method of Wittgenstein's Tractatus' in Crary, A. M. and R. J. Read (2000). The New Wittgenstein, Routledge. pp149-73

<sup>154</sup> Harpham, G. G. (1999). Shadows of Ethics: Criticism and the Just Society, Duke University Press. p19

Returning to living witnesses and their testimonies, data protection regulations do not deal fully with the ethical problem of writing about one's own family where there is a living connection. Referring back to Wittgenstein, we can say something is good because it meets a required standard, such as ethical clearance and consent forms, but I would argue that alone does not make it so. I propose that something is good if it meets our inner ethical code, the one that honours the essence of truth above all other considerations because there is purity in it. This is the code, I would argue, that Primo Levi adopted in writing clearly and logically his analysis of the strength of the socio-economic contract that ensured compliance within Nazi concentration camps.<sup>155</sup> There are many emotive narratives on this subject, of various quality, but Levi succeeds in answering my childhood question: 'Why did so many people let so few control them?' Only in showing the nuances of human behaviour can we bring a greater understanding of how and why events occur, or decisions are made. Sometimes it is better for the world to understand the mechanics of phenomena alongside their emotional outcome.

This is what led me to decide how to structure the creative work; to present it as a hybrid-post-memoir that contains the essence of truth, not historical fact. Through this method, I show that Stefan and Lucia, as individuals, felt that the foundations of their pre-war security were founded on a sense of knowing who they were because of societal institutions such as church, family, and community,<sup>156</sup> and that is the way their story has been written. No written records of their experiences survived,<sup>157</sup> they were partial in what they chose to tell but all the while their subsequent generational observers were organising their own wholly-owned consciousness, and the intelligibility of that is what I have articulated. Earlier generations may have been the sole eyewitnesses to Stefan and Lucia's early experiences, but I argue that their interpretations *may* be contested, and be given an appropriate framework to understand their motivations; notwithstanding an awareness of the partisan nature of the enquiry, and of my own private interests and desires.

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<sup>155</sup> Levi, P. (1996). *Survival In Auschwitz*, Simon & Schuster.

<sup>156</sup> Belonging within mechanical frameworks such as church, family and community is discussed in Chapter 5, where these societal institutions are seen (in RTM) to rupture and fail when challenged by the experiences of displacement.

<sup>157</sup> Stefan's letters to Halina were burnt, and Lucia only allowed photographs to be seen.

Knausgaard, writing about his deceased father at the same age as his father died, says it 'enabled him to write about him as an equal.' On the other hand, the unpublished novelist in the Barbieri case, can be viewed as child still to her mother, because death has not yet enabled her to catch up. The unpublished novelist's story is not yet outside the world-as-is, which is where Wittgenstein claims value lies.<sup>158</sup>

What began as an articulation of an ethical dilemma can be viewed as a more sub-conscious protection; that of not allowing my parents' story to be swallowed up in the very social-technological mechanisms I believe they tried to resist. By bringing their narrative into the realms of academia, as a channel to tell their story and what lies behind it, I am responsible for two effects: on one hand, providing a probable context for understanding their decisions and, on the other hand, positioning them within a world that was not altogether known to them at the time; paradoxically, their external world-as-was, but not the internal world-as-was-experienced. This is because what I have identified as the moment their 'Angel of History' was looking back, they themselves were looking forward. Their backward reflection developed only in the four-fifths of my parents' lives *after* their meeting. If Wittgenstein says that value lies outside the world-as-is, then perhaps I can live ethically with the idea that I am providing a different value to their experiences than any they could provide themselves. New knowledge arises through the practice of writing, and new ways of seeing old histories can be enacted, but for me, ethical considerations will be under constant review.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Primary research provided photographs of my father's first-born child in adult life, and in death, that he himself had never seen. As a result, I find myself in the privileged position of seeing something of my father's life that he did not see.

<sup>159</sup> Since the start of my project in 2012, a legal precedent informs ethical considerations with the case of pianist, James Rhodes, whose ex-wife took out a temporary injunction in October 2014 to prevent him publishing part of his autobiography because of the potentially harmful impact on their 12-year-old son. The court ruled that there should be a trial to decide whether the son's rights should take priority over the father's. Rhodes was supported by English Pen, free speech campaign groups: Article 19, Index on Censorship, and several high-profile authors. On 20 May 2015, the supreme court overturned the previous ruling, with Lord Justice Toulson saying, 'Freedom to report the truth is a basic right to which the court gives a high level of protection and the author's right to his story includes the right to tell it as he wishes.' The ruling has recognised that freedom to report the truth is now a basic right protected in law.

## Chapter 5 Remembering, Forgetting, Seeing

In this chapter I outline the context for my investigation: how my work fits into the field of memory studies which forms the parameters of my literature review. Although tangential to the main focus of my work, I briefly discuss how other writers have approached the task of retelling traumatic stories. In simplistic terms, the gap in knowledge and practice that I am seeking to address is how my approach and experience might assist other writers.

My work fits into a literary genre that most closely resembles semi-biography, acting as a vehicle to present a polyphonic text that speaks spatially and temporally across generations and experiences. There are many extant examples of wartime stories, telling of trauma and the uncovering of lost and hidden histories, such as Austerlitz,<sup>160</sup> Everything is Illuminated,<sup>161</sup> The Hare with the Amber Eyes,<sup>162</sup> HHhH,<sup>163</sup> Mother Departs,<sup>164</sup> In Search of Six of the Six Million,<sup>165</sup> Tales of Galicia<sup>166</sup> and Let Me Go.<sup>167</sup> Many of these resonate in some way with my project, whether it's Sebald's use of photographs, Safran Foer's experience with his Ukrainian translator, Mendelsohn's extraordinary coincidences and durational research, or Binet's self-referential reflections on his research process. However, none of them reflect anything like Stefan's unique experiences. Lesser known memoirs and biographies deal more specifically with Kresy experiences, but again fall short of presenting a multi-cultural experience.<sup>168</sup>

To a greater or lesser degree, all the writers of these texts have presented a view of the past as having a relational attachment to images. All the texts are either illustrated with

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<sup>160</sup> Sebald, W. G. (2002). Austerlitz. Germany, England, USA, Australia, Canada, India, New Zealand, South Africa, Penguin.

<sup>161</sup> Safran Foer, J. (2002). Everything Is Illuminated. England, Penguin Books Ltd.

<sup>162</sup> de Waal, E. (2010). The Hare with Amber Eyes: A Family's Century of Art and Loss, Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

<sup>163</sup> Binet, L. (2013). HHhH, Random House.

<sup>164</sup> Różewicz, T. and B. Bogoczek (2013). Mother Departs, Stork Press Limited.

<sup>165</sup> Mendelsohn, D. (2007). The Lost: A Search for Six of Six Million. London, HarperPress.

<sup>166</sup> Stasiuk, A. (2003). Tales of Galicia, Twisted Spoon Press.

<sup>167</sup> Schneider, H. (2014). Let Me Go, Random House.

<sup>168</sup> For example: Andre, B. E. (2014). With Blood and Scars. Unknown, PebbleStone., Urbikas, D. S. (2016). My Sister's Mother: A Memoir of War, Exile, and Stalin's Siberia, University of Wisconsin Press., Bitner-Glindzic, H. (2017). A Song For Kresy: A Story of war, of loss and a family's survival, Matador.



images of the people they are about or refer to images in some way, in what can be read as evidence of verisimilitude, or an opening to a story.<sup>169</sup>

However, Sebald collected images randomly over time during his long walks and deployed them in his writing to add verisimilitude where none existed. Of all the texts I have read, it is Sebald's that moved me the most, and yet, his story is the one that can be described as complete fabrication.

A unifying theme of the examples above is the presentation, even manipulation of memory, and of forgetting. My practice seeks to address this operation of remembering, mis-remembering, and forgetting in the creation of Stefan's identity, and consequently that of his family's, to demystify family myth, whilst respecting the lived experience of the several participants who made and maintained the myth.

Combining material gleaned from face to face interviews, historical fact-checking, and retold family stories, the operation of memory and how it operated on the re-telling of stories in my family became fundamental to both the creative and critical element of my work, as described in the previous chapter.

In memory, individual pieces remain unaltered but a circumstantial twist or turn here or there of the kaleidoscope creates a different picture, especially where something comes to light at a moment of danger.

In terms of biography, and a historical narrative of this nature, an exploration of collective and individual memory gave both a context for my investigation and a creative direction; a key plotline and theme.

Initially, an imagined preconception of the purported truth of my family's history was outlined, based on what was known, as described in Chapter 1 Background. But research for a creative work based on real life events, where the outcome is a hybrid post-memoir, throws out many variables and twists. Every new perspective revealed through first person narrative demanded a re-interpretation of previously known facts, and new creative possibilities presented themselves. As discussed in Chapter 4 Methodology, these required some degree of epistemic relativism because, as Norman Denzin says, sometimes people are forced to make

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<sup>169</sup> Schneider's text bears a cover photograph of herself aged four, whereas Safran Foer's narrator bears a 'weathered photograph in hand.'

the history they lived, therefore, 'there are only interpretations, and all that people tell are self-stories.'<sup>170</sup> Added to this were the unexpected outcomes periodically experienced during historical research through archive documents, which, traditionally, historians have deemed to be more objective<sup>171</sup> – thus reliable – sources of information, but even these have proven unreliable in some respects.<sup>172</sup>

A further complication on the topic of memory, pertaining to a hybrid post-memoir based on the particularities of my own family history, is how memory defined my parents' post-war identity, and mine, in peacetime England. As outlined, this family history is framed within three competing co-existent cultures (pre-war rural Poland, pre/post-war rural Italian, post-war urban English) in which several theoretical challenges occur simultaneously. There is a difficulty in selecting creative perspectives on which to base various theoretical elements when they are constantly in flux, alternating between the points of view of: the main male protagonist; the main female protagonist; the lost son; the author's perspective on collective pressures that emanates from an English point of view. While potentially productive, giving rise to a number of creative opportunities, these perspectives posed problems for how to apply a standardised methodology (in these circumstances). And, if one could be applied, how it could be articulated within the limitation of a linear exegesis. As Brad Haseman and Daniel Mafe point out in their article, 'Acquiring Know-How: Research Training for Practice-led Researchers', there are '...deep and unresolved tensions for traditional research approaches ... to capture the messiness and dynamism ... which lies at the heart of ... creative production.'<sup>173</sup>

The relevance of memory and how it works collectively and individually in what I am writing is heavily based on what has been remembered, told, and passed on in retelling, either through family folk lore or first-person narratives through interview. What is strictly necessary

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<sup>170</sup> Denzin, N. K. (1989). *Interpretive biography*. Newbury Park, Calif., London, Sage. p77

<sup>171</sup> Hilary Mantel discusses inbuilt bias and fallibility inherent in historians and novelists alike. They are neither guilty nor innocent of accumulating facts or of imagining the past. Mantel, H. (2017). The day is for the living: Hilary Mantel on writing historical fiction. *BBC Reith Lectures, part one*, BBC: 42 mins.

<sup>172</sup> Depending on the source of the original information. For instance, Ministry of Defence army records show wartime information given by Stefan to be inaccurate as he claimed to have been enlisted in a pre-war Polish defence corps which did not exist at the time stated. Documents only recently received from a Warsaw Military Archive provide exact details of his pre-war military service. See Appendix 1.

<sup>173</sup> Dean, R. T. and H. Smith (2009). *Practice-led research, research-led practice in the creative arts*. Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press.

to my aims is to understand how I can use elements of cultural memory theory<sup>174</sup> to interpret my first-person interviews into a critically creative body of work.

The main points I cover in this review then, is what has so far been discovered about the field of social memory studies – a summary of existing views - a critical evaluation of five theories: peasant memory, family memory, forgetting, post-memory and multi-directional memory. The evaluation includes how these theories impacted the creative project both in form and content.

### General summary of social memory studies

The memory studies landscape is an uneven terrain. Social memory takes a place within the field of memory studies alongside practices such as commemoration, monument building and more general forms such as tradition, myth, or identity. It has attracted approaches from disciplines as diverse as sociology, history, literary criticism, anthropology, psychology, art history and political science. And, as Jeffrey Olick and Joyce Robbins outline in their 1998 review of the diversity of work in this variety of disciplines – in both substantive areas and geographical context – ‘social memory studies is a nonparadigmatic, transdisciplinary, centreless enterprise’.<sup>175</sup>

However, in 1998, four areas of further research *were* emerging, identified by Olick and Robbins as:

1. Social and sociological discourse: memory as the central medium through which identities are constituted.
2. A more genuinely historical sociology: the changing history of mnemonic practices through the medium of temporal existence.
3. Social memory, evidence and conflict: the notion of incorrect social memory being a key ingredient in creating and perpetuating destructive conflicts.

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<sup>174</sup> Defined as ‘memory that is shared outside the avenues of formal historical discourse yet is entangled with cultural products and imbued with cultural meaning.’ Sturken, M. (1997). Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering, University of California Press.

<sup>175</sup> Olick, J. K. and J. Robbins (1998). "SOCIAL MEMORY STUDIES: From "Collective Memory" to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practices." Annual Review of Sociology **24**(1): 105.

4. Studies of the way memory practices are central features of modern and postmodern life.

The key point for this discussion is a return to Maurice Halbwachs' notion and which most closely reflects no. 1 above, is that '[i]t is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognise, and localise their memories.'<sup>176</sup> Although it should be noted that modern historical scholarship is still divided as to whether collective memory exists at all; sociologists being more interested in it than historians.

Most oral historians have, until recently, been more interested in collecting life stories rather than in analysing them for social memory. Mostly they were not interested in what the stories themselves could tell them about people's lives but, rather, in constituting archives. In this milieu, older people are considered more authoritative than the young because they are deemed not to be influenced so much by modern cultural phenomenon such as television, film, etc. I have certainly been encouraged to secure interviews with members of a declining generation whose first-hand experiences are vital to my research. However, for this very reason, I would argue against the point that television does not so influence older people. The experience of interviewing a 78-year-old woman – albeit only one subject – showed that she had quite clearly been influenced by television, to the extent that she had been able to rationalise her own youthful memories of the war by gaining supplementary information through historical documentary programmes.<sup>177</sup>

This notion supports Olick and Robbins' reading of Pierre Nora's work on identity and history insofar as it brings to mind the different places and practices that enable historical imagery to enter the imagination, which sits well with the non-essentialising nature of my creative work. Indeed, in addressing the issue of historical agency, recent work published on

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<sup>176</sup> Halbwachs, M. and L. A. Coser (1992). On collective memory. Chicago, London, University of Chicago Press. p38 2

<sup>177</sup> Joan Tumblety reports how oral historian, Alistair Thompson, in his work, *Anzac Memories*, showed how his subjects' memories 'had become entangled with the legend of their lives' through 'broader commemorative trends, incorporating the interpretative features of film, official histories and veterans' parades.' The dynamic between individual memory and group memory explored by Thompson was that 'remembering changes in relation to shifts in the particular publics in which we live, and as the general public field of representation alters.' Tumblety, J. (2013). Memory and history: understanding memory as source and subject. London, Routledge. p9

memory and history (2013) suggests that oral histories, while lacking the theoretical and methodological reflection of history, 'contains one important virtue – refusal to let the problem of collective memory trump that of historical agency and thus [lead to letting] essentialism in through the back door.'<sup>178</sup>

The first part of this literature review explores some of the fundamental principles of collective memory such as class and group 'social memory'. These are memories which are remembered because they fit into pre-existing forms of narrative which themselves have meaning for the group that remembers them. The main work reviewed is that of James Fentress and Chris Wickham in 1992<sup>179</sup>. It has been chosen because it includes the notion of peasant memory in semi-literate societies and is particularly useful for exploring wartime experiences in the southern Italian village in which some sequences of the creative work occur.<sup>180</sup> My primary research revealed that Lucia received only four years of primary education before taking vocational training as a dressmaker. In many ways, Fentress and Wickham subvert the Durkheimian notion of collective consciousness, and this serves well to release my female protagonist from '...passively obeying the interiorised collective will.'<sup>181</sup> Lucia subverts protocol by her individual way of dressing before finally escaping through migration to England.

The second part of the review probes a different type of group memory by reviewing literature on the collective memory of family, using as a key text the work of Maurice Halbwachs (1877-1945)<sup>182</sup> The decision to make Halbwachs' text the basis of the review is due to his presence as an orthodox figure in the second generation of Durkheimians in the interwar years. Not only was it within this period that my main characters' early memories and behaviours were being formed but also Durkheim's association with Max Weber and Karl Marx meant that his sociological concern was with society's maintenance of integrity and coherence

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid. p10

<sup>179</sup> Fentress, J., A. C. o. L. Societies., et al. (1992). Social memory. Oxford, UK, Cambridge, Mass., Blackwell.

<sup>180</sup> And where some Polish influences occur.

<sup>181</sup> Fentress, J., A. C. o. L. Societies., et al. (1992). Social memory. Oxford, UK, Cambridge, Mass., Blackwell. pp1-40

<sup>182</sup> Halbwachs, M. and L. A. Coser (1992). On collective memory. Chicago, London, University of Chicago Press.

in the face of modernity, an implicit sub-theme in my creative work, and makes connection with the Frankfurt School, of which Benjamin was a part. While Halbwach's approach may seem dated, and his work superseded, his espoused patriarchal attitudes toward family are particularly apposite for my project; several sequences of the creative work are situated within a newly created family in an English landscape, drawing on previous, pre-war family memories from Poland and Italy respectively. Furthermore, Halbwach's reference to groups rather than society allows a degree of flexibility, enabling me to *segue* between the group-types from which my different characters emanated.<sup>183</sup>

The third part of the review looks at forgetting, to understand how memory combined with forgetting contribute to the construction of Stefan's identity.

Finally, I will look at post-memory and multi-directional memory.

## Peasant Memory

Moving from the relative positions of different aspects of social memory studies, I turn to consider the utility of peasant memory for my project, which brings me to the work of James Fentress (anthropologist) and Chris Wickham (historian). The rationale for examining the theory of social memory is that it carries a society's vicarious beliefs about its past. That is, something which has not been experienced personally, but imagined (and it could be argued, magnified) through the experience of others, bringing notions of Walter Benjamin's concepts of *erlebnis* and *erfahrung*.<sup>184</sup> In selecting this text, I am able to review my approach to some outputs from my fieldwork by examining issues around the theory of social memory. By extrapolating similar topics from my interviews, I not only illustrate how peasant memory (social memory operating in a semi-literate European society) affects prevailing attitudes in Jelsi but also influences themes within RTM, such as marriageability of girls in southern Italy, or national identities in eastern Poland. This part of the literature review identifies how critical

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<sup>183</sup> Jeffrey Olick refers to 'collected memory' – 'the aggregated individual memories of members of a group' – not least because current scientific research on human memory suggests generalities that could help historians predict how memories are likely to be shaped in the wider group.' From J.K. Olick 'Collective Memory: the two cultures' *Sociology Theory*, 17(3) 1991 p338 in Tumblety, J. (2013). Memory and history: understanding memory as source and subject. London, Routledge. p10

<sup>184</sup> *Erlebnis*: to experience. *Erfahrung*: to be experienced.

theory on the nature of memory underpins my primary research interviews. What it doesn't deliver is the nature of forgetting, which I will discuss later.

An interesting aspect in peasant memory is how it has the ability to contextualise modernism as an effort to break with tradition. It liberates me as researcher from some of the tensions between the micro and macro: individual beliefs *versus* communal beliefs. Significant is appropriation – the removal from the specific to the general – and this is especially intriguing to me as a researcher who wishes to avoid notions of universalism espousing only one truth.

My own interview sample data are examples which illustrate how peasant memory works on two levels: first, in how in a semi-literate society, social memory works by verbal communication; by people talking to each other about the type of things that are more easily remembered, those that fit into forms of narrative that the group already has at its disposal. This comes from my desire to hear seldom-heard voices and to find out things that couldn't be directly found in interview transcripts.<sup>185</sup> For example, when Lucia and Teresa tell each other about jokes they have played on vulnerable victims (RTM pp40-42), it harkens to a generalised culture of *barzelletta* or *scherzo*.<sup>186</sup> More seriously the scene continues to when the girls reach the balcony from where two Neapolitan girls were thrown by German soldiers after they'd been raped, a case where the memory fits a traditional Madonna/whore dichotomy; particularly strong in Catholic culture.<sup>187</sup>

This second example shows that there are complexities based in gender politics to prevent the incident being wholly successful in creating a single cohesive narrative because of

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<sup>185</sup> Another example, using three extracts from transcript describing the same issue, show how social memory becomes social fact not historical fact. When asked what happened when occupying forces were billeted in a village, respondents showed that a coherent social memory served a function for Jelsi, which was a seal on the virtue of its girls, at least as far as the outside world was concerned. Its complexities bore further analysis and formed the basis of a conference paper but is outside the remit of this research so not included.

<sup>186</sup> *Raccontare una barzelletta*: to tell a funny story or joke. *Fare uno scherzo*: to play a joke.

This area of southern Italy understands the Neapolitan *Comedie del'Arte* tradition, featuring the voice of the people through *Pulcinella*, his main characteristics being sarcasm, rudeness, cruelty, deviousness, and duality. (One interviewee described travelling Neapolitan theatricals coming to the village.) The telling of funny stories against a vulnerable victim remains a strong tradition in the eldest member of my Italian family (now in the north), and meals frequently end with *Zia* Maria re-telling a familiar *barzelleto*. Younger members of the family would roll their eyes whilst enjoying, and correcting, every detail.

<sup>187</sup> This remains unspoken in RTM because it could not be officially corroborated and because it would have been gratuitous.

the question of regional prejudice that prevailed. The Neapolitan girls were outsiders, seeking refuge from fierce fighting and hunger in Naples. Therefore, their experiences are both abhorred (according to social mores) but diminished in Jelsi because they were 'other'.

Fentress and Williams advise that researchers must closely analyse narratives, such as my interview transcripts, because each have their own grammar. I would go further and say, each has its own motivation for telling the way it does. It is interesting that the only one of my research subjects who fully articulated what was being spoken of as rape,<sup>188</sup> during the wartime occupation, was the person who had lived the majority of her life in England, away from the prevailing social influence of her home village where the incident took place. The question I put to all my transcripts is, what teleology is at work here – is it uniform or contradictory to social identity? Furthermore, I explored prevailing factors in the lives of my characters that may have influenced their decisions. For instance, Lucia avoids romantic connections after Stefan has left because her purity is surrounded with ambiguity; both by outsiders and by herself. A full analysis of her predicament can be found in RTM page 113 (where reluctance to meet boys is challenged), and shows how her teleology is affected by it, especially on page 145 when she realises she is 'stuck', unable to return to Italy.

### Family memory

As previously discussed, a problem lies within the use of a rigidly Durkheimian approach and Halbwach's outdated interest in creating sociology as a scientifically positivist discipline because my entire project is predicated on a relativist approach. Double dialectics releases me from that rigidity. Furthermore, antipositivism and critical theory proposes that cultural norms, values and symbols should be viewed from a subjective perspective;<sup>189</sup> a position supported by Max Weber, Georg Simmel, Ferdinand Tönnies, George Herbert Mead, and Charles Cooley.

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<sup>188</sup> Of the two other respondents, one corroborated the incident's violence but, as a fascist sympathiser, claimed the Germans behaved impeccably. The other used a euphemism, in dialect, and quickly changed the subject.

<sup>189</sup> Certainly the case in RTM.



However, Halbwachs proves to be an important source for new research in historical sociology and cultural memory. In his introduction to the 1992 translation of Halbwach's work, Lewis Coser says, '[c]onceptions of the past are affected by the mental images we employ to solve present problems, so that collective memory is essentially a reconstruction of the past in the light of the present. [...] Memory needs continuous feeding from collective sources and is sustained by social and moral props.'<sup>190</sup>

In discussing his primary thesis, Halbwach's chapter on family reminiscences ('The Collective Memory of the Family') is particularly useful as my protagonists each recall, and selectively bring to bear on their thinking, significant events within their own family dynamic. For instance, Lucia's experience of her sister's death at the hands of an abusive husband, and her own sexual assault, is seen to influence her attitude, not only towards men but also towards societal pressure in a small Italian village. Later, her feeling of being 'stuck' in an almost untenable situation with Stefan in England is because she discovers he has a child, which creates a bond between him and his first wife. The potential of her return to Italy is blocked, both by the lie that she was married by proxy, and by the experience of seeing her father's ignominious return from America.<sup>191</sup> On the other hand, Stefan's reminiscence of ownership, whilst not explicit in the memoir<sup>192</sup>, nevertheless bears on his acquisitive tendencies: the bicycle, his gambling and, ultimately, the unsuitable family car.

Halbwachs claimed that human memory could only function within a collective purpose, which is seemingly at odds with Fentress and Wickham's more nuanced view that it is a two-part process: once people select their memories, these then form the pattern of the 'ideas and actions of those who have done the selecting.'<sup>193</sup> This could present a seemingly self-fulfilling prophecy such as that of Lucia and Stefan, who hid knowledge of Stefan's previous wife and child from their peacetime children. In time, it became the foundation of

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<sup>190</sup> Lewis A Coser, Introduction to Halbwachs, M. and L. A. Coser (1992). On collective memory. Chicago, London, University of Chicago Press. p34

<sup>191</sup> Which is obliquely alluded to in the RTM in Antonietta's scolding (pp34-36) and Lucia remembering her farewell to Giovanni (p127).

<sup>192</sup> RTM p85: He owns everything he can touch

<sup>193</sup> Halbwachs, M. and L. A. Coser (1992). On collective memory. Chicago, London, University of Chicago Press.

the family's collective memory upon which a new generation's identity was formed. Lucia was able to commemorate something that was contiguous with her own belief systems; her parents had a tangible existence, her own marriage was lawful, and her family legitimised. However, for Stefan, re-constructing a true picture of father, mother, children, and wife would be problematic. It is here, in the way that the recall of his personal history subverts the respectable collective notion that he is most conflicted, resorting to the construction of a conflated history, which will be discussed in depth in Chapter 7.

As far as historical consciousness is concerned, Fentress and Wickham point out that for the working classes, realities differ greatly from their middle-class counterparts. Working class communities are weaker than peasant communities, especially since World War Two in Europe, where they may often be culturally very different from old communities such as those from which Stefan and Lucia came. Although Halbwachs talks about the 'farm, the stable and the barn' remaining in the family's consciousness (as illustrated by Stefan's attempts to grow vegetables in unyielding English soil), my writing portrays a family in transition from a rural to a more urbanised environment. They cannot reconstruct a potentially unifying existence because their environment is modern.

In addition, the collective memories of working class communities in large urban settings would tend to 'split into different groups fairly easily; common experiences of relative poverty at home or factory discipline at work'<sup>194</sup> not always uniting groups very effectively beyond their limited shared experiences in a new location. This is exemplified in the relationships between Lucia, Gerda and the Polish women: whilst brought together through the common experience of being immigrants who have escaped poverty and trauma, discontinuities inevitably arise when relationships are tested by close proximity with husbands, or acquisitions such as furniture, cars and hairdressing equipment.

For Stefan, the political aspect of his memory creates a significant difference between him and his English and Polish working-class counterparts. Notwithstanding that he derived

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<sup>194</sup> Fentress, J., A. C. o. L. Societies., et al. (1992). Social memory. Oxford, UK, Cambridge, Mass., Blackwell. p115

from a privileged Polish background,<sup>195</sup> Stefan had been politically involved in meetings of the Polish Government in Exile in London. He was in no way guilty of the Marxist notion of ‘false consciousness’, being fully cognisant of the notion of capitalist exploitation of the working classes, exemplified by his reading of The Daily Mirror. Where Fentress and Wickham focus on the ‘conflict between a social identity based on the reality of working-class experience and one imposed from above, more or less deliberately, by the ruling classes, who have always had their own versions of truth,’<sup>196</sup> they acknowledge the almost impossible task of ‘doing justice to this kaleidoscope of difference [because of the complex relationship between each element] and the rival frameworks of dominant cultures.’<sup>197</sup> Two such differences being Stefan’s relationship with Anthony Kershaw, soon to be Conservative MP, and that of Lucia with his wife, Barbara. Stefan’s hostility towards Kershaw as a member of the ruling class differs from Lucia’s absorption of Barbara as benefactress and protector. In this proximity can be read residual traces of their lived experiences of communist and fascist ideology.

## Forgetting

Here I use a combination of Paul Ricoeur and Pierre Bourdieu as theorists respectively on narrative identities, and cultural taste and social hierarchies. These work particularly well to articulate differences at the very limits of knowledge. That is where subject positions are not fixed but rather are at the mercy of external stimulus.<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> Identifying as Polish in Galicia (or Kresy, a borderland of the Second Polish Republic (Poland between the First and Second World Wars 1918-1939), Stefan occupied a position above that of local Ukrainian and Jewish populations. As a landowner (albeit depleted) he would be considered *bourgeois* by Soviet occupiers, and to have been well above the local peasant/working class. He also received middle school (*gimnazjum*) education aged 13 to 16 whereas peasant education ended at elementary school (as was the case for Lucia) and he went on to attend a regional college to study agriculture, or so his army records state.

<sup>196</sup> Fentress, J., A. C. o. L. Societies., et al. (1992). Social memory. Oxford, UK, Cambridge, Mass., Blackwell. p124-125

<sup>197</sup> Ibid. p126

<sup>198</sup> As Sebastian Purcell notes in his review of Michel, M. (2015). Ricoeur and the Post-Structuralists: Bourdieu, Derrida, Deleuze, Foucault, Castoriadis, Scott Davidson (tr.), Rowman and Littlefield. Michel ‘makes the case that Ricoeur, just like Bourdieu, shares the aim of resolving the paradox of personal identity by making sense of its “temporal invariance”’. Purcell, S. (2015). "Ricoeur and the Post-Structuralists: Bourdieu, Derrida, Deleuze, Foucault, Castoriadis." Retrieved 1 September 2015, 2015,

Creating a neo-narrative for Stefan and Lucia's lives involved multiple layers of meaning, one of which is discussed in the next chapter.

## Post-memory and Multi-directional memory

As noted before, post-memory is a 'structure of inter – *and* – trans-generational transmission of traumatic knowledge and embodied experience'<sup>199</sup> which serves my remit as a researcher and author-as-producer. It is also a useful concept for understanding the way that Stefan conflated and embodied his and his son's memories. However, it also serves to address the question of how I show the impact of Stefan's traumatic knowledge and embodied experience on subsequent generations.

As Hirsch says, there is a 'specific relation of children to the traumatic events experienced by their parents'<sup>200</sup> because it is we who are inheritors and guardians of a past that is passing 'into history or myth.' I would argue that, as children, we are subject to these received memories – the pain of others – and are subjecting them to alternative tellings.

On the other hand, Stefan as a parent was a guardian of the future who subjected his and his first son's history to alternative tellings, which leads the discussion to the operation of multi-directional memory. Taking Hirsch's work onwards, Michael Rothberg states that:

Post-memory may well constitute a version of memory's multi-directionality, [...which is constructed] out of networks of spatially and temporally differentiated "moments".<sup>201</sup>

Those characteristics of post-memory are precisely the points of entry for the 'multidirectional confluence of the disparate historical imaginaries'<sup>202</sup> I present in RTM.

Proceeding from the premise that texts do not speak with one voice, where 'an individual is contingently "caught" on the contradictions of a situation,' as I am, that individual

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from <https://ndpr.nd.edu/news/ricoeur-and-the-post-structuralists-bourdieu-derrida-deleuze-foucault-castoriadis/>.

<sup>199</sup> Hirsch, M. (2012). The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust, Columbia University Press. p6

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

<sup>201</sup> Rothberg, M. (2009). Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization, Stanford University Press. p271

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

is propelled into a search for the past. Consequently, the work of memoirists catapults them into becoming subjects of fidelity and agents of memory. And because texts do not speak with one voice, hybridity comes from the multiple narratives that appear in the memoir. This includes my own involvement in exposing a newly discovered version of truth, which becomes new knowledge.

Where Stefan is contingently “caught” or exposed at moments of danger he is also propelled to become a subject of fidelity and a different type of agent of memory.

The following chapter outlines what I learned that explains much of Stefan’s teleology.

## Chapter 6 Findings: the undiscovered country

Here I discuss how I undertook my primary research, how it went and what I found that influenced my writing.

Fundamental to Stefan's narrative arc as a fractured subject was that he had two families – pre and post-war – in each of which he fathered a son.

Around 1978, I learned from Lucia of the existence of his first-born son from an earlier relationship in Poland. Stefan never spoke of it and we knew better than to question his past, so it remained a mystery. His Soldier's Service Book<sup>203</sup> shows that Stefan had redacted details of his place of birth and, significantly, the nationalities of his mother and father:



6.1

My first task was to request a copy of his army record from Ministry of Defence central records, which not only presented the first documentary evidence of his son's existence, but more significantly, his name (Rudolf), his wife's name and maiden name (Helena<sup>204</sup> Zadrożna),

<sup>203</sup> Issued 17 March 1943

<sup>204</sup> In Polish, Halina

her nationality, and his place of birth: Giermanówka. Rudolf's place of birth was recorded as 'unknown'. See 6.2.

PARTICULARS OF MARRIAGE.	Particulars of Woman to whom married or with whom living as a wife.		Date and Place of Marriage.	Signature of Officer (with date).
	(a) Christian names.	(c) Nationality at birth.		
	(a) HELENA		unknown	
	(b) MOTKALUK			
	(c) polska			
	(d) ZADROŻNA			
<small>*In the case of a Widow or a Divorced, Maiden and previous married name to be included.</small>				
PARTICULARS OF CHILDREN.	Sex (M. or F.)	Christian Names (In the case of stepchildren, adopted children, etc., surnames also.)	Date and Place of Birth.	
	m.	RUDOLF	1941 unknown	

6483 11342 14819/D.781 200M. 8.16 SP/THH Cp. 33

6.2

At this stage I believed Stefan to be Polish. An internet search found Giermanówka<sup>205</sup> to be in Ternopil province in what is now western Ukraine (previously Tarnopol, south-eastern Poland). I also found reference to a graphic memoir entitled, Mendel's Daughter<sup>206</sup> which referred to Gusta Mendel, a Jewish girl who was born and lived in Germakówka from 1919 to 1939 and was therefore a contemporary of Stefan and his wife, Halina.<sup>207</sup> The memoir proved invaluable in presenting images and contemporaneous information<sup>208</sup> from a Jewish point of view that I was able to reiterate through the lens of non-Jewish characters, and which I will discuss in more detail later.

In July 2012, armed with information from the MOD record, I instigated a search through the Red Cross International Family Tracing Service, which seeks to reunite families separated by war. The search needed to be for Rudolf, who, as a half-brother, was related to

<sup>205</sup> Alternatively: Germakówka. Pre-war, a large village which comprising Jews, Poles and Ukrainians with a railway station house built in Austro-Hungarian times.

<sup>206</sup> Lemelman, G. and M. Lemelman (2006). Mendel's Daughter, Free Press.

<sup>207</sup> They would have gone to school together as there was no segregation in education, although in different year grades.

<sup>208</sup> That only someone living in Germakówka at the time could know. Present-day Hermakivka is an obscure rural village where no pre-war Jewish people remain.

me by blood. Over three years I received an annual letter confirming that the search would continue but had not yet found anyone. At this stage, I expected to learn that Stefan's family were, indeed, 'all gone' and so continued with my original idea of Rudolf as a ghost son, a leitmotif representing everything that Stefan had lost. I speculated on whether Rudolf had perished as a baby or, if he survived, what kind of life he might have had in the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic as an abandoned fatherless child.

*Primary research in Italy*

*I do believe you think what now you speak*

In 2012, I travelled to Lucia's home village, Jelsi in southern Italy, to interview surviving contemporaries. I'd made prior contact with the Mayor's office, sending them an Italian translation summarising my research, letter of authorisation and sample consent forms. As a result, I received invaluable help in gaining access to a short list of respondents who would have known Lucia. My contact greeted me with warmth, as an insider in the village, and a trusted and authentic link between its citizens and its many émigrés.

I interviewed<sup>209</sup> three remaining, and very elderly, contemporaries of Lucia, one of whom transpired to be Don D'Amico, Lucia's pre-war *Innamorato*.<sup>210</sup> It was an extremely emotional experience both for him and me when I had to tell him that Lucia had died in 2010. He asked to see pictures of her, which I only had on my phone. Despite his failing sight, this gentle 95-year-old man held the phone up close to his face, and lovingly stroked the pictures, saying, 'Yes, yes, that is Lucia.' He asked if she had had a good life, but more significantly, wanted confirmation that she had married by proxy prior to migrating.<sup>211</sup> What could I say? Here I was, a fêted visitor in my mother's home village, receiving every possible assistance

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<sup>209</sup> I conducted the interviews in Italian without interpreters and then translated then into English on my return whilst transcribing. A consequence of not using interpreters was that I missed an opportunity to probe deeply because I was processing everything in Italian. I mistook a key word to mean 'violence' when it meant 'violated'. Subsequent re-interviewing of subjects did afford the opportunity to clarify some misunderstanding.

<sup>210</sup> Boyfriend

<sup>211</sup> He was confused, thinking she had married a Canadian or Englishman.



from the Mayor's office; was I, the prodigal daughter of one of their daughters, going to besmirch her memory? I told them what they needed to know.<sup>212</sup>

I also interviewed two of Lucia's sisters, Maria and Carmelina. It was Maria who confirmed that Don D'Amico used to leave letters and gifts for Lucia, hidden in cracks in the wall in the courtyard behind their house.

Throughout my stay, everyone was supportive and nurturing, delighted that I would be writing about one of their own; honouring her memory as they saw it. With one exception. During one interview I realised that my interviewee had been a wartime fascist sympathiser<sup>213</sup>. Despite my conflicted feelings, it was useful to be able to probe into this man's mindset. I found a place for him in the story as a fictional character.<sup>214</sup>

Site visits were made around the village to see Lucia's original dwelling, the church she attended and outside to the Convent of Sant'Anna where her sister, Concetta was buried. I even walked through the elliptical arch to the church of *Sant'Andrea Apostolo*, which became a pivotal trope in the narrative arc of my story.<sup>215</sup>



6.3

A personal incident during the Italian research trip presented an early creative idea that might have been developed into a plot device; a ghostly back story to provide psychological insight into Stefan's character.

The incident took place during my field trip around Italy, as this extract from my field diary illustrates:

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<sup>212</sup> RTM p121

<sup>213</sup> Southern Italy was largely anti-fascist, welcoming Allied troops but it had its share of sympathisers.

<sup>214</sup> RTM pp39-40 and pp48-49

<sup>215</sup> The arch where Stefan pulls Lucia the night she dresses the dead virgin, and the arch through which Concetta's body is carried from the church for burial at the Convent of Sant'Anna. It thus became the symbolic site of *une petite mort* followed by *une grande mort*; an additional motivating factor in Lucia's wish to emigrate.

Day 2 ...I learn that Z<sup>216</sup> had arrived unannounced the Saturday before. The train of thought that this news precipitates in me is interesting in its own right. Here I am to research a book about my parents, during the course of which I am constantly confronting territory that has been trodden before; first by my parents' separate, then combined experiences, and now by Z. Present, the whole time by his enforced banishment from this narrative, is Z.<sup>217</sup> Maybe the story is about him.

This was the first appearance of the notion of a ghost element in the story: Rudolf as the son who's been there before; a precursor, blemishing the second son's territory like footprints in new snow. This would have provided an authorial device, through analepsis, and a pointed signifier to carry all that was lost as a result of Stefan's post-war displacement.

The *leitmotif* of a first son representing loss of culture, language, family, and identity could be seen as being displaced by a second son in a new family, forcing a new identity for Stefan. However, Halbwachs argues that kinship or alliance [leaves] traces in the memory; a footprint that works as a 'framework of notions that serve to recall memories of domestic life.'<sup>218</sup> The passion of the father for his lost son might represent all that Stefan had lost; his country, culture, family and a future in which he understood his place. However hard Stefan worked to repudiate his first son, he would nevertheless remain a father and that is a hard passion to escape; a piece of Stefan's life would always remain in the hands of his first son. And Lucia would resent that.

The potential tension in this plot device was reinforced several days later at the Abbey of Monte Cassino, the site of ferocious fighting in which many Polish soldiers died, and where Stefan fought. He can be seen on the right of 6.4 at one of the emotively-worded memorials on hills surrounding Monte Cassino.<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> Zbigniew, Stefan's post-war son.

<sup>217</sup> Banishment as a character; it was originally planned that he would have only a minor role in the narrative.

<sup>218</sup> Halbwachs, M. and L. A. Coser (1992). On collective memory. Chicago, London, University of Chicago Press. p69

<sup>219</sup> The inscription reads: 'FOR OUR FREEDOM AND YOURS WE, POLISH SOLDIERS, HAVE GIVEN TO GOD OUR SOULS, OUR BODIES TO THE ITALIAN EARTH AND OUR HEARTS TO POLAND' and was unveiled 18 July 1945. On the other side, the inscription reads: 'PASSER-BY, GO TELL POLAND, THAT WE HAVE PERISHED OBEDIENT TO HER SERVICE.'



6.4

I went to the Polish cemetery to research contemporaneous Polish names that might be useful for minor characters in my writing and met a man and his daughter from Poland searching for their father/grandfather (6.5). As Stefan had done, he had gone into the war, leaving behind a family in Poland, never to return. They had no information about whether he had perished in the war or survived so were scanning the gravestones hoping to find him.



6.5

The abandoned son I met at Monte Cassino could have been my half-brother, who I believed was named Rudolf. It seemed we were either side of a looking glass; them seeking a man's second life, me seeking a man's first life. The duality of the situation stuck with me and

contributed to my thinking about double dialectics because I realised I, my research and my writing were hovering along a continuum between lost and found.

Later, at the *Historiale Montecassino*,<sup>220</sup> I discussed my encounter with a Polish guide who explained that it was commonplace for Polish soldiers to take a second wife – a war wife – and to establish a new family and identity.<sup>221</sup> This was my first awareness of the more general extent of what I had considered to be a particular narrative arc. For many of the Polish soldiers, Italy had become the site of the looking glass through which these men passed but some, unlike Alice, never returned.

### *The Red Cross delivers*

In 2015, three years after my first enquiry, the Red Cross contacted me with information about Stefan's family. My interview with their co-ordinator has been fictionalised to some extent in the Afterword of RTM but the part about the two photographs did happen.

I was told that Stefan's wife kept this photograph (6.6) next to her bed all her life. This photograph was inscribed 1946 and is obviously a studio portrait. Stefan wears the Monte Cassino Cross, the Cross of Valour and the Jerusalem Cross; some of the medals he later carelessly threw into a drawer but here seemingly worn with pride. Note the prominence given to the medals in the centre of the image. Above all, this was the first evidence that he wrote to his wife after the war.

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<sup>220</sup> Multimedia Polish Museum

<sup>221</sup> General Władysław Anders never returned to his first wife and daughter in Poland after the war. He married Irena (a singer in the Polish Parade Band of the Second Polish Corps) in 1948 and had second daughter in England in 1950.



## 6.6

I had never seen this photograph before, and my emotional response to it was overwhelming, especially when I placed my photograph of Stefan beside it. When Teodor's photograph was presented, I found myself searching for likeness, needing to convince myself that Stefan's real family had been found.<sup>222</sup> The photographs perfectly triangulated. These were my people.

I was told that Halina never re-married, and that my half-brother, whom I had understood to be called Rudolf, was actually named Teodor. And, to my surprise, that Halina had had another child, Maria, born in 1946.<sup>223</sup> There was no information available about Maria's father.

Halina's son, Teodor had died in 1967 leaving an eight-week-old son, Serigy. Stefan's wife, Halina died in 1995.

Both Maria and Serigy had supplied their addresses and telephone numbers. Maria still lived in Germakówka, which was now called Hermakivka and Serigy lived in the region's capital, Ternopil. Neither spoke English so initial electronic communications were poorly conducted with the help of unreliable translation programmes during which I learned that Halina had been sentenced to seven years in Siberia for receiving a letter from Stefan from Teheran in 1943 but was released after three years. Maria had been born in 1946. And that Stefan's

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<sup>222</sup> By unconsciously writing 'real', it feels as though *they* were the authentic family and we were not.

<sup>223</sup> The name Stefan gave as the child of his aunt's servant.

mother was a 'mad bull' who needed to be caged in the house. This was quite alarming, and I rather hoped it was the translation programme's error.

However, two things from my letter exchanges with Serigy made a deep impression on me because both reveal something about a boy who lost his father, and it could be that Serigy was projecting some of his own feelings when he wrote:<sup>224</sup>

My father Teodor dreamt to meet his father Stefan though all his life. He looked for him, but failed. [sic]

It is interesting for me to get to know about the life of my grandfather Stefan as it is interesting why grandfather knowing that he has a son never was in touch with them [sic]

Giving Teodor a voice, albeit through his own son's, was a motivating factor in writing a hybrid post-memoir. I was able to incorporate both these feelings of loss in the memoir. This first appears in RTM (p144), where ten-year-old Teodor says if he had a little boy, he would want to know what he was like. This is juxtaposed with the previous scene in which Stefan receives a letter from his wife's family telling them not to contact Halina again, and enclosing a photograph of the ten-year-old boy. The second mention on page 270 simply notes, via pregnant Vira, that Teodor has been searching for his father.

I was also concerned about Stefan's early racial attitudes as the family told me that he had not been arrested in September 1939, at the outbreak of war as he had always said, but in May 1941. Who and what was he, to have survived transportation during this time?<sup>225</sup> I feared what he may have been involved in.

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<sup>224</sup> As Serigy was only eight weeks old when Teodor died, he would have received this knowledge from his mother, Vira and aunt, Maria. Maria recounts a superstitious belief that if a cherry twig is cut, put in water indoors on St Andrew's Day (30 November), and a wish made over it, if the cherry blossoms at Christmas the wish will come true. Maria and Teodor did this: Maria to become a nurse, Teodor to find his father. Only Maria's twig blossomed.

<sup>225</sup> My experience of Stefan was that he was not racist or anti-Semitic (apart from casual anti-Semitism in telling jokes about 'an old Jew' who invariably got the better of his Polish neighbours through his cleverness and their lack of sophistication). Stefan's house was open to all nationalities and he even brought home a Pakistani co-worker, who was alone and friendless, to eat with us. The same could not be said for Lucia who was far more partisan in her attitude, even to Italian regional differences.

However, my early anxiety that Stefan had abandoned his family was mollified by the news that he had contacted them after the war, but I was still concerned about Maria's origins.<sup>226</sup>

This was just the beginning of many harrowing discoveries. In my consciousness, Poland/Ukraine had been a place of terrible unknowingness where bad things had happened in the past and continued to happen if current affairs programmes were to be believed. I was to find out the bad things of the past, and to be touched by some of the present when I travelled there in 2016.

I engaged a local driver with basic English (Andriy) and an interpreter (Nadya) who could be flexible enough to adapt to an ad hoc interview schedule.

Prior to organising a schedule, I held a briefing meeting with my translator at my base in Ternopil, explaining my research aims and the sensitivity of what we might hear. She was able to telephone Teodor's son, Serigy and his widow, Vira to arrange our first meeting. They asked to come to the hotel. After our initial lunch meeting I was invited to their home<sup>227</sup> where I conducted the first of two interviews. Vira was extremely forthcoming about Teodor's character, their marriage and how they lived under communism. On the second visit, Vira had photographs ready, which proved invaluable as prompt material. She even produced the marriage gift Halina gave to her and Teodor, and which she still uses.<sup>228</sup> and which illustrated the poverty of their existence in 1960s Soviet Union.

My first experience of Hermakivka was with Andriy and it was the most emotionally charged of all my visits. It seemed to me that this land did not exist until I set my feet on it.

What was intended as an orientation visit to meet the family, resulted in my being taken to see Stefan's house and land, and to the cemetery where my half-brother was buried. Next to him were the graves of his mother, Halina, and of his aunts, Antonina and Maria. I learned later that Antonina was the aunt who prevented Teodor from being sent to a communist orphanage (almost certain death for a three-year-old) and cared for him when

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<sup>226</sup> The worst of my speculations was that Maria's conception may have been violent.

<sup>227</sup> The communist era flat which Teodor was given by his employers, and where lived with Vira a few months after their marriage. The conditions of the bequest were not certain, but I learned from Maria that Vira's father was a high-ranking, wealthy party member.

<sup>228</sup> Cooking pot.

Halina was in Siberia. From this information I started to trace the first synergy with Stefan's story. It was Antonina who was the adopting aunt and Teodor the adoptee, not Stefan. I was also taken to Karolina's grave and shown where Stefan's father was buried next to her. Here I learned that Stefan's father was Ukrainian and his mother, Karolina was Polish. Although I already knew that Motkaluk was a Ukrainian name, here was evidence that Stefan's parents had not emigrated to Canada, leaving him behind. Technically, Stefan was Ukrainian, which entirely subverted the way he identified himself in England as Polish.

I returned to Hermakivka two days later with my interpreter, with whom I made a fundamental error to save costs. She had presented her credentials as a freelance interpreter but was only a trained English teacher. I hadn't expected simultaneous translation but at times I had to prompt her to translate consecutively and felt I lost opportunities to fully understand the very complex stories that were spilling out. Furthermore, her age and limited historical knowledge of these histories, resulted in time wasted by having to explain to her the history of her own country.<sup>229</sup> Another problem was that, due to her lack of training, she started to develop a relationship with my main interviewee, Maria rather than remain neutral. After the first day's interviewing I felt quite despondent. However, the rapport she built with Maria, and her wide-eyed interest in Maria's life under communist rule, ultimately served us well. This was notable on the second day's interviewing, especially on the site visit to Stefan's house, where Maria had grown up with Halina and Teodor. I created a video diary, with a projective technique of interviewing Maria in the house, using each room and its remaining furniture as prompts for her to describe life with Halina, Teodor and Karolina, and what Halina had passed down to her about her married life with Stefan.<sup>230</sup> I learned that Karolina had had some form of mental breakdown around the time of her husband's death<sup>231</sup> and had a tendency to wander about the village where, on occasion, she was ridiculed and attacked. Stefan, it seemed, had built a wooden barrier alongside her bed to contain her while he was out working.

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<sup>229</sup> However, the experience provided a vivid picture of a national discourse that employed selective amnesia at politically ideological levels with the added dimension of the dual effects of a newly established nationalism (since 1992) coupled with preceding decades of communist historicism trickle-down education.

<sup>230</sup> As I'd filmed the extended interview.

<sup>231</sup> When Stefan was 17 years old



In the last room, Maria became agitated and overwhelmed when describing the death of her beloved brother, Teodor. I stopped filming but kept my digital sound recorder running. As we were about to leave Stefan's house,<sup>232</sup> Maria mentioned that the old woman who lived next door knew Stefan. This was the first time I encountered anyone who actually knew him in Poland. We went next door to find Stefania, daughter of Pawel. She told us she used to call Stefan, 'uncle' and that he called Pawel, '*Tata*' Dad. She said Pawel had been Stefan's godfather, and had looked out for him after his father died. Pawel had also held the crown over Stefan's head when he married Halina.<sup>233</sup> She recalled Halina's distress at Stefan's arrest, and that when his few letters arrived Halina would come to their house to read them in secret. Convinced now, that Stefan had lied about his nationality, we were about to leave when Stefania's daughter announced she'd found a photograph of Stefan. He had been a guest at a wedding as a single man and was pictured in the back row.



6.7

When I asked why Stefan was the only guest wearing a collar and tie, Stefania said, matter of factly, 'Because he was Polish!' More ambiguity about his national identity, which I put to use when writing in the gap of his missing few months between Soviet invasion and

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<sup>232</sup> The family still call it Stefan's house, and Maria expressed gratitude that she was able to take Stefan's surname, Motkaluk, as hers.

<sup>233</sup> A sacred tradition in the Ukrainian wedding ceremony of the Orthodox church.

occupation, and his NKVD arrest. In the course of twelve months my cultural heritage shifted from Polish to Ukrainian and back again to Polish.

A third, rather chaotic, interview was conducted with Maria over family photographs and documents, many of which she allowed me to take away.<sup>234</sup> Maria's daughter, Olana, was frequently present, as was Andriy, my driver and Volodnya, Maria's son<sup>235</sup>. Olana was exceptionally supportive in supplying historical context and filling gaps in Maria's story. Volodnya frequently held background conversations with Andriy, which were distracting but interesting insofar as I heard several mentions of Poles/Polish and Ukraine/Ukrainians.<sup>236</sup>

I also learned that Halina had been arrested and sent to Siberia on two separate occasions, the second being in Maria's memory. She recalled standing at the railway station with Teodor, both of them crying for their mother. There was much ambiguity around the circumstances of Halina's first arrest (resulting from receiving Stefan's letter in 1943), which I put down to poor translation. Believing that this visit would be my only opportunity to interview Maria, I decided to use what I had and develop the story around it.

The main outcome of my first visit to Ukraine in April/May 2016, was the overturn of Rudolf/Teodor as a ghost son. The family could not shed any light on why Stefan might have given the wrong name to the military authorities and struggled to come up with reasons for his doing so; to the point of trying to make a connection with Stefan's paternal grandfather who was named Adolf.

Thankfully, Maria's parentage was confirmed. I was concerned that her conception might have through violent means, possibly in Siberia. As it turned out, Halina had had a dalliance on her return from Siberia (as had a friend of hers) and Maria was the outcome. What impressed me, was the candour with which Maria imparted this information; I

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<sup>234</sup> Including original documents shown in 2.1. Significant photographs were Stefan in pre-war Poland, one in his army training uniform and the other with friends (this one was used to describe a scene on px). Until this moment, I had never seen anything connected to Stefan's pre-war life.

<sup>235</sup> A reflection of the generosity of Ukrainian hospitality; no-one is left outside in the cold when there's a warm fire and food available. And there was always food.

<sup>236</sup> These have been noted in the transcripts but time and resources prevented re-translation of the interviews.

speculated that communism's secularity may have influenced her social conditioning insofar as lack of shame was concerned.<sup>237</sup>

On my return to England, I reviewed Mendel's Daughter in the light of what I had learned about Halina and her three sisters. I found a connection between the Mendel family and Halina's and immediately contacted Martin Lemelman, Gusta Mendel's son, to share my news. Although not Stefan's history, his wife's father had given Gusta Mendel's family food during the war, and that I found enormously comforting.

The following year (2017), I returned to re-interview Teodor's sister, Maria Rudka. For this visit I engaged an experienced driver/translator for four days, at much greater expense. Slav was everything that Safran Foer's translator was not. He was erudite, understanding all the complexities of the region's history and experienced in guiding Polish and Polish-Jewish émigrés wishing to trace their family history. His language skills, coupled with his openness to other histories, meant that interviewing Maria could be conducted at greater depth. Of course, Maria had had a year to reflect on our first interviews and was better prepared for what was to come.

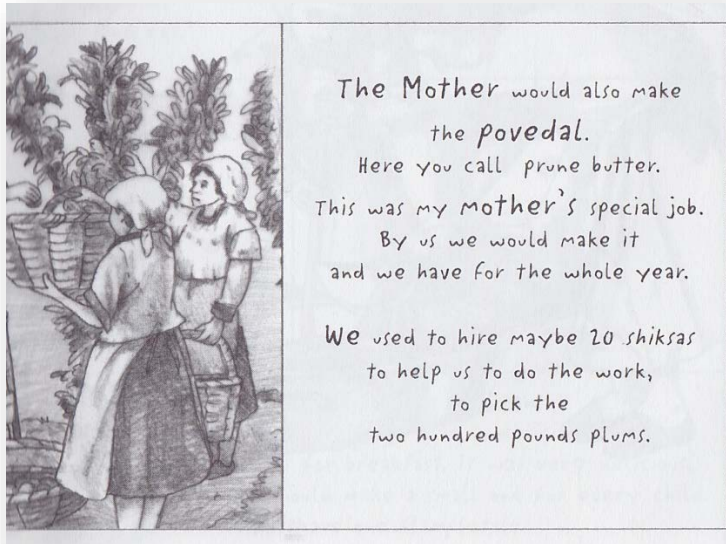
With Slav, I visited archives in Ternopil and Borschiv and found Stefan's birth record confirming his parentage as Basiyli Motkaluk and Karolina Motkaluk (nee Jurkiewicz), baptised in the Orthodox Catholic Church. I also found his father's death record, which showed he died of a pulmonary condition in 1934, when Stefan was seventeen years old. This meant that Stefan was left to manage his landholding and make a living for ten years, with a mentally deranged mother, before he married Halina. I learned from Maria that various members of Karolina's family appropriated land, which led to her derangement.

I took copied pages from Mendel's Daughter to show Maria and her daughter, and to ask if there were any other Zadarožni/Sadarožny families living in the village. They confirmed that the three sisters depicted in the book must have been Halina and her two sisters: Antonina and Maria; Halina being the intelligent one as she had received a higher level of schooling. Maria's daughter, Olana, was overwhelmed by the revelation in Lemelman's memoir

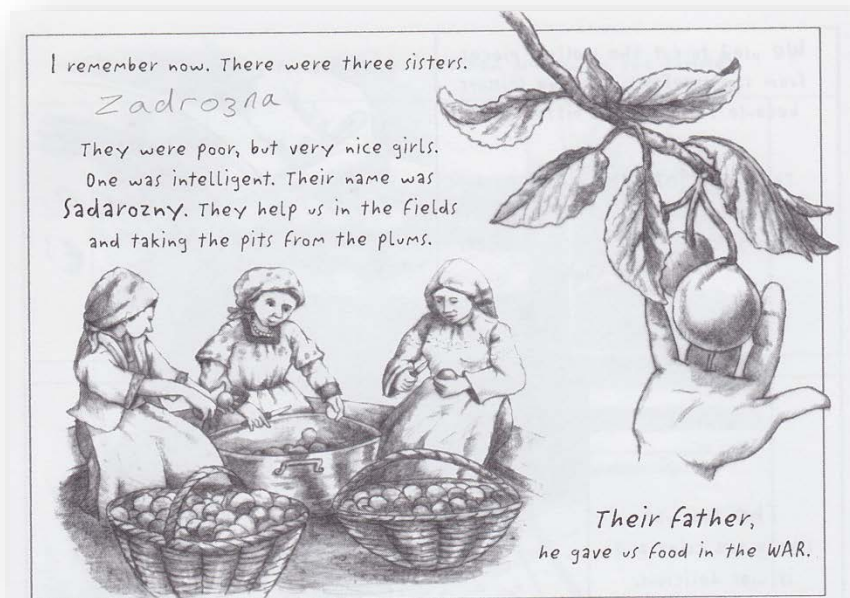
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<sup>237</sup> Halina was religious and attended clandestine services regularly. However, Serigy was baptised in her house not in church. After Teodor's died, Halina had a memorial mass read on every anniversary of his death. The priest would refuse people who wanted to use the church on that day.

that her great-grandfather had given his Jewish neighbours food during the war at a time when they were hiding in the forest and would have put Józef and his family at considerable risk. Albeit a drunk, he had been generous to all and Antonina used Józef's generosity to persuade him to let her care for Teodor.



6.8



6.9

I learned more about the circumstances of Halina's shooting, which was far more harrowing than the one I had written. She had been taken to a central location in Hermakivka, the place of the three crosses, along with two men and was to be publicly executed in broad daylight. One man was shot in the stomach, the other in the hand. Halina was wounded in the shoulder. The man with the stomach wound told her to run, which she did, and it was then that the incident with horse and cart occurred. She was taken to Mielnica, a nearby town, and on her return to Germakówka was arrested and sent to Siberia. Maria speculated that the UPA shot her, but we couldn't understand how members of a Ukrainian insurgent army (which the Soviets opposed) could sentence her to a Siberian gulag. Furthermore, by this time Halina had been instrumental in setting up the collective farm. The family could not explain.

Later, when visiting the Memorial Museum of Totalitarian Regimes: Territory of Terror in Lviv, I saw an exhibition about a local priest who was publicly executed with his family in front of his house. On engaging the curator,<sup>238</sup> he explained that the family were ostensibly shot by UPA men, but an observant villager recognised one of the executioners as an NKVD

<sup>238</sup> Himself a displaced person from Crimea.

officer. It was commonplace for the NKVD to dress in UPA uniforms and carry out public executions to discredit the organisation. One can only speculate that this might have been the case for Halina. On my return, I considered whether to rewrite Halina's shooting but decided not to as I wanted to keep the action tightly bound to Stefan's house, and was reluctant to open another political dimension to the story.

## Chapter 7 Discussion

...what is your substance, whereof are you made, that millions of strange shadows on you attend?

Alongside the creative work, this chapter on the discussion of my findings and the scholarship generated from them encapsulates, for me, the most satisfying aspects of my investigation. Here I discuss what I have learned from integrating theory and practice and how it impacted on my writing process.

Like all research, mine needed to start with some epistemological and ontological positioning, albeit grounded in relativism. But despite *a priori* awareness of the need for flexibility, I encountered challenges to my inchoate creative process, and experience.

For my critically creative project, what started as exploratory primary research into my main subject's pre-war life, rapidly impacted on my creative process. Early drafts of openings, scenes, and plot required frequent realignment to reflect new information, which resulted in at least three false starts. When first presenting my research methodology, an imagined preconception of what truth might be had to be postulated but, in the event, my chosen methodology enabled deeper epistemological explorations of previously established facts.

Early exploratory primary research subverted some imagined hypotheses and, as every new perspective arose that required interpretation, new creative variables emerged. These in themselves can be seen as self-reflexive in seemingly endless permutations. Consequently, my preferred research methodology created conditions for a new way of understanding – without judgement – to become a general theory of motivation that describes conditions, which in turn precipitates action, and evaluates motive. Introducing the concept of double dialectics meant that I could move between more objective 'known' facts and the subjectivity necessary for the memoir.

It would have been tempting to collect data that confirmed my original thoughts about my research subjects; especially as social research tends to be biased towards socio-political viewpoints. And certainly, two of my subjects' ontologies were grounded in inescapable socio-political realities. But if I had taken a foundationalist approach – starting with basic propositions in a hypothesis – it would have been exactly that, hypothetical; not proven and

likely to remain so because of the very particular nature of my project and its subjects. A foundationalist approach would have limited the creative exploration necessary, not only to discover but also to construct fillings for gaps in narrative. In addition, it would be dishonest (not to mention naïve) to attempt to pretend, in an undertaking such as this, that the researcher is not part of the research, any more than the writer is not part of the writing, or that one generation is not affected by the experiences of previous ones.

‘...most necessary ‘tis that we forget

Where tangible information emerged, which conflicted with aspects of the social reality that Stefan had presented as truth – such as his son’s real name, and the role of Halina’s sister in protecting Teodor - what I found was the opening of a new situation; a possibility for my creative work that I could not have imagined. The significant elements from Stefan’s past that contradicted what he had told me were revelations that did not totally negate previously-owned truths, but appeared through what Alain Badiou calls, an ‘opening event; simply [something] which interrupted the law, the rules, the structure of the situation, and created a new possibility.’<sup>239</sup>

The locus of the event that led to Stefan’s estrangement from his first family, and his newly constructed identity as an ethical subject started in Kresy.<sup>240</sup> The event – his arrest - precipitated a conflation of memories whereby he took into himself some of his son’s experience. This brought me to confront the logic of his memory conflation: why would Stefan conflate his son’s experience with his own in creating a fabulous myth? The myth being that it was Stefan not Teodor who was the child left behind at the age of two, who was taken in and cared for by an unmarried childless aunt. Also, that his first wife, Halina, was a husbandless servant who had an illegitimate child, Maria.

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<sup>239</sup> Blechman, M., A. Chari, et al. (2012). *Human Rights Are the Rights of the Infinite: An Interview with Alain Badiou*, Brill Academic Publishers. **20**: 162-186.

<sup>240</sup> Kresy describes part of the Second Polish Republic that was lost to Poland after World War Two as a result of the Yalta Agreement, in what Timothy Snyder describes as a shift of Poland to the west. Snyder, T. (2010). *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin*. USA, Basic Books. Prior to this shift, came the Soviet occupations of 1940 and 1941, resulting in thousands of Poles being arrested under spurious charges and deported to Siberian gulags. Many, like Stefan, never returned home.



In his discussion of *pointe de fable*,<sup>241</sup> Badiou says that a fable is a part of narrative that, 'so far as we are concerned, fails to touch on any accessible residue sticking to every obvious imaginary.'<sup>242</sup> Certainly for his second family, given the temporal and spatial distance from the opening event, there was no accessible residue. Stefan was thorough in eliminating any evidence that could provide a link to his pre-war origins as seen by his redacted army document.<sup>243</sup>

In pre-internet, pre-Glasnost days, there was little chance of anyone being able to trace his origins, despite his lifelong fear that he might be found, even in the Cotswolds, to Anthony Kershaw's incredulity.<sup>244</sup>

Stefan's forgetting however, is what Ricoeur refers to as being on the 'level where the forgetting due to effacement, and the reserve of forgetting intertwine.'<sup>245</sup> A strategy of denial is employed because, just as a 'society cannot be continually angry with itself,' nor can a human being.

On the question of forgetting and *forgiveness*, Ricoeur asks whether, if it's possible to speak of happy memories, does there exist something like happy forgetting?<sup>246</sup> And Pierre Bourdieu says that 'disconnecting the past from the present is itself a social practice' because in so doing, 'the unconscious, when exposed, reveals its structural dimensions as well as possibilities of the future for those who initially did not see the beginnings of their own positions and identities.'<sup>247</sup> As the creative work shows, for Stefan and the Polonia immigrants, they could not have foreseen the beginning of their own positions and identities but they nevertheless set about constructing them without realising their future impact. For Bourdieu, social practices are not disinterested, but '*interestedness* is not transparent.' That is, the teleological interpretation of Stefan's decision to elide his first-born son could have been

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<sup>241</sup> An element of fabulation.

<sup>242</sup> Badiou, A. (2003). Saint Paul: the foundation of universalism. Stanford, Calif, Stanford University Press. p4

<sup>243</sup> p336: 6.1

<sup>244</sup> RTM p134

<sup>245</sup> Ricoeur, P. (2004). Memory, history, forgetting. Chicago, Ill London, University of Chicago Press. p426

<sup>246</sup> Ibid.

<sup>247</sup> Tupas, T. R. F. (2008). "Bourdieu, Historical Forgetting, and the Problem of English in the Philippines." Philippine Studies 56(1): 47-67.

written as, *initially* disinterested, even necessary to Stefan's ability to survive traumatic events,<sup>248</sup> it is only when his second son is born in the relative safety of peacetime England that his early decision to forget<sup>249</sup> starts to impact on his psyche as shown in the maternity hospital scene<sup>250</sup>. Due to Stefan's inalienable values – honour, loyalty, family allegiance – his *habitus*, the way in which he became himself, is seen to be severely compromised.

But to what other end could he have created the fable about himself being adopted by an aunt?<sup>251</sup> Why did he do it? I would argue that Stefan fabulised, not just to compensate for loss of memory, but to some extent he *assigned* some of Teodor's history to himself. He unburdened himself of the imaginary that surrounded Teo's lived experience, unable to tolerate internal or external speculation on the fate of a son he couldn't protect. Although he knew his son survived the immediate aftermath of the war years, he had only one letter and two photographs as a frame of reference.

After 1950, Stefan lost touch with his pre-war family, and would not have known anything of their living conditions, or even if Teodor was alive. Stefan's character is given to suspicion and distrust, and he is seen to speculate on the possibility that Halina may have another man in her life (despite her sister's letter suggesting the contrary, and despite his own advice to her to find someone else) who may be mistreating Teodor. As far as prevailing Slavic notions of patrimony are concerned, Stefan is a failed protector of his first-born. In leaving his Polish family, repudiating his affective bonds, he may be considered an outcast, not only by the displaced Polish community in which he finds himself in England (bearing a Ukrainian name) but also by his home community. Indeed, there would have been additional pressure from the external gaze, 'the testimony of others, that supports memory, or may impose an acceptable memory on a subject.'<sup>252</sup> The fear of questions from 'others', outwith his lived experience, could be sufficient for him to feel defensive. Stefan was part of the Polonia generation, a

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<sup>248</sup> His NKVD arrest, horrendous prison conditions and journey to Siberian labour camp and his consequent experience of fighting in the war.

<sup>249</sup> On Adam's advice: RTM pp96-97 and p122

<sup>250</sup> RTM pp171-174

<sup>251</sup> The lie once told to explain away his Ukrainian nationality now becomes further reinforced.

<sup>252</sup> Ricoeur, P. (2004). Memory, history, forgetting. Chicago, Ill London, University of Chicago Press.p120

cultural phenomenon of post-war immigration to England,<sup>253</sup> who defined themselves as separate from other migrant groups insofar as they constructed their group identity as heroic Polish persons displaced by war through no fault of their own.

More dangerously, however, Stefan could have been prey to becoming an outcast to himself. By appropriating Teo's story as his own, he could protect both himself and his son by the embodiment of that story. In the creative work, I have shown how he does it by 'weaving together two subjective paths ... the flesh (*sarx*) and the spirit (*pneuma*).'<sup>254</sup> It therefore becomes real; while the spirit of his son is within Stefan, Teodor's flesh will not die.<sup>255</sup>

Returning to the concept of multi-directional memory – in terms of 'important aspect[s] of recent scholarly and imaginative approaches' – Rothberg recalls Pierre Nora's work as placing 'an emphasis on the means and mode of memory's transmission.'<sup>256</sup> I would add motive. Rather than initiating a new paradigm for his way of being – a failed father who might eventually forgive himself for existential circumstances – Stefan adjusted his memory within an existing paradigm and remained faithful to his role.<sup>257</sup>

Where Nora writes about 'the conflictual incompatibility of memories,' Rothberg recognises a 'productive interplay of disparate acts of remembrance, and an open-ended sense of the possibilities of memories and counter-memory that might allow the "revisiting" and rewriting of hegemonic sites of memory.'<sup>258</sup>

The preponderant influence for Stefan was his responsibilities as a father, as assimilated in his culture, and further acculturated by post-war hegemony in the resettled Polish community. Stefan's recall or repression of fragile memories become expressed in how he forms a new identity in order to interact within a new culture in England. He adopts the

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<sup>253</sup> Different from later (2004) economic migrants.

<sup>254</sup> Badiou, A. (2003). Saint Paul: the foundation of universalism. Stanford, Calif, Stanford University Press. p55

<sup>255</sup> 'The thought of the flesh is death; the thought of the spirit is life.' *ibid.* p69

<sup>256</sup> Rothberg, M. (2009). Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization, Stanford University Press. p270

<sup>257</sup> It is only when Stefan learns of Teodor's death that he is released from his responsibility. He is then seen to turn his face south, towards Lucia's family, and to 'Mother'.

<sup>258</sup> Rothberg, M. (2009). Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization, Stanford University Press. pp309-310

values of patriotism and nationhood as part of a group of Odyssean Refugees,<sup>259</sup> adapting to the tenets of a new social memory; ‘victims with a myth of return’ to the extent that he displays the crowned white eagle on his living room wall. He gives his second son a Polish name against the day when he will return to his homeland, but it is Lucia who realises that the return would be problematic. As the narrative unfolds, Stefan himself realises that he will never return. He remains in a cultural limbo unable to relate to his Italian wife except through re-rehearsing his wartime struggle; teaching her Polish recipes and even reminding her of Italy’s fascism. And all the while having a peacetime second son who produces a ‘singularly vivid image on the screen of an obscure past.’<sup>260</sup>

On the subject of fidelity, Badiou’s ethics of truth describe a particular type of response to an event that ‘renders visible the previously hidden contradiction or “void” of a situation to “induce” a new subject who will construct a new truth and reconstruct the social situation.’<sup>261</sup> As a consequence, the ethical subject emerges out of the investigation of gaps in the present, not only for Stefan but for his memoirist. As a researcher, and the writer of his experiences, I am doing Stefan’s remembering for him in a way that he could not have realised himself.

As later generations, we have an engagement with our parents’ traumatic pasts. Whether or not we invite – or are invited – we are its inheritors and there is a connection between ‘different eras and the unresolved past in the present.’<sup>262</sup>

Seeking to come to terms with the past involves comparative context ‘via the circulation of memories that are linked to what are only *apparently* separate histories and national or ethnic constituencies.’<sup>263</sup> Endorsing Rothberg’s assertion that aggressively foregrounding the ‘haunting past’ does not produce divisiveness, I would say that a

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<sup>259</sup> Reed-Danahay, D. and C. Brettell (2008). Citizenship, Political Engagement, and Belonging: Immigrants in Europe and the United States, Rutgers University Press.

<sup>260</sup> Halbwachs, M. and L. A. Coser (1992). On collective memory. Chicago, London, University of Chicago Press. p60

<sup>261</sup> Alain Badiou’s ‘ethics of truth’ from Rothberg, M. (2009). Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization, Stanford University Press. p272

<sup>262</sup> Ibid p276

<sup>263</sup> Ibid p272

reconciliation with the past enables trauma to be bearable, and silences to be filled in different ways.

On first arrival in England, Stefan lived among Polish men and families who shared common experiences of separation. In terms of community memory, he might have felt pressured to obliterate his family from the narrative of his life, to avoid judgement from his community in not returning home to his wife and son.<sup>264</sup> To say, 'they are all gone, there is no one there any more,'<sup>265</sup> was one way to avoid having to explain himself. Until Halina's family's letter arrived in 1949, Stefan did not know that they survived the war, and subsequent hardships under a communist regime, or that, ironically, his son became a nuclear submariner in the North Baltic Fleet in Murmansk, pointing Soviet nuclear missiles at the west where his father then lived. Nor that he was involved in the Cuban Missile Crisis. And neither Stefan nor Lucia knew that Stefan's first family remained in his ancestral home and made a good life for themselves.

Conflicts of memory over conflicts of territory lead to displacement – and in wartime, men leave their land and families – but in this case, Stefan's conflating of histories to become a new ethical subject was never a battle of contested memories over territorial rights; I have shown it as more an internal reconciliation which meant that whilst he embodied his son's experiences, he could keep him safe.

During the war, the very land on which Stefan stands, which he owns, and which bestows his identity as a Pole, is under threat. Pawel tells Stefan that he must decide who he is,<sup>266</sup> because in times of conflict few people have the luxury of neutrality. Once the political protection afforded by his Ukrainian identity through his name and lineage no longer served him, Stefan reassumed his identity as Polish but he no more belonged to that migrant community in England than he did to the English community in which he lived, and to which his children were attempting to integrate. His identity seems constantly vulnerable to moments of

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<sup>264</sup> He confides only to his friend, Adam that he had a son. Adam is the character who advises Stefan to release Halina from their marriage contract, and to find another man. Despite taking Adam's advice, Stefan is conflicted when, in 1949, he is seen to view Maria's presence as evidence of Halina's infidelity. An alternative reading here might be that Stefan does not wish to be seen as a cuckold.

<sup>265</sup> RTM p175, Afterword: p292

<sup>266</sup> RTM p87

aporia. Although Stefan identified as Polish all his life, as attested by his documents, and supported by interview data, he had a Ukrainian father and name; a dangerous nationality to have in the Second Polish Corps. In England, he is shown as being an alien among aliens, married to an alien, an eternal 'other' who cannot even claim his heroic heritage. His 'unified reaction [therefore] to outside events [are] defensiveness; categorising all events as threats coming through difference.'<sup>267</sup>

However, the differences between my chief protagonists, Stefan and Lucia, do not rest solely on national or cultural differences, but on relational differences at a more domestic level: their coming together was based on desire predicated on their sexual identities. It is on the level of individuated memory that this discussion now moves.

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<sup>267</sup> Halbwachs, M. and L. A. Coser (1992). On collective memory. Chicago, London, University of Chicago Press. p78

Well! Do you remember this man?

To create multiple layers of meaning in the creative work, I sought a way of presenting alternative points of view for Stefan and Lucia, based on indeterminate sexual identities, which in turn led to the disablement of fully realised sexuality for them both.

Using the dialectical image of the opening photograph (7.1) in the creative work - which stands for dialectic in standstill, married to the theology that shaped their lives - I created an 'opening to the past ... achieved ... through a related experience of the present,'<sup>268</sup> or at least their present. That is, I showed how historically-constructed schemata carried by individuals directly influenced their decisions and, ultimately, sense of being. I suggest that this could be the case, not only for my protagonists, but for me (the author-as-producer), and for the reader.



7.1

This is because, in investigating memorials, memories and objects left behind, in a wide context, we can more fully explore and exploit new ways of understanding. Taking the notion of textual intervention, as a driver for creative possibilities, I examined four possible

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<sup>268</sup> Using, as a metaphor, 'the phantasmagoric appearance of a new Parisian arcade plow[ed] over the remnants of an older city in older passages.' In other words, the masquerade of conventional sexuality covering lived and witnessed experiences in a previous time and different place. Max Pensky (Tactics of Remembrance: Proust, Surrealism, and the Origin of the *Passagenwerk*) in Steinberg, M. P. (1996). Walter Benjamin and the demands of history. Ithaca, London, Cornell University Press. p165

interpretations of this photograph – Stefan gazing directly and seductively into a camera – to provide a foundational explanation of the changing sexual dynamics (and identities) of my protagonists’ relationship. This helped to articulate ways in which family folklore, or myth, could be made to work for their narratives by tracing teleological alternatives for them as characters.

In this type of construction, using only one theory might have obscured knowledge of other aspects or facts, occurring not only in the minds of the original trail-layers – the subjects of my work – but also for a contemporary audience for post-memoir. Through the application of a range of theories inherent in the work of Elizabeth Grosz,<sup>269</sup> James Fentress and Jeffrey Blustein, it was possible to reach for a double dialectic through which to produce complex multiple readings with the power to influence established paradigms and develop new ontologies for my characters.

In borrowing a creative device from Walter Benjamin – that of producing a montage of possible events – I freed an object (the photograph) from a ‘history that [had] tied itself to the contemplation of a single event’<sup>270</sup> and ‘trick[ed] the dream world into revealing its construction.’<sup>271</sup>

To place it in context, this photograph was purported to have been sent by Stefan to Lucia in 1949, which she always said was the first notification she received that he had survived the war. What resulted from the exchange of this object was the bringing together of the two individuals who eventually married and raised a family in post-war England.<sup>272</sup> As RTM shows, there is a difference of opinion about who sent the photograph to whom, and when, which I have deliberately left ambiguous.

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<sup>269</sup> Despite Anthony Auerbach’s view that ‘dialectical transfiguration cannot be attributed to method, as if it could be accomplished by dialectics, or by psychoanalytic introspection’ nevertheless it is a useful device to explore these possibilities for creative directions:

Auerbach, A. (2007). "Imagine no Metaphors: the Dialectical Image of Walter Benjamin." Image [ & ] Narrative Thinking Pictures(18).

<sup>270</sup> Ferris, D. S. (2008). The Cambridge Introduction to Walter Benjamin. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. p83

<sup>271</sup> Ibid. p119

<sup>272</sup> Notwithstanding that a 2016 interview revealed that the photograph had been sent by Stefan to Lucia while he was recovering from wounds in Italy *during* the war.



Note the sensuality of the image. Loaded with meaning, it shows Stefan as a young man lying prone in pyjamas, his right arm extended along his flank, his left lying languidly on a pillow. He appears relaxed and comfortable, looking straight at the camera, and behind it to the photographer; a seductive impression. The photograph actually disables him by showing Stefan in a passive and non-typical masculine position. This becomes significant as the discussion moves to who sent the photograph, and to whom.<sup>273</sup> Knowing the myth which accompanies the picture, it can be speculatively referred to as an epiphany or pivotal moment to providing dialectics in standstill<sup>274</sup> between a past, present and future. That is, the photograph was taken in the past, as the result of a past event<sup>275</sup> - prior to the acquisition of dynamic (contemporaneous) present propensity – which, when sent to another person, had the power to alter the futures of both the sender and the recipient. But as with all creative journeys – temporal and spatial – there are authorial decisions to be made as to which trail to follow. And how many.

Therefore, the construction of new meaning for this photograph is itself artful because, while it allows an interpretative link to the past (an image of a subject from the past, taken in the past), it presents itself today as an object that has created a new future. This new future is not only procreative, in the transitive sense through producing offspring, but also *creative* when the photograph is invested with a new form of expression. As John Berger points out, '[e]verything around the image is part of its meaning ... everything around it confirms and consolidates its meaning'.<sup>276</sup>

But in a written creative work, based on an image of uncertain provenance, it is language that reconstructs the world in which the image was produced. The photograph becomes an imagetext in two ways: first, exposing and resisting 'the conventions of family

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<sup>273</sup> There is a deliberate ambiguity in RTM as to when the photograph was passed. Although Lucia has a photograph in her notebook, it is never made clear what the photograph is or whether it is the photograph that Stefan slipped into the envelope at the last minute. Furthermore, when juxtaposed with the photograph Stefan sent to his first wife, Halina (full military uniform with medals) it adds to the psychosexual contrast between his relationship with his first, and second wife.

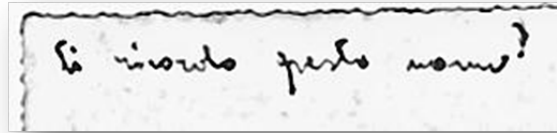
<sup>274</sup> *umfunktionierung*

<sup>275</sup> The event has been accepted as a war injury of unknown nature or origin.

<sup>276</sup> Berger, J. (2008). *Ways of Seeing*, Penguin Adult.

photography and hegemonic familial ideologies<sup>277</sup> and then, its function in creating fractured subjectivities for my characters.

Its greatest capacity to hold a contemporary audience in thrall is through its hermeneutic possibilities – albeit *creatively* – because it carries an inscription on its reverse:



## 7.2

The Italian writing can be read imperatively: *ti ricordo questo uomo!* or interrogatively as *ti ricordi questo uomo?*<sup>278</sup> The significance of this difference is that immediately any ensuing narrative is altered.

In the second interpretation, the sender can be seen as male petitioner: it's been a long time, will she still remember? She may have married someone else, as Stanczek points out (RTM p109). There is little sense of control in Stefan's voice as petitioner. His state can be understood as *erlebnis*; simply lived or witnessed. On the other hand, an alternative interpretation could lead to an assumption that perhaps Lucia made a promise to remember him, in which case the inscription becomes imperative: '*remember* this man!' Stefan now appears to a contemporary audience not as *erlebnis* but as *erfahrung*; the stuff of storytelling because something can be gained from it. He had an experience, probably sexual, with the recipient of the photograph, possibly under the elliptical arch in Jelsi (RTM p61).

Now let us consider another pair of variables: the assumption is that in both the aforementioned cases, the sender of the photograph is Stefan; he both sent it and wrote the inscription. What, though, would the story be if it was Lucia who sent the photograph to Stefan? What if it was she who wrote from a state of *erlebnis*, interrogatively: 'do you remember this man?' or, from a state of *erfahrung*, imperatively: 'remember this man!' Stefan took something from her and now she wants him to take responsibility for their past.

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<sup>277</sup> Hirsch, M. (1997). Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory, Harvard University Press. p8

<sup>278</sup> *Ricordo*: to remember as in Remember this man! or I think of this man!  
*Ricorda*: to remind, as in Remember this man?

What effect would gender politics have on these historic states? What different stories would need to be told to navigate a reader through these domestic issues?

As a research practitioner, basing the story on family folklore, I have only *reportage* to rely on, as neither Stefan nor Lucia are alive. The preferred version within the family (reported by Lucia as storyteller) is that Stefan sent the photograph to her, but cursory handwriting analysis suggests that it is not Stefan's writing. The grammar is flawed, which may suggest it was written by someone whose first language was not Italian; perhaps he asked someone else to write it for him. However, what is 'known' about Lucia, the native Italian speaker is that she received only elementary education, and that habitually only local dialect was spoken in the village where she lived. We could consider that it was Lucia's linguistic error and that she wrote the inscription. Or that someone else wrote it for Stefan.

Any story that emanates from such a beginning is immediately contingent on an *assumption* of the truth of the matter which, it has been revealed, is not entirely reliable. Furthermore, due to possible gender bias in the petitioner/controller dynamic, the significance of language is emphasised. As Benjamin says, 'our image of happiness is thoroughly coloured by the time to which the course of our existence has assigned us.'<sup>279</sup> We need to understand the text in its historical context with the additional labour of filling the gaps as faithfully as possible to its predominant contemporaneous cultural norms.

The author-as-producer, in Bertolt Brecht's notion of re-functioning<sup>280</sup> takes these gaps in knowledge to make creative decisions. Through dialectical techniques, modern-day political sensibilities from the author-as-producer can be brought to previously historically-defined events. The author is now in possession of several variables, but they are only to be glimpsed at the moment they are lost. And so it is in the creative work; the truth of the matter is continually in flux, from the first page where the photograph's trajectory is contested between Lucia and Stefan. Each glimpse brings a different political attitude to work, which becomes a production *in* its time and releases the image, which is now no longer tied *to* its time. However, if a single narrative flow is decided, all other possibilities are lost both to the writer and to the

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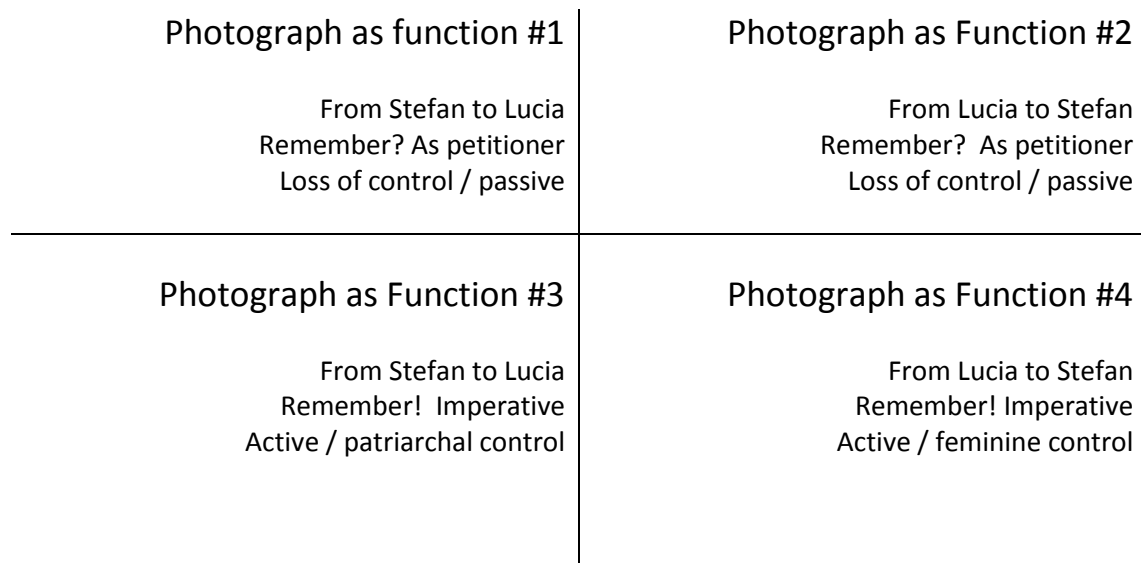
<sup>279</sup> Benjamin, W. (1999). *Illuminations*, Pimlico. p245

<sup>280</sup> *umfunktionierung*

reader, unless some way of presenting all or any of them simultaneously can be found, which is where multi-directional memory serves well.

To illustrate these glimpses, I explored how the function of four possible variables,<sup>281</sup> or temporal indices, could operate to provide creative possibilities by devising a double dialectic.

The four possibilities outlined in Fig 3, present two sets of parallel dialectics in an Hegelian sense, which have the potential to produce thesis/antithesis - that is, either/or binaries - the thesis being supplied by the existing myth told by Lucia that Stefan sent the photograph to her.



**Fig 3**

Each of the interpretations reveal how the characters' inner sexualities can be disabled by elements (such as language, wartime events or Catholicism) which operate to condition their life choices.

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<sup>281</sup> These bifurcations arise from Lucia's testimony however there could be others. For instance, what if her father, Giovanni, had written 'Remember this man?' on the back of the photograph? Or even the person who took the photograph? These assumptions, of course, would lead to different stories.

The first temporal index of the photograph functions as an 'image of happiness bound up indissolubly with the image of redemption.'<sup>282</sup> The reading here would be that Stefan sent the photograph to Lucia as petitioner, using the interrogative, 'do you remember this man?' He seeks redemption from a debt that must be repaid by him. He made promises which he failed to keep; maybe he felt he took something from the vulnerable female during the war years so is uncertain of his reception.

Messianic power, however weak in this case, would be invested in the male as deliverer or saviour *coupled* with his ability to satisfy desire. But Benjamin says '*that* claim cannot be settled cheaply'<sup>283</sup> and one can see how costly this type of messianic heroism can be: if the male saviour sets himself upon a pedestal as Freud outlines in a romantic reading of love (anaclitic) and as Lacan ascribes the patriarchal order, then the female (the feminine) would perforce have to abject herself and not present as an equal partner, but rather be required to take an inferior or child-like role in order to be rescued. This perspective lends itself to proposing the abject female subject as a narcissistic woman; written as 'plainly seeking [*herself*] as a love object.'<sup>284</sup> Where Lucia's abjection is most clearly written is on her arrival in England in 1950. Not only is she portrayed as friendless and afraid at Victoria Station but her situation at Long Furlong, whilst sustaining her narcissism for a short while, is quickly overwhelmed by succeeding events.

In the only room she's ever had for herself alone, a full-length mirror reflects Lucia's image. She is shown fetishising her belongings to the point of categorising her body parts in the separation of her hairbrush from her intimate clothing. The easy dismissal of the ravioli cutter suggests a denial of her previous domestic role as she waits to be rescued by her handsome soldier. This new identity is later further reinforced by Barbara's gifts of discarded expensive clothing to Lucia. However, the second-handedness of this idyllic period foreshadows Stefan's disclosure about his first wife and son. From that moment on, Lucia's

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<sup>282</sup> Ferris, D. S. (2008). The Cambridge Introduction to Walter Benjamin. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. p245

<sup>283</sup> Hanssen, B. (2006). Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project, Bloomsbury Academic. p197

<sup>284</sup> Grosz, E. and J. Lacan (1990). Jacques Lacan: a feminist introduction. London, Routledge. p126 from Freud 1914a:88

identity will be under erasure as she perceives herself, and future children, to be second-best in terms of cultural purity, and even worse, denied primogeniture status.

In this first reading, Stefan's role as passive is clearly reflected in the loneliness and isolation of his ignominious return to the single men's hostel at Babdown, exacerbated by his role in the Kershaw household where he struggles for supremacy over a predominantly female household. His futile attempt to regain masculine control results in the explosive crisis with Anthony Kershaw on Christmas Eve, leaving both he and Lucia homeless. Whilst he could not have foreseen the outcome of his impulsivity, he has, unwittingly, achieved sole possession of the object of his desire.

If we speculate that Lucia sent the photograph, as petitioner, to Stefan, she could be viewed as suffering loss of control because she was not decisive in taking control of her actions in the past on the night she dressed the dead virgin, Melinda and allowed Stefan to pull her under the elliptical arch. As a result, she lacks personal agency – and cannot entertain a new relationship - because she feels she made a mistake and is desperate to make things right by sending a photograph. Lucia gave something of herself during the war years and in so doing, pledged herself to a soldier: Stefan. She has been left behind, waiting to see if her investment will be rewarded with his fealty. In this iteration, we can read Benjamin's 'fight for the crude and material things without which no refined and spiritual things could exist.'<sup>285</sup> Lucia *needs* to be married, not only to regain her honour, but to preserve her future. The dichotomy can be seen as survival at its most fundamental – simple economics – which for many may be enough in the short term. However, there are long term implications for future choice and conduct, especially in the face of the harshest judge of all, *oneself*. To fulfil and satiate the longing which gives rise to nostalgia, a restoration of refinement and spirituality is necessary for Lucia to engender moral improvement and reconciliation with herself. Acceptance of her responsibility would function as a preventative against projecting blame for her decision onto others through passive control. But Lucia's character is written as not prone to accepting personal responsibility, any more than her mother, Antonietta, who routinely retired with a migraine when things became unpleasant. In this reading, Lucia, as many women in similar situations,

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<sup>285</sup> This being the 'most inconspicuous of all transformations.' Ferris, D. S. (2008). The Cambridge Introduction to Walter Benjamin. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. p246

defaults to passive-aggression towards Stefan, and towards the established Polish women whom she is expected to respect. Lucia seeks out those, like her, who are marginalised in her new culture: Lorna, the English woman married to an ebullient Pole, Betty, the strong Welsh woman married to a tolerant Pole, and Gerda, the German woman married to a disappointing Englishman. It is only when Lina arrives, and Lucia is secure in a home with her own front door, and with a new baby, that she achieves a degree of control.

The third interpretation shows Lucia as female protagonist in control; this version announces a state of emergency as ‘a conception of history.’<sup>286</sup> The historical norm in this case can be seen as the fascism of the female controlling body as a form of dominating the male. The symbolism of the controlling female is entirely consistent with the greater controlling fascism that prevailed at the time, both dramatising and romanticising female strength during a period when women were frequently carrying the bulk of domestic and economic burden. Certainly, in pre-war Italy, Lucia is portrayed as the economic lynch-pin of the Caruso family, heroically working through the night and commanding the respect of her immediate family and the rest of Jelsi. Furthermore, this interpretation of the image permits a degree of verification – albeit unstable – through Lucia’s subsequent romantic re-telling of her story: the heroic female who had supported her family throughout the war with the domestic industry of her dressmaking.<sup>287</sup>

This reading also supports a retrospective construction of the character’s strength in the face of showing what the self should *be* by virtue of what she has *done* in the past. In this interpretation, Lucia has transgressed certain socio-religious boundaries – in particular the Madonna/whore dichotomy – by sacrificing her purity but recovers any possible negative attitudes towards herself by affirming her value as a human being through her industry, and her worth by being able to support her family. Thus, to some extent she recovers her socio-religious status as Madonna even though she has bartered her virginal status. *Postino Di Pietro*’s erotic reminiscence of Lucia’s provocative clothing in church on Sunday morning

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<sup>286</sup> Benjamin, W. (1999). *Illuminations*, Pimlico. p245

<sup>287</sup> While much of her work was dress-making, she had been trained in tailoring and, in turn, trained several girls at a time who were apprenticed to her. Italian translation accords the feminine, *sarta*, the title of dressmaker but the masculine, *sarto*, the elevated title of tailor, suggesting a greater degree of skill and knowledge.

describes the ambiguity of her identity. In this state of emergency, Lucia is fighting for her existence with her public voice, as performed through her attire.<sup>288</sup>

In the small southern Italian village where Lucia lived, any immediate matrimonial avenue has been denied to her due to the loss of the emblem of her respectability, and reliability. The post-war social memory that the village carries supports the notion that despite the arrival and departure of both German and Allied armies, *no Italian girl was ever violated*.<sup>289</sup>

In addition, given that in this family an older sister (Concetta) had already died at the hands of an abusive husband whom she would not leave in case it transmitted signs of unreliability for her remaining four unmarried sisters, social memory further reinforces the reading. When asking why social groups remember this rather than that, Fentress explains that group narratives vary according to the purpose they serve, not only for the identity of the individual within the group but also for the group's identity. Peasant memory focuses on minor affairs, as in this case, where the war is a backdrop to the everyday issue of relationship description and positioning. Within a tradition of family folklore, the positioning of Lucia's relationship with a soldier would have a bearing on the dignity, not only of the individual concerned (the female protagonist) but also reflect on the family. This is something that Giovanni, as a returned émigré, is better placed to recognise when he perceives the photographer's probing questions, addressing Lucia as *signorina*, Miss, and asking who she is going to join abroad. Giovanni further settles matters for Lucia – especially with Antonietta - by saying that everyone will be told that she was married by proxy prior to her departure.

In this iteration the female must be viewed as in control and not at the mercy of the gossips. The symbolism here is unmistakably that the family has not allowed one of itself

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<sup>288</sup> Lucia is frequently placed in a public sphere where she interacts vocally and commercially with her clients.

<sup>289</sup> First person narratives of people who remember the events of 1943 and the arrival of the German army recall the extent that families went to in order to protect their women and girls from violation. As Stefan is told on p28 the girls are just returned from a countryside farm and still have straw in their hair from hiding in a barn. Despite several inconsistencies in interviewees' accounts, the overall memory was that nothing worse than pillaging took place. The two girls from Naples appear not to have escaped unscathed, suggesting a partisan attitude to this very loaded topic, which encompasses both masculine and feminine gendered positions.



(therefore all of itself) to be abused. An analysis of this proposition would hold that the present would need to be legitimised by marriage if the future is to guarantee any form of security.

The final interpretation, that Stefan sent the photograph to Lucia - *Remember! I remind you of what happened; you are contracted to me* – relies on the notion that something irreplaceably precious is held hostage by the male protagonist: Stefan. The cultural treasure that he has taken is, again, her virginity and on the surface, he can be seen as victor because by placing her in the role of Madonna, although subduer of the male as Antichrist, he effectively disempowers her by inhibiting any notion of an active sexuality from which she might obtain power because she has not given it willingly. As Lacan points out, 'to be a subject or "I" at all, the subject must take up a sexualised position, identifying with the attributes socially designated for men or women.'<sup>290</sup> By appropriation Stefan, and no other, becomes custodian of Lucia's virtue. She remains in the status of Madonna, pure and unstained, but has no voice or agency. As Stefan points out shortly after their son is born, and Lucia is marooned on her maternity hospital bed in what she perceives as a hostile environment, she is a fish, she has no voice. Far from her home and family, she is at her most vulnerable. Consequently, her rational conscious subject has been decentred. It has been reduced to a speechless metaphor: an eternally objectified *pieta*, projecting a silent constant sorrow above the inaccessibility of a lifeless relationship.

For Benjamin, as a document of barbarism, this would fail in terms of refinement because a patriarchal class or, in this case, a phallogentric discourse, can be viewed as a tool of the ruling classes; a controlling patriarchy. The female subjectivity here is predicated on a bourgeois notion of purity. The event, of course, which has not ceased to be victorious, is religion, which places the 'socio-linguistic genesis of [Lucia's] identity' in a Catholic religious orthodoxy, one that demands virginity as proof of fidelity to the marriage bed. A state of emergency therefore arises when a conception of history is presented that is not in keeping with this insight, which is possibly why Lucia and Stefan hid their marriage certificate from their children.

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<sup>290</sup> Grosz, E. and J. Lacan (1990). Jacques Lacan: a feminist introduction. London, Routledge. p148

In this reading, the historical norm is of passive feminine control; the passive fascism of the female controlling body that is considered pure and any attempt on it experienced as a transgression. Lucia is not childlike submissive but, rather, so highly elevated as to be psychologically out of male reach. So, although Stefan has satiated his desire, by taking advantage of Lucia on Christmas Eve, he has secured her martyrdom. Furthermore, from the moment she becomes a mother, she will be assigned a role that has the capacity to work, to comfort, but ultimately not to be equal; a vacillating position that endows her with an authoritative role but no voice with which to discharge her desire, except through the exploitation of its properties. This she does on the birth of her third child, when she acquiesces to his request to name the child, Carol. This scene articulates the fluidity of her position, still spiritually connected to her baby who is named for Stefan's mother. Stefan himself is disabled because he is both dependent on Lucia for the gratification of his needs – as he is on Halina to care for his mother – but simultaneously estranged from her essence through his own conflicted position.

A relationship predicated on these diffused sexual values is perforce vulnerable as Lucia acquires her maternal role, which is vested with some authority because she will be subject to both idealised objectification and its inevitable critique by Stefan and the Polish community. Given the likelihood of Lucia's unconscious understanding of this cultural position, Lucia, as a character, can choose to embrace her suffering whilst simultaneously seeking covert methods to navigate its uncomfortable terrain. This, she seeks to do with Betty as an ally, and with Feliks as an admirer.

The discussion of a single image shows how the montage effect of comparing and contrasting interpretations of the same object has 'tricked the dream world' into freeing the object from its historical construction, in its turn denying the spiritual qualities which bind it to a fascist agenda, simply by a twist here and there.

Benjamin believed a montage of effects could create a form of temporary alienation (*gestus*) in an audience, which, while recognising the disruption it brings, also has the power to create meaning.

Presenting these shifting perspectives in my post-memoir, demands that the reader considers the whole situation rather than individual parts of it. In returning to Benjamin for

understanding the potential of these dialectical intersections, it can be seen that time provides:

A kind of return to a direct experience of historical time perceived in the qualitative difference of each of its instants, since each is loaded with a unique specificity, but hence each also opens toward a multiplicity of possible futures. As soon as the present instant stops being seen as a simple transition between the preceding one and the subsequent one, historical time can no longer be presented, like physical time, as a homogeneous sequence of formally identical units.<sup>291</sup>

In Hegelian terms, this offering of manifold meanings can satisfy both the preservation of the lifework, which is the work of Life Writing (its elevation but also its cancellation) enabling the author to reach for a new way of understanding. Simultaneous creation through double dialectic offers the author-as-producer a view of potential characterisations with a narrative thread that presents constantly shifting perspectives, depending on different situations.

What is clear, is the destructive nature of any of the presentations in the lifework depicted here. Where relationships are predicated on the will to power through knowledge and a culture of blame, as they were in the period under investigation, the resulting effect can be seen as disabling the sexuality of both Stefan *and* Lucia. Like the damask of their curtains, there was always a discernible right side and wrong side.

Ultimately, the effects of the monolithic structure that precipitated conflict at the beginning of Teodor's life is experienced through the final official letter closing it.

Once Stefan has discovered that Teodor is dead, not only does he realise he no longer needs to protect him - and is thus released - but Teodor then becomes a ghost from the past, and that Stefan in the present 'cannot claim a unity with the past, neither a personal nor a collective one. He is different. The world is altered.'<sup>292</sup> The myth of return is denied, and with that denial emerges the possibility of yet another reinvention. It is at this point that Lucy identifies her opportunity to prioritise her own son over Halina's and to commandeer the

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<sup>291</sup> Mosès, S. p. (2009). The angel of history: Rosenzweig, Benjamin, Scholem. Stanford, Calif.; London, Stanford General Eurospan [distributor]. p11

<sup>292</sup> Leslie, E. (2014). Derelicts: Thought Worms from the Wreckage, Unkant Publishers. p11

remaining years of her marriage. Stefan is seen to turn his face towards the south, to Italy, to Lucia's family and to 'Mother'.

## Chapter 8 Conclusion

In terms of the context for the project I identified above, this investigation contributes to a greater understanding of the impact of war and displacement on ordinary people's lives. It also contributes a way to understand how creative writing can move beyond empiricism through the application of multi-directional memory to present a polyphonic text across countries, cultures, and identities.

This is significant because we live in a time of greater mobility for forced migrants, often displaced by war. With the prevalence of war and the presence of displaced people in our midst, the memoir contained here presents an attempt to understand, without judgment, why people do the things they do, and make the decisions they make, in extreme circumstances.

When engaging with one's own parents' traumatic past, it is not long before the realisation emerges that one is both beneficiary and victim; both inside and outside the trauma. Being both inside and outside, the double dialectic I employed, allowed the possibility of escape from some Westernised binary models to produce complex multiple readings that influenced established paradigms, and which developed new ontologies for my characters. For characters is what they became. Through a double dialectic, my changing position – intellectually poised between stranger and friend – enabled me to be both inside and outside challenging decisions; both theoretical and creative. In recognising the hybridity and uniqueness of my own cultural position, and my unique position, I was able to examine at close hand, 'the connections between [my parents'] racial categories of the past and contemporary cultural discourse,'<sup>293</sup> and my own as a second-generation immigrant of dual heritage trying to assimilate a third culture. I also realised that where an ambiguous past lends itself to internal and external speculation, it can lead to a concomitant yearning for acceptance that comes from normalcy.

Technically, I found structural answers for my writing in the concept of multi-directional memory, constructed out of 'networks of spatially and temporally differentiated

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<sup>293</sup> Moscovici, C. (2002). Double dialectics: between universalism and relativism in Enlightenment and postmodern thought, Rowman & Littlefield. p97

moments.’<sup>294</sup> The resulting polyphonic text, in which perspectives shift, therefore has the potential to increase readers’ inferential capacity through their own subjective perceptions.

I have shown that it is possible, through the limited use of visual culture, to see how a montage of possible events can be produced by freeing an object – in this case, a photograph as an example of dialectic in standstill – from a history that has [hitherto] tied it to the contemplation of a single event<sup>295</sup> simply by a twist of the kaleidoscope. A twist which enables a new story to come into being because the photograph I used as an entry point for the multidirectional confluence of disparate historical imaginaries, released the image – no longer tied *to* its time – to become a production *in* its time.

I have produced a hybrid post-memoir that carries the essence of my father’s story forward, without appropriating it, and without having my own story displaced by it. I have shown that the world that existed between me as a second-generation immigrant, and my parents-as-others, is a dialectic that adds reality to this discourse, despite my subjectivity being inextricably entangled in their lives, and despite the perils of adopting a largely relativist epistemology. For my purposes, double dialectics provided nuances that mediated ‘between relativism and objectivism to offer creative avenues of thought [not only for] contemporary ethical and epistemological problems,’<sup>296</sup> but also for writing a creative post-memoir that operates beyond its empirical phase.

Adopting a post-Enlightenment anti-positive position opened the creative possibilities of re-writing a set of experiences that my two protagonists could not possibly have experienced as historical moments insofar as they were living them in their present, with only their individual cultural perspectives on which to rely. Their ‘Angel of History’ was not yet looking back; that moment was to come once they had made their respective journeys to England.

This position brought challenges because any fixed epistemological and ontological positions - be they positivist or relativist – are open to critique, not least that of ‘cherry-

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<sup>294</sup> Rothberg, M. (2009). Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization, Stanford University Press. p271

<sup>295</sup> Benjamin, W. (1999). Illuminations, Pimlico.

<sup>296</sup> Moscovici, C. (2002). Double dialectics: between universalism and relativism in Enlightenment and postmodern thought, Rowman & Littlefield. p5

picking'. However, Stefan's history did not happen in one moment in time but developed along a continuum consequently it was necessary to identify and adopt approaches that allowed my character-led creative work to take its own unique shape in structure and plot.

A foundationalist approach, such as social research, which tends to be biased towards socio-political viewpoints – starting with basic propositions in a hypothesis – would undoubtedly have limited the creative exploration necessary, not only to discover but also to construct fillings for my subjects' narrative gaps. Despite my two main research subjects' ontologies being grounded in certain inescapable socio-political realities, identity formation did not sit exclusively under socio-politics. In addition, I, as a researcher, was implicated in Stefan's story and it would have been dishonest (not to mention naïve) to attempt to pretend that I was not part of the research, any more than I, as author-producer, was not part of the writing, or that my generation was not affected by the experiences of the previous one.

Taking a relativist approach meant that where one hypothesis was disproved a different point of view was created. This is fundamental to the neo-narrative creative process because it complicates the immigrant story and challenges traditional historiography.

My approach therefore enabled an epistemological exploration of established facts. My flexible research methodology created conditions for a new way of understanding – without judgement – to become a general theory of motivation that described conditions that precipitated Stefan's and Lucia's actions, and evaluated their motives. Introducing the concept of double dialectics into my research methodology meant that I could move between the more objectively 'known' facts of my parents' lives and their subjective lived experience.

On a personal level, through my research and writing, I have come, not only to understand my own beginning, but to trust it. What I discovered was the heartrending realisation that, without needing to be anything other than he really was, Stefan would probably have received the understanding and comfort he deserved from those who loved him, and the sense of belonging that I believe he lacked. From the outset, my research was a desire, not to judge my father, but to understand why a man would distance himself from the love and comfort of a family.<sup>297</sup>

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<sup>297</sup> He couldn't have known this would be its impact.

In the process of writing the post-memoir – a *bildungsroman* of sorts – it became apparent that this distancing is one of many generalities that can be made from the particular stories it contains, and it would be interesting to test this hypothesis, using the post-memoir, with a selected sample of readers.

It would also be fruitful to explore the notion of internalised displacement in the field of memoir, and writing from the perspective of a dual heritage, second-generation immigrant experiencing an alien culture. And if a gap in literature is found to exist, to gauge whether a post-memoir such as mine can contribute to filling that gap. Because it is within and between the gaps, that ordinary people slip, survive, and create lives and identities for themselves. In their struggles, appearing as futile as Kafka's beetle, scuttling impotently through their newly constructed lives, they are oblivious to the inherent heroism of their experience because it does not fit within prevailing societal constructs of memory.

The memoir shows that in extreme circumstances comes the emergence of narrative expediency. When Kresy disappeared from the map of Poland, displaced Poles were told they could go to any country that would take them.<sup>298</sup> For Stefan this meant that core defining characteristics such as nationality and cultural heritage, which he never wholly owned, was again denied; indeed, like his second son.

Looking back, like Paul Klee's 'Angel of History', at Benjamin's proposal that 'historical progress is a cruel illusion...', I would argue that drawing parallels between Stefan's experience and migration is not the most helpful way forward. War will always be with us it seems, but it is our response to trauma that determines our agency. In tracing and presenting Stefan's teleology, I have shown that his life was maybe not worse but different from the one he originally envisaged for himself. He was undoubtedly a casualty of war, but he did retain personal agency. Those who do not have an identity must make it. An early reader of the manuscript said, 'He never stood a chance, did he? I wonder if his life would have been any better if he'd gone back or moved to Italy?' No-one can answer that. I would argue, though, that he did stand a chance, and not only that, he adjusted to a new life; as his first-born son did behind the Iron Curtain. Because that's what human beings do.

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<sup>298</sup> Some committed suicide when they learned there was no return to the country they had fought for.



The hybrid post-memoir fulfils its aim to a large extent in that it shows how people's motivations operate under extreme pressure.

I said earlier that I discovered enough material to fill a dozen books. The one that most impresses upon me is the story of those left behind. I was able to present some of Teodor's life in the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, but Halina remains a marginal character. She was a strong intelligent woman who lost her husband, survived Soviet and Nazi invasion, was shot, endured two sentences in a Siberian gulag, adored her son, cared for a demented mother-in-law, helped to set up a collective farm, fed Ukrainian insurgents, and she had a beautiful singing voice. What's not to like?

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## Appendices

1. Chronology<sup>299</sup>
2. Selected reading
3. Respondent research summary and generic consent form
  - a. Italian translations
  - b. Ukrainian translations
4. Interview schedule<sup>300</sup>

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<sup>299</sup> Information regarding living subjects is available in the public domain.

<sup>300</sup> Under the terms and conditions of the interview consent form, electronic interview data and their transcriptions are to be destroyed within seven years from the date of collection or on completion of the thesis, whichever is the soonest. Consequently, no direct link exists between the content of the interview transcripts and creative use of them as source material; information cannot be directly attributable to any individual research subject.

Express permission has been granted by the Rudka family to use Halina Motkaluk's personal letter content verbatim in the memoir.

Express permission has been granted by Peter Grzelinski, sole surviving son of Feliks Grzelinski to use his father's memoir transcript verbatim.

## 1. Chronology

Date	Event	Location	Notes / sources
1915	Motkaluk family start to build house	Germakówka, Galicia	Rudka family (2016 visit)
Friday, April 6, 1917	<b>Birth of Stefan Motkaluk</b>	Germakówka, Galicia	Borschiv Archive (2017 visit)
	Baptism in Greek Catholic Church	Germakówka, Galicia	
Wednesday, February 20, 1918	<b>Birth of Halina Zadrożna</b>	Germakówka, Galicia	Borschiv Archive (2017 visit)
Friday, November 1, 1918	<b>Austro-Hungarian Empire collapses</b>		
1924 - 1931	7 classes of grade school	Germakówka, Poland	MOD, APC Disclosures 5 (Polish) Army record
Thursday, December 10, 1925	<b>Birth of Maria Lucia Caruso</b>	Jelsi, Molise, Italy	Jelsi registry archive and copy birth record obtained for purpose of emigration and Comune di Ielsi, Scheda Individuale obtained in 2012 Italian fieldwork
1932 - 1933	<b>Holodomor</b>		Stalin's policy of starvation resulted in starvation of Soviet Ukrainians conservatively estimated between 6 to 7 million in 18 months. Various sources suggest between 1.8 to 15 million people.
1932 - 1934	Stefan on a military training course		MOD, APC Disclosures 5 (Polish) Army record
Wednesday, June 13, 1934	Stefan's father, Basilyi Motkaluk dies of pulmonary disease	Germakówka, Poland	Borschiv Archive (2017 visit)
Thursday, July 29, 1937	<b>Stefan and Halina marry</b>	Germakówka, Poland	Copy marriage certificate (Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic copy)

Saturday, March 19, 1938	Stefan in 32nd Infantry, Skalat Battalion	Eastern front defences, possibly along Dniester	Komenda Główna, Straży Granicznej Archiwum (listed but no personal file)
	Stefan in KOP Podole (Border Protection Corps)	Unknown	MOD Army record: dates challenged by Sikorski Institute archivist in 2012 as KOP Podole did not exist at that time. Return visit required to clarify in light of subsequent archive documentation received from Warsaw dated 18 May 2017.
Thursday, November 10, 1938	Stefan in active service with 12 Battalion Frontier Defence Corps	Poland	MOD, APC Disclosures 5 (Polish) Army record
Tuesday, March 14, 1939	32nd Infantry, Skalat Battalion moved	Modlin	Wojskowe Biuro Historyczne, Warszawa: authenticated photocopies from Central Archive of WBH confirming service in the Polish Army.
Wednesday, August 23, 1939	<b>Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact (Nazi-Soviet Pact)</b>		
Sunday, September 17, 1939	<b>Soviet Union invades Poland on the eastern front</b>		
Monday, September 18, 1939	Stefan in battlefront involvement	Tarnopol, Poland	Polish Army records (translated)
Tuesday, September 19, 1939	<b>Poland's eastern borderland defences overrun and collapses</b>		
Friday, September 1, 1939 to Tuesday, September 19, 1939	Stefan took part in 1939 September campaign. 12 Battalion Korpus Ochrony Pogranicza	Poland	MOD, APC Disclosures 5 (Polish) Army record and Polish Army record

Saturday, February 10, 1940	<b>First Soviet mass deportation of Polish citizens</b>		Sent primarily to far north and east Russia, including Siberia and Khabarovsk Krai
Saturday, April 13, 1940	<b>Second Soviet mass deportation of Polish citizens</b>		Sent primarily to Kazakhstan
Monday, June 10, 1940	<b>Italy declares war</b>		
June to July 1940	<b>Third Soviet mass deportation of Polish citizens</b>		By now, Stefan's Polish friends would all have been deported.
Monday, October 14, 1940	<b>Stefan's son is born (named Teodor Stefan)</b>	Germakówka, Poland	Borschiv Archive (2017 visit)
End May 1941	Stefan denounced by neighbour and arrested by NKVD	Germakówka, Poland	Family information (2016 visit)
	Held on remand, convicted on charge of hooliganism, given 40 day sentence	Chortkiv prison	Confirmed by family. Photographs of prison taken in 2016. See 2016 Ukrainian transcripts for photographs. Evidence of horrific torture and executions carried out by NKVD. Last prisoners evacuated (death march to Uman) on 20 July 1941.
Exact date unknown	Stefan deported to	Soviet Union	MOD, APC Disclosures 5 (Polish) Army record
Between May and June 1941	Transported east as Soviet troops retreated	Gulag in Siberia, location unknown	No information available at Hoover Institute, Stanford University. Failed to locate records at Central Archive, Lviv in 2017. Advised to enquire at SBU (KGB) archive
June 1941	<b>Fourth Soviet mass deportation of Polish citizens</b>		
Sunday, June 22, 1941	<b>Germany invades Polish eastern borderland and Soviet Union (Operation Barbarosso)</b>		Hungarian Nazis enter Germakówka (Mendel's Daughter)
Wednesday, July 30, 1941	<b>Sikorski-Maisky (Polish-Soviet) Agreement signed in London</b>		Soviet Union joins Allies in fighting Germany



Wednesday, July 30, 1941	Stefan released for the purpose of joining the Polish Armed Forces, which were being organised in 1941-1942 on Soviet territory	Soviet territory (exact location unknown)	MOD, APC Disclosures 5 (Polish) Army record
Tuesday, November 11, 1941	Stefan enlisted in the Polish Army, posted to 13 Infantry Regiment,  5 Infantry Division	Not specified but possibly Buzuluk where Polish civilians released from camps throughout USSR reported for enlistment	MOD, APC Disclosures 5 (Polish) Army record. 'From Warsaw to Rome: General Anders' Exiled Polish Army in the Second World War' by Martin Williams
Thursday, January 1, 1942	Promoted to rank of Bombardier	Soviet territory (exact location unknown) Possibly dispersed in the region of Tashkent to be nearer the Persian border	Polish Army record (translated)
Sunday, March 15, 1942	Stefan at Szkoła Podoficerska 5 p.al (Officer Candidate School)	Soviet territory (exact location unknown)	Polish Army record (translated)
Monday, June 15, 1942		Passed second from 32 candidates	
1942-1944	Served in Middle East	Iran, Iraq, Palestine, Egypt	MOD, APC Disclosures 5 (Polish) Army record
Saturday, August 15, 1942	With Polish Army units, crossed the Soviet-Iranian border. Evacuated to Iran.		MOD, APC Disclosures 5 (Polish) Army record
Saturday, August 15, 1942	Came under British command		MOD, APC Disclosures 5 (Polish) Army record
	via Iraq was transferred to	Palestine	MOD, APC Disclosures 5 (Polish) Army record
Saturday, August 15, 1942	Stefan commences service with the Polish Forces under British Command		MOD, APC Disclosures 5 (Polish) Army record
Sunday, October 25, 1942	On re-organisation of Polish Army in Middle East, was		MOD, APC Disclosures 5 (Polish) Army record and Polish Army record

	transferred to 1 Battalion, 4 Field Artillery Regiment,		
	5 Kresowa Infantry Division, 2 Polish Corps, 8 British Army		
Saturday, January 30, 1943	Concetta Caruso marries Paolo D'Iorio	Jelsi, Molise, Italy	Comune di Jelsi, Foglio di Famiglia: village archive obtained during 2012 visit.
Wednesday, March 17, 1943	Soldier's Service Book issued		Soldier's Service Book 52232/42  International Committee of the Red Cross delegation, Ankara, date: 06.06.1945. Notes: 'I correspond with sister Cesia' NB: This is likely to be his cousin, Czeslawa, who emigrated to Canada in 1930, not a sister: Canadian Immigration Service Return, Halifax N.S. for 17 May 1930
Sunday, August 1, 1943	Stefan arrives in Teheran	Teheran, Iran	
Wednesday, September 8, 1943	<b>Armistice between Allies and Italy</b>		Lucia's father, Giovanni (a veteran of WW1) returns to Jelsi on foot from Rome
Wednesday, October 13, 1943	<b>Italy declares war on Nazi Germany</b>		
1943	Stefan writes to Halina, sending a photograph	Teheran, Iran	Family information 2016 - photograph of Stefan by tent

1944	Stefan's letter arrives, resulting in Halina's arrest and sentence of 7 years. Sentence commuted for good behaviour.	Germakówka, Poland	Ukrainian family information 2016: insisted the first letter was dated 1943 and sent from Teheran. This south-eastern part of Poland was under German occupation from June 1941, so the letter could not have passed behind enemy lines until some time in 1944 when the Soviet Union was pushing back the German occupation. Halina would have had to have been sentenced by a Soviet court to serve in a Siberian gulag. Arrest accounts unreliable.
Monday, February 21, 1944 to Thursday, March 16, 1944	Stefan's unit, the 5th Kresowa Infantry Division land in Italy via Taranto		
1944-1946	Stefan Served in Italy and saw action in the following:		
Tuesday, February 15, 1944 Sunday, April 23, 1944	Action on the Rivers Sangro and Rapido/Southern Apennines		MOD, APC Disclosures 5 (Polish) Army record
17 January to 19 May 1944	<b>Battle of Monte Cassino</b>		Series of four assaults by the Allies. Stefan fought in the fourth and final battle in the Polish II Corps on 11-18 May, going on to fight through the Gustav line
Monday, April 24, 1944 to Wednesday, May 31, 1944	Battle for Monte Cassino/Gustav-Hitler line of enemy defences		MOD, APC Disclosures 5 (Polish) Army record

Thursday, June 1, 1944 to Monday, September 4, 1944	Battle for Ancona/Goths line of enemy defences		MOD, APC Disclosures 5 (Polish) Army record
Monday, August 21, 1944	Stefan promoted to rank of Corporal for 'fighting acts'	Italy	Polish Army records (translated)
Tuesday, September 5, 1944 to Monday, October 9, 1944	Rearguard of 8 British Army		MOD, APC Disclosures 5 (Polish) Army record
Tuesday, October 10, 1944 to Monday, January 1, 1945	Action in the Northern Apennines		MOD, APC Disclosures 5 (Polish) Army record
Tuesday, January 2, 1945	Action on the River Senio		MOD, APC Disclosures 5 (Polish) Army record
Sunday, April 8, 1945			See two periods of 'illness' February and March 1945
Sunday, February 4, 1945 to Sunday, February 11, 1945	<b>Yalta Conference</b>	Yalta, Crimea, Soviet Union	Serving Polish soldiers informed of the loss of the Kresy territories resulting from Yalta Agreement between Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin
Saturday, February 17, 1945	Stefan recorded as 'ill person/wounded'	GPO Nr. 2, Stacya Zborna (Concentration Station), Italy	Polish Army records (translated)
Saturday, February 24, 1945	Returned to combat duty	4 Pulk Artylerii Lekkiey, and allocated to Bateria II Dyziyon	Polish Army records (translated)

Friday, March 2, 1945	Stefan recorded as 'ill person/wounded'	GPO Nr. 2, Stacya Zborna (Concentration Station), Italy	Polish Army records (translated)
Monday, March 26, 1945	Returned to combat duty	4 Pulk Artylerii Lekkiey, and allocated to Bateria II Dyziyon	Polish Army records (translated)
Saturday, March 31, 1945	Stefan recorded as 'ill person/wounded'	GPO Nr. 5, Stacya Zborna (Concentration Station), Italy	Polish Army records (translated)
Friday, April 27, 1945	Returned to combat duty	4 Pulk Artylerii Lekkiey, and allocated to Bateria II Dowodzenia, 11 Battalion	Polish Army records (translated)
Monday, April 9, 1945 To Wednesday, May 2, 1945	Battle for Bologna/Lombardy Plain		MOD, APC Disclosures 5 (Polish) Army record
Sunday, September 2, 1945	<b>End of World War Two</b>		
Thursday, November 1, 1945	Stefan awarded Polish Cross of Valour (first time)	Italy	Polish award
	Cross of Monte Cassino Army medal	Italy	Polish award
	Italy Star		Polish award
	Defence Medal		British award
	The War Medal		British award
Saturday, June 22, 1946	Stefan left to SK	5 Korpus	Polish Army records (translated)

Sunday, July 28, 1946	Halina gives birth to Maria	Hermakivka, Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic	Ukrainian family information 2016. Halina must have returned from Siberia by at least October 1945 as the family describe two village women who were impregnated by a local man, Halina being one and her best friend the other. Maria remembers him (her father) coming to visit and picking her up when she was a child.
Wednesday, September 4, 1946	4 Light Artillery Regiment Kresowa who have been transferred to the Centre Demob. No.3 as candidates for the trip to Canada	Italy	Polish Army records (translated) L.dz. 1635/Tjn.46
	Stefan's last residence outside of UK	Ravenna, Italy	Certificate of Registration No. 834941 under Aliens Order, 1920
Saturday, October 5, 1946	Stefan arrives in UK		Certificate of Registration No. 834941 under Aliens Order, 1920
Wednesday, February 19, 1947	Stefan recruited to	PKPR from 4 PAL	Polish Army records (translated)
Friday, April 4, 1947	Classed 'W' Reserve	Commenced terminal leave pending discharge from Colours	Army Form B271 (Polish) copy received from MOD
Thursday, April 10, 1947	Registration certificate issued to Stefan	Cirencester, Glos, England (address of residence: Royal Agricultural College, Cirencester)	Certificate of Registration No. 834941 under Aliens Order, 1920. Released from Polish Resettlement Corps to the Reserve for purpose of employment.
Friday, April 11, 1947	Stefan employed as live in Steward	Royal Agricultural College, Cirencester	Alien Identity Certificate Army Form X204 (Polish) MOD

Sunday, September 14, 1947	Stefan change of address to work at Stroud EGC	Babdown Camp, Tetbury, Glos	Certificate of Registration No. 834941
Monday, November 17, 1947	Application for final termination of service in the Polish Resettlement Corps	Record Office, Witley, Surrey	Form PRC/D.1
22 November 1947	Stefan discharged	Witley Camp, Witley Common, Surrey, England	Army Form B271 (Polish) copy received from MOD and Army Form B108J in Stefan's papers
Sunday, August 29, 1948	Lucia's sister, Concetta dies, aged 27, leaving two sons: Andrea (2/3 years old) and Giuseppe/Pepino (9 months old)	Jelsi, Molise, Italy	Italian family interview (2012) and Comune di Ielsi, Scheda Individuale
Saturday, October 30, 1948	Stefan moves to	c/o Mrs Taylor, 8 Parsonage Street, Dursley, Glos	Certificate of Registration No. 834941
Thursday, January 1, 1948	Stefan moves to	Babdown Camp, Tetbury, Glos	Certificate of Registration No. 834941
Monday, April 18, 1949	Stefan moves to	c/o Mrs Kershaw, Long Furlong, Tetbury, Glos	Certificate of Registration No. 834941
Saturday, November 5, 1949	Mrs E B Kershaw issued with employer permit for Lucia.	Employing Domestic (Resident) at £1. 15s. 0d. per week at Long Furlong, Tetbury, Glos	Labour Permit under Article 1(3)(b) of The Aliens Order 1920, ref. 100318 sent to Lucia to produce on arrival to Immigration Officer and to be preserved by alien for production at any time to competent authorities.
Thursday, January 12, 1950	Lucia lands in the UK	Folkstone	Certificate of Registration No. 379893

Sunday, February 5, 1950	Registration certificate issued to Lucia	Cirencester, Glos, England (address of residence: Mrs E B Kershaw, Long Furlong, Tetbury, Glos)	Certificate of Registration No. 379893 under Aliens Order, 1920
Saturday, December 30, 1950	Lucia employed as a domestic at	Malmesbury District Hospital, Malmsebury, Glos	Certificate of Registration No. 379893
Monday, January 29, 1951	Lucia employed as a domestic at	Oakley Hall School, Cirencester, Glos.	Certificate of Registration No. 379894
Monday, January 22, 1951	Stefan moves to	Babdown Camp, Tetbury, Glos	Certificate of Registration No. 834941
Thursday, April 12, 1951	Lucia moves to	Aerodrome Huts, Babdown Airfield, Tetbury, Glos	Certificate of Registration No. 379894
Thursday, April 12, 1951	Stefan moves to	Aerodrome Huts, Babdown Airfield, Tetbury, Glos	Certificate of Registration No. 834941
Saturday, June 16, 1951	Stefan and Lucia marry	Cirencester Register Office	Copy Marriage Certificate TC555593 issued 25 November 1980. Stefan listed as a widower, (profession: labourer (fibre board makers), father's name Bazyl Motkaluk (deceased) fruit merchant.) Lucia listed as a spinster (profession: dressmaker, father's name Giovanni Caruso, road worker)
Monday, June 18, 1951	Stefan reports marriage to Lucia Maria Caruso, Italian Alien	Gloucestershire Constabulary, Tetbury	Certificate of Registration No. 834941



Monday, June 18, 1951	Lucia reports marriage to Stefan Motkaluk, Polish Alien	Gloucestershire Constabulary, Tetbury	Certificate of Registration No. 379894
Friday, September 21, 1951	<b>Stefan's second son is born (Zbigniew Bronislaw)</b>	Stroud Maternity Hospital	Birth certificate
Wednesday, February 13, 1952	Stefan interviewed by Immigration Officer, Tyne Ports	Nailsworth, Glos	Certificate of Registration No. 834941
Sunday, February 17, 1952	Lucia interviewed by Immigration Officer, Tyne Ports	Tetbury, Glos	Certificate of Registration No. 379894
Friday, October 16, 1953	<b>Stefan's first daughter is born (Adelaide)</b>	Stroud Maternity Hospital	Birth certificate
Tuesday, June 8, 1954	Stefan moves to	6 Albermarle Row, Hotwells, Bristol	Certificate of Registration No. 834941
Tuesday, June 8, 1954	Lucia moves to	6 Albermarle Row, Hotwells, Bristol	Certificate of Registration No. 379894
Monday, November 7, 1955	Stefan moves to	15 Sussex Place, Bristol 2	Certificate of Registration No. 834941
Monday, November 7, 1955	Lucia moves to	15 Sussex Place, Bristol 2	Certificate of Registration No. 379894
Thursday, March 1, 1956	Stefan's mother, Karolina dies	Hermakivka, Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic	Ukrainian family information 2016
Saturday, June 23, 1956	Stefan moves to	6 Gathorne Crescent, Yate, Glos	Certificate of Registration No. 834948
Saturday, June 23, 1956	Lucia moves to	6 Gathorne Crescent, Yate, Glos	Certificate of Registration No. 379894

Friday, September 27, 1957	Lina arrives in UK	Caldicot Preparatory School, Farnham Royal, Buckinghamshire	Interview transcripts dated 20 March 2013 and 19 May 2017 (Stroud, Glos)
December 1957	Lina moves to live with Lucia and Stefan	6 Gathorne Crescent, Yate, Glos	Interview transcript dated 20 March 2013 (Stroud, Glos)
Saturday, October 3, 1959	<b>Stefan's second daughter is born (Carol)</b>	Chipping Sodbury Cottage Hospital, Glos	Birth certificate
Tuesday, October 16, 1962 to Sunday, October 28, 1962	<b>Cuban Missile Crisis</b>		Ukrainian family report Teodor involved (possibly Operation Andyr) in submarine escort for supply ships travelling to Cuba
Saturday, August 19, 1967	Teodor killed in motorcycle accident	A turn somewhere near Myroliubivka on the road to Chortkiv	Halina's draft letter to authorities, kindly donated by Ukrainian family
undated	Halina appeals to authorities to investigate Teodor's death	Public Prosecutor's Office, Ternopil	Original handwritten draft letter kindly donated by Ukrainian family reproduced verbatim from translation in RTM
Saturday, March 2, 1968	Acknowledgement of letter	Public Prosecutor's Office, Ternopil	Original letter kindly donated by Ukrainian family and reproduced from translation in CW
Friday, April 12, 1968	Halina informed that investigator of regional police department inspection inconclusive as to driver of motorcycle. Additional inspection proposed Halina informed that Teodor deemed to be driver of motorcycle and died due to his own negligence. No further action to be taken	Prosecutor of Ternopil District	Original letter kindly donated by Ukrainian family
Monday, July 15, 1968		Prosecutor of Ternopil District	Original letter kindly donated by Ukrainian family and reproduced from translation in RTM

Thursday, February 10, 1983	<b>Stefan dies</b>	Bristol	Death certificate
Thursday, November 9, 1989	<b>Berlin Wall brought down leading to the collapse of communism in eastern Europe</b>		
Saturday, August 24, 1991	<b>Official declaration of Ukraine as an independent state</b>		
June 1993	Letter addressed to Maria Rudka (nee Motkaluk), daughter of Halina, confirming receipt of payment for 9 radio broadcasts read on the 'Mailbox' programme between 1 and 7 June searching for news of Stefan Motkaluk.	National Broadcasting Company of Ukraine, Worldwide Service of Ukrainian Radio, Kiev, Ukraine	Broadcast in all the countries of the world on short wave: 25, 31, 41, 49 meters. Letter kindly donated by Ukrainian family (2016)
Monday, September 27, 1993	Letter addressed to Olena (Halina) from Ukrainian Red Cross Society explaining that insufficient information supplied to trace Stefan.	Ukrainian Red Cross Society, National Committee, Kiev, Ukraine	Letter kindly donated by Ukrainian family (2016)
Sunday, August 6, 1995	<b>Halina dies</b>	Hermakivka, Ukraine	Ukrainian family information 2016. Halina is buried beside her son, Teodor. Her two sisters, Antonina and Maria are buried close by.
Sunday, December 26, 2010	<b>Lucia dies</b>	Yate, Gloucestershire	Death certificate

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### 3. Respondent research summary and generic consent form

#### Primary Aims:

1. To academically research background material to inform a semi-biographical, critically creative work that will enable readers to engage deeply with issues around sense of place, of self and of loss in the context of post-WWII individual displacement from both a Polish and an Italian perspective.
2. To produce a creative work which seeks to present the individual perspectives of first generation immigration through the lens of partially assimilated second-generation narrative, revealing the benefits and dis-benefits of cultural alienation outside recognised mainstream diasporic groups; an increasing phenomenon with the expansion and ease of global travel.

#### Major Sub-aims:

- a) To establish a philosophical context by examining historical external forces existing in Poland and Italy between the 1930s and 1940s that produced conditions for diaspora.
- b) To explore cultural and national identity during periods of diaspora to understand potential effects that physical and temporal dislocations are likely to have on individual identities in terms of the construction and deconstruction of identity.
- c) To integrate research on history and diaspora combined with primary material, in a critically creative semi-biographical narrative structure.

***Ti ricordi questo uomo? :***

**A creative and critical investigation into crossing cultures, countries and identities<sup>301</sup>**

**Consent Form**

I have had clearly explained to me and understood the information about the project. I understand that my participation in this project is completely voluntary, and that I may withdraw at any time during the project, without penalty.

I understand the arrangements that have been made to ensure my anonymity and privacy. I am aware that I have the right to see what has been written about me.

The researcher has made clear to me any risks which may be involved in my participation in the project.

The arrangements for secure storage of data, and for its eventual disposal, have been explained to me as follows:

1. That digital recordings (and any transcription) of interviews will be stored electronically on a password protected portable computer.
2. In addition, archived digital recordings (and any transcriptions) will be stored on a password protected external hard drive.
3. The above electronic data (and transcriptions) will be destroyed within seven years from the date of collection or on completion of the thesis, whichever is the soonest.
4. I will be notified of the date when the data are to be destroyed.
5. I will receive confirmation that the data have been destroyed.
6. I am agreeable to being re-contacted to obtain permission to extend the duration of the above recordings.

On this basis, I consent to take part in the project.

Signed. .... Date.....

Name .....

---

<sup>301</sup> Remember this man?

### 3.a) Italian translations

#### Obiettivi primari:

1. Per la ricerca accademica materiale di riferimento per informare un semi-biografica, il lavoro critico creativo che permetterà ai lettori di impegnarsi a fondo con le questioni circa il senso di luogo, di sé e della perdita nel contesto della post-seconda guerra mondiale lo spostamento individuale sia da un polacco e un italiano prospettiva.

2. Per produrre un lavoro creativo che cerca di presentare le prospettive individuali di immigrazione di prima generazione attraverso la lente parzialmente assimilato racconto di seconda generazione, rivelando i vantaggi e dis-benefici di alienazione culturale, al di fuori riconosciuti i gruppi principali della diaspora, un fenomeno in crescita con l'espansione e la facilità di viaggio globale.

#### Sub-obiettivi principali:

a) Per stabilire un contesto filosofico, esaminando storici forze esterne esistenti in Polonia e in Italia tra gli anni 1930 e 1950 che hanno prodotto le condizioni per la diaspora.

b) Per esplorare l'identità culturale e nazionale durante i periodi di diaspora per capire gli effetti potenziali che dislocazioni fisiche e temporali possono avere sulle identità individuali in termini di costruzione e decostruzione dell'identità.

c) Per integrare la ricerca sulla storia e la diaspora in combinazione con materia prima, in una critica creativa semi-biografico struttura narrativa.



***Ti ricordi questo uomo? :***

**Una ricerca creativa e critica in culture di frontiera, i paesi e le identità**

### **MODULO DI CONSENSO**

Ho aveva chiaramente spiegato a me e compreso le informazioni sul progetto. Capisco che la mia partecipazione a questo progetto è completamente volontaria, e che io possa recedere in qualsiasi momento nel corso del progetto, senza alcuna penalità.

Capisco gli accordi che sono stati compiuti per garantire il mio anonimato e la privacy. Mi rendo conto che ho il diritto di vedere ciò che è stato scritto su di me.

Il ricercatore ha chiarito a me i rischi che possono essere coinvolte nella mia partecipazione al progetto.

Le modalità per la conservazione sicura dei dati, e per la sua eventuale smaltimento, sono state spiegate a me come segue:

1. Che le registrazioni digitali (e qualsiasi trascrizione) di interviste vengono memorizzati elettronicamente su un computer protetto da password portatile.
2. Inoltre, archiviate le registrazioni digitali (e qualsiasi trascrizioni) saranno memorizzati su un protetto da password disco rigido esterno.
3. I dati sopra riportati elettronica (e trascrizioni) saranno distrutti entro sette anni dalla data di raccolta o al termine della tesi, qualunque sia il più presto.
4. Mi sarà comunicata la data in cui i dati devono essere distrutti.
5. Riceverò la conferma che i dati sono stati distrutti.
6. Sono piacevole di essere ri-contattato per ottenere il permesso di prolungare la durata delle registrazioni di cui sopra.

Su questa base, ho acconsentito a prendere parte al progetto.

Firmato ..... Data .....

Nome .....

### 3.b) Ukrainian translations

#### Основні цілі:

1. здійснити академічне дослідження довідкових матеріалів для укладення напівбіографічної, критично-творчої праці, що дозволить читачам глибоко проникнути в проблеми відчуття місця, самого себе і втрати в контексті переселень людей після Другої світової війни з польсько-української, а також італійської перспектив;
2. укласти творчу працю, яка б представила особисту перспективу представників першого покоління іммігрантів через призму розповідей частково асимільованого другого покоління, розкриваючи позитивні та негативні наслідки культурного відчуження за межами визнаних основних груп діаспори; феномена, що зростає завдяки експансії та спрощенню подорожування по світу.

#### Проміжні цілі:

- a) встановити філософський контекст шляхом вивчення тих історичних зовнішніх сил, котрі існували в Польщі та Італії в 1930-1940-х роках та створили умови для виникнення діаспори;
- b) дослідити культурну й національну самобутність в періоди діаспори, щоб зрозуміти потенційний вплив, котрий мають переміщення у просторі й часі на індивідуальні ідентичності в плані творення чи руйнування цієї ідентичності;
- c) інтегрувати дослідження історії та діаспори в поєднанні з первинним матеріалом у критичну, творчу напівбіографічну працю оповідної структури.



***Ti ricordi questo uomo? :***

**Творче критичне дослідження перетину культур, країн та ідентичностей<sup>302</sup>**

**Згода**

Я чітко усвідомив/ла та зрозумів/ла інформацію про цей проект. Я розумію, що моя участь у ньому є повністю добровільною, і що я можу завершити участь у цьому проекті в будь-який момент в ході його реалізації без штрафних санкцій.

Я ознайомлений/а з домовленостями, котрі були зроблені для гарантування моєї анонімності та конфіденційності. Я ознайомлений/а з тим, що маю право знати про те, що писатимуть про мене.

Дослідник чітко поінформувала мене про всі ризики, з якими я можу стикнутися в ході моєї участі в проекті.

Механізми для безпечного зберігання даних, а також їх остаточного знищення, були роз'яснені мені в такий спосіб:

1. Цифрові записи (і будь-які стенографічні записи) інтерв'ю будуть зберігатися в електронному вигляді на портативному комп'ютері, захищеному паролем.
2. Крім того, заархівовані цифрові записи (і будь-які стенографічні записи) будуть зберігатися на захищеному паролем зовнішньому жорсткому диску.
3. Вищевказані електронні дані (стенограми) будуть знищені протягом семи років від дати їх створення або ж після завершення написання дисертації - залежно від того, який термін настане швидше.
4. Я буду повідомлений/а про дату, коли дані мають бути знищені.
5. Я отримаю підтвердження того, що дані були знищені.
6. Я згоден/згодна, щоб зі мною повторно зв'язалися для отримання дозволу на продовження тривалості зберігання вищевказаних записів.

На основі усього вищевказаного я даю згоду взяти участь у цьому проекті.

Підпис. .... Дата.....

ПІП .....

<sup>302</sup> Пам'ятаєте цю людину?

#### 4. Interview Schedule

26 Aug 2012	Caruso, Carmelina	Favria, Torino, Italy
28 Aug 2012	Caruso, Maria	Magnago, Milano, Italy
3 Sept 2012	Santella, Giovanni	Jelsi, Molise, Italy
4 Sept 2012	Don D'Amico, Antonio	Jelsi, Molise, Italy
4 Sept 2012	Santella, Teresa	Jelsi, Molise, Italy
20 Mar 2013	Caruso, Natalina	Stroud, Glos, UK
25 Apr 2016 (1)	Rudka, Olana & Rudka, Maria (nee Motkaluk)	Hermakivka, Ternopil Oblast, Ukraine
25 Apr 2016 (2)	Rudka, Olana & Rudka, Maria (nee Motkaluk)	Hermakivka, Ternopil Oblast, Ukraine
27 Apr 2016	Motkaluk, Vira	Ternopil, Ukraine
3 May 2016	Motkaluk, Vira	Ternopil, Ukraine
4 May 2016	Rudka, Maria (nee Motkaluk)	Hermakivka, Ternopil Oblast, Ukraine
19 May 2017	Caruso, Natalina	Stroud, Glos, UK
12 Jul 2017	Rudka, Maria (nee Motkaluk)	Hermakivka, Ternopil Oblast, Ukraine