Chapter 15. Grade 9

I

In grade 9 students began a foreign language, and Josy selected French. Her parents wanted her to take Latin, but Verna Blackman had chosen French, and Josy wanted to be in the same class as Verna.

For the first nine weeks the French teacher, Miss Emily Pollard, remained out sick. The substitute, a tall, gangly fellow in his early twenties, found it impossible to control his classes. His every movement was clumsy and awkward to the extent of being comical. Completely unsure of himself, he wavered at the slightest distraction. Hesitating at everything, stammering, agreeing to shift course whenever any student voiced the slightest objection, he presented a perfect target from Day One. It took no time for the students to recognize his lack of teaching experience, and they took full advantage.

The livelier ones acted boisterously, one boy even heaving a desk out the window. Quieter pupils, unable to hear over the uproar, simply gave up trying to pay attention. Day by day the situation worsened. Teachers of other classes would begin their lessons by asking, "Who in here takes French?"

When the hands went up, they would plead, "Boys and girls, please, please, behave yourselves in French class. We can't hear in our own room with all the noise coming from down the hall. It's affecting the whole school. You're the ones losing out. Please, please behave yourselves and tell others to behave, too! Please!"

It proved to no avail. Cooperative students remained disinterested, disruptive ones only got worse.

Josy was one of the few quiet ones, but she found it impossible to concentrate through the commotion. It was around the fifth week that she came down with a heavy cold that kept her home for several days. On the day she returned the substitute teacher gave a test on material she had missed. She got a B. When her report card came out a couple weeks later, a B was her grade for the first term in French.

Malvina went over all of her quiz papers with her and found that, except for that single test, all the other papers were marked 100. She was furious and for the first time in her life, went in to school to complain. The principal, Mr. Charles Neville, promised to look into the matter. Later he phoned and told Malvina that he had been receiving numerous complaints from other parents all along, for there had been pandemonium in the substitute teacher's classroom from the day he arrived. Actually, it turned out, the substitute teacher was unsure of exactly which student was Josy. As a matter of principle, Mr. Neville refused to change her grade, but he asked Malvina to bear with him, and assured her that the regular teacher was due back next week and things would be different.

Miss Pollard returned the following Monday. Elderly, scrawny, barely five feet tall, her wiry, almost pink carrot-colored hair sticking out wildly in all directions, she presented a formidable presence despite her size. With a heavy stride, glancing neither to the right nor left, she marched into the classroom, scowling and ready to pounce on anyone who crossed her path. From behind steel-rimmed glasses her tiny, beady eyes peered out menacingly, missing nothing. She was almost half the height of the substitute teacher, yet her every movement reflected authority. One could hear a pin drop in the silence accompanying her arrival. The air actually seemed thick with apprehension.

She took charge at once. Glaring, she called on one student after the other, barking at them to stand up and read aloud. After each reading she spat out corrections. Josy's

knees shook when her turn came. Taking a deep breath, she rose, read her paragraph aloud in a trembling voice, and then remained standing at attention waiting for whatever might come next. Miss Pollard glared at her in silence for a long time, appraising her sharply.

"Where did you learn to read like that?" she finally snapped. "Now don't you lie to me!"

"My mother knows French," Josy replied in a quavering voice, "and she worked with me."

"Sit down!" Miss Pollard hissed. Then she went on to the next pupil.

Later Malvina told Josy, "You should have answered that you knew the work because you studied so hard. That would have made a better impression."

"I had to tell her the truth," Josy replied. "I was too scared."

Next morning Cooke Jr. High was a-buzz with the news that a young woman, rejected in love, had thrown herself out the third-floor window of a neighborhood building the night before. Miss Pollard, her glare icy, took this as an opportunity to offer some counseling.

Squinting, her eyes particularly beady, she wrinkled her nose in disdain and fixed the class, particularly the girls with a penetrating glare. Glowering in menacing indignation she snorted: "I would never ever make a grease spot of myself on Broad Street for any man!"

As the months rolled by, she covered an extremely broad amount of material. Gradually, despite Miss Pollard's stern and menacing demeanor, Josy grew to enjoy the work, even including the grammar. Once she had grasped the concept of dividing a verb into stem and ending, she had little trouble mastering the various tenses. Miss Pollard taught eight of them that year!

She loved to send students to the board to write out verb conjugations. Then walking around the room, she would scrutinize each pupil's results with an eagle eye, hunting for errors. When she came to Josy, she seemed particularly exacting, peering sharply to find a mistake. Josy got into the habit of checking and rechecking her work meticulously, making it a point to search for mistakes and correct them before the teacher got there. Crinkling her nose, Miss Pollard would inspect minutely, letter by letter. Finally after one such appraisal, she moved on to the next pupil, glancing back at Josy and sniffing, "You sure do know your French, Girlie!"

On one test, she asked for the translation of the expression "to go to bed". This had never come up before, either in the textbook or in class. Josy, at a loss, wrote "aller au lit"

for what should have been the correct "se coucher". Her paper received a "100"nevertheless. As she handed back the test, Miss Pollard snarled, "You ever write that again, I'll take off points!"

One time she asked, "Who in here plays the piano?"

When Josy raised her hand, Miss Pollard handed her a songbook and ordered, "Go home and learn to play 'Il Pleut, Il Pleut, Bergerè' ".

The following week, she asked to hear it. There was an upright piano in the corner at the front of the room, and Josy sat down nervously to play. Afterwards, Miss Pollard told the class grudgingly, "This is the first time ever since I started teaching that I heard anyone get the rhythm right."

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That term the history teacher was an elderly lady named Miss Faulkner. Her bluish gray hair with its vivid greenish streaks caused students to wonder and stare surreptitiously, most of them too naïve to recognize this as the result of an unprofessional application of hair dye.

One day Miss Faulkner told Josy to remain after class. After the others had gone, she held out two used copies of books by Victor Hugo: *Gil Blas* and *Quatre-Vingt-Treize*.

"I hear you're a very good French student," she smiled. "I want you to have these. Some day when your French gets even better, I'm sure you'll enjoy them."

Josy was a bit taken aback, pleased but never quite sure why Miss Faulkner had singled her out.

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In the French class there was one student that Miss Pollard remained unable to subdue. Dan Wolf was the boy who had sung the part of DeadEye Dick in *H.M.S. Pinafore* the year before. Half a grade ahead of Josy, he had failed French the previous term and was now repeating the subject with her class.

Every day the lesson began in more or less the same way. Dan would get into some sort of mischief (tripping another student, throwing a board eraser, blowing pellets out of

a bee-bee gun shouting out a curse, once even shoving an inkwell out the window). Predictably, Miss Pollard would scream, "Get out! Go to the Principal's office!"

Taking his time, Dan would saunter lazily to the door, open it slowly, then turn to face the class. With one hand still on the knob, he would draw himself up to his full height, raise a cautionary index finger, and address his gaping classmates in his most dramatic manner.

"I'll go," he would drawl pompously, "but I'll be back!"

A few brave pupils snickered. Josy, along with the majority, though hugely amused, lacked the courage and didn't dare. Invariably Dan returned with a note from the office readmitting him, and Miss Pollard sighing, pointedly ignored him and went on with the lesson. The same thing happened practically every day.

One method Miss Pollard had of increasing her students' vocabularies was to translate surnames of pupils wherever applicable, addressing and referring to them by these French names. Thus Dan Wolf became "Monsieur Loup". This helped Josy recall him years afterward, though at the time she never spoke to him and he barely knew she existed.

Later, in 1959, when she would be teaching at Beeber Jr. High School, she would meet another new teacher named Ruth Wolf, who started there on the same day. When Ruth happened to mention her husband Dan one day, Josy's ears perked up

"Ask your husband if he ever went to Cooke Jr. High," she asked.

Sure enough, he was the same Dan Wolf who had kept Miss Pollard's class in such an uproar. Ruth finally introduced her to Dan, and Josy found that he had turned into a charming and affable man, a successful building contractor with a delightful sense of humor. It was then that he brought her up to date on what had happened to him since their days at Cooke.

"When World War II broke out," he explained, "I went into the Air Force. And guess where they sent me! To France!

"And on the way over," he continued, "the Captain asked, 'Which of you guys ever had French in school?'"

Without thinking, Dan had raised his hand. He turned out to be the only one.

"O.K. You're going to be our translator," the Captain announced.

"What? Who? Me? I can't!" Dan protested. "I flunked French! Twice!"

"O.K." repeated the Commander, "Anyone else here know French?"

Again, nobody. So it fell to Danon translate for the entire company throughout the war years.

"Had I known then," he now admitted, "what was in store for me, I would have tried to learn something in that Miss Pollard's class! That 'farbiseneh!' ('nasty embittered witch!'). But how was I to know I'd ever need French?"

Years after that admission, Dan and Ruth performed together in a community production of the musical *South Pacific*. One evening they played a videotape that they had recorded of it for their friends. In the play Dan had to speak and sing quite a few words in French. His pronunciation was impeccable.

Afterwards Josy laughed heartily.

"You may have hated Miss Pollard and fought with her all the time," she giggled, "but she won out in the end! Did she ever do a number on you! In spite of how you tortured her, she got you to pronounce every single word perfectly. You couldn't have sounded better had you been born in France!"

Noticing Dan's look of astonishment, Josy chuckled, "So it looks like she got the last laugh after all, didn't she?"

II

That year Jacques lost his job. The country was going through a minor depression, and one day Honeywell Brown Company fired eight hundred employees.

It was a tremendous blow. Jacques had worked for the same firm ever since coming to Philadelphia, and before that he had stayed with Republic Flowmeter in Chicago for almost twelve years. Never before had he been unemployed and without prospects. He had been trained only for engineering, and nobody was hiring engineers now.

A few days before, Josy had come home to find him sobbing uncontrollably. He had ordered her out of the room, sending her to the store as a pretext. On her way she met Malvina returning home and told her mother, who immediately deduced that something must have happened to their stock market securities. She was right. The market had plunged, and Jacques had lost almost everything he had invested.

After much deliberation, he decided to accept an offer from long-time acquaintance Daniel Berkowitz, to open a store selling electric appliances. They chose a location on the southwest corner of Broad and Louden Streets. Using borrowed money, they stocked it with refrigerators, washing machines, ovens, radios, and other small appliances. They named the place "The Keystone Appliance Company". It remained in Logan for almost

two years before moving to Strawberry Mansion.

Malvina asked Josy's piano teacher, Frank Potamkin, to come see her. Thanking him profusely for his excellent teaching, she suddenly burst into tears. Sobbing, she explained that Josy's lessons would have to stop; they could no longer afford to pay him. To her amazement Mr. Potamkin declared that he would teach Josy for free. She had enough talent, he explained, that it would pay him to keep her on, since having her perform at his yearly recitals would demonstrate his skill as a teacher and help bring in new pupils.

There was one condition, however. Nobody was ever to know of this arrangement, lest it lead others to also demand free lessons. Malvina was overwhelmed with gratitude.

When Josy came home from school that day, her mother informed her of the situation. Emotionally and in somber tones she pointed out that Josy would have to be very serious about her music, practice diligently, and continue to make progress. She cautioned her to keep it all a secret, and Josy solemnly agreed. It remained a source of tremendous pride to Malvina that Mr. Potamkin would continue to teach Josy without charge for the next eight years.

It was this circumstance that led to the break-up of her friendship with Verna Blackman. One day Verna approached her.

"You'll never guess who was at my cousin's wedding yesterday!" she announced. "Mr. Potamkin! And you know what he told me? He said that you really have no talent at all. He only teaches you because your mother pays him!"

Josy seethed with exasperation. Realizing what a lie this was, she remained particularly frustrated at not being able to respond with the truth. Verna's nasty and unprovoked attack left her feeling not only angry, but betrayed. From then on, she avoided Verna, never quite able to understand what had led to such cruel and mean-spirited behavior.

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The pay that Jacques brought home each week from the store depended on how much business they had done. Any profit had to be divided between two families, and sometimes weeks went by without a sale. The profit depended further on the bargaining skills of each customer.

To cut down on expenses, Jacques and Malvina decided to move from the apartment

building on Duncannon Avenue where they had lived for eight years. Mr. Bernstein, the landlord, was given to shouting and deaf to all reasoning. He refused to even consider Malvina's appeal that he temporarily decrease their rent by five dollars a month, though she assured him that as soon as the store repaid its loan three months later, he would get back the difference. Reminding him of how reliable they had been as tenants, and that they had always paid on time, she pleaded for him to suggest any compromise they could come to. To this he screamed that they either continue paying the fifty-five dollars a month or get out at once.

They found a small two-story row house at 4544 North Camac Street, at the opposite end of Logan near Hunting Park, and moved a couple weeks later. Jacques was now a bit closer to the store, and Josy able to continue at Cooke, where she still had one term left. It was a tremendous change after having lived at the same address for so long, but now their rent was only forty-five dollars a month.

Looking for other ways to cut down on expenses, Malvina would shop early in the morning for day-old bread to save pennies. She served meat less often, and when it came time to buy clothing, she tried to limit her search to the basement of Blauners Department Store at Ninth and Market, where occasional bargains could be found and mismatched goods were sometimes marked down. She also cancelled their Philadelphia Orchestra subscription for the coming year.

In a house across the street lived a thirty-five-year old mentally retarded man. Josy was taken aback to see him playing gleefully with five and six-year olds on the block. Shouting joyously in happy abandonment, he ran and disappeared behind a tree during their games of hide-and-seek, and flew merrily after them while playing tag. Once in a while when she practiced the piano, she spotted him stopping his play to stare in wonder at her window, open-mouthed at the music coming out.

On summer nights Jacques kept the store open late in hopes of getting extra customers, something that rarely occurred. Waiting for him to come home, Josy and her mother would sit outside in the yard on humid nights after supper, talking on the back steps until bedtime. Just before Josy went to sleep, Malvina would get out a deck of cards and read her fortune. When Josy's friend Frances Jacobs stayed overnight, Malvina would tell both their fortunes, which they loved and giggled over.

Though Jacques was outstanding at the game of bridge, Malvina never learned to play. When they went to bridge parties, she sat with the other ladies and told their fortunes. Keenly insightful about human nature, she picked up cues from body language and inter-

preted what she saw in the cards so enticingly that people often left the game to listen to her. Jacques sometimes scolded Malvina for telling Josy's fortune so often. He argued that it distorted her sense of reality, so they continued to enjoy this diversion without telling him.

Sitting outside on the front steps one hot August night, they heard Orson Welles announce over the radio, in his authoritative, electrifying voice, that men from Mars were invading the earth. Gaping at each other, they shrugged, turned it off, and moved to the back yard where it was cooler, to talk until bedtime. The next day they learned that hundreds of people had fled New Jersey and New York State in panic after listening to that program.

III

That summer a new friendship started that was to become the family's closest in Philadelphia. On the phone one morning a woman asked in heavily accented English for Mrs. Feldmark. Taking the phone from Josy who had answered the call, Malvina heard the woman haltingly inquire, "Do you speak Polish, French, or German?"

"All three," she responded, and immediately the caller gushed into animated conversation. In French, she introduced herself as Halina Wolkowicz, niece of a man from Chicago whom the Feldmarks knew casually. She explained that she and her husband Michal, who was a physician, had just arrived from Europe, and intended to settle in Philadelphia. They were staying with another uncle, a Dr. Levy in Center City. Malvina immediately invited them, and they came the following evening.

They turned out to be a charming couple, cultured, elegant, well read, refined. Because of mounting tensions in Europe, they had convinced Dr. Levy to bring them from Paris, where they had been living for several years. They were among the last to leave Europe before World War II broke out.

That night in anticipation of their visit Malvina sent Josy out to Perloff's Drug Store to buy ice cream. Perloff's, at Eleventh and Courtland, was where you could buy regular cones for a nickel, and even a smaller amount for three cents. This evening Josy was instructed to buy a full quart. The Wolkowiczs were approaching the house just as she was leaving for the store. They noticed her coming down the porch steps, bouncing along in her saddle shoes and ankle socks. Later Michal would often speak of how, even though he

had no idea then who she was, he would always remember this image of her as the first teen-ager he ever saw in America.

When she returned home with the ice cream and heard that the guests knew very little English, Josy announced that music was an international language, and offered to play the piano for them. Coming from a fourteen-year-old, this made a lasting impression, and they soon grew to be like second parents to her, while she, in turn, came to love them dearly.

They were almost twenty years younger than Jacques and Malvina, but they all had a great deal in common. Like the Feldmarks, they came originally from Poland before taking up residence in France, and shared many similar experiences and adventures. Though he had practiced medicine in France for many years, Michal now had to reapply for a physician's license in the United States. Until he got it, they would stay with "Uncle Bucky", the wealthy, aging, slightly eccentric physician who, with his wife, lived in a large home downtown on Pine Street. This was on the other side of the city, some sixty blocks from the Feldmarks. What they did not find out until many years later was that on that first night, Halina and Michal had walked all sixty blocks each way to visit them. This, Halina later confided, was because they had been unable to afford the thirty cent round-trip carfare that it would have cost them both to use public transportation!

It would take some two years before they could finally afford to leave "Uncle Bucky's" and move into their own small house on Richmond Street. Here in the Kensington section of Philadelphia Michal opened his first medical practice, with offices on the ground floor and living quarters upstairs. This was a Polish neighborhood, and they felt entirely at home from the start. The practice (first in general medicine, later ophthalmology) quickly flourished. Josy and her parents visited them often there during the next few years. Frequently she would do her homework in Michal's ground floor office (empty on Sundays) while the grown-ups chatted upstairs. She would remember particularly the time when she got to twelfth grade and was doing her physics homework in his office, because it was then that she slowly became aware of an odd sensation in her mouth, and suddenly realized that her wisdom teeth were coming in.

IV

The days hung heavy during the summer of 1938. The heat was oppressive, and everyone longed to find a spot in the shade, lie around idly, and subside on cold drinks.

One day, bored but too tired to walk to the library, Josy browsed through the huge, old wooden bookcase in the dining room. It had been in the family since before she was born. It stood about five feet high, its two glass doors protected by an intricate design carved in wood. One of the glass panels was missing, but the wooden carving over the space remained. (Some twenty years later when Josy would sell the piece to a used furniture dealer for seven dollars, her cleaning lady Katie would inform her the following week that she had seen it for sale in an open-air West Philadelphia market, its asking price there forty-nine dollars. Katie had recognized it by the missing glass panel in one of the two doors.)

Inside that bookcase Josy now discovered three items that intrigued her: two romance novels and a book on psychology. One of the novels was by Grace Livingstone Hill Lutz, the other by Margaret Peddler. Both were considered a bit steamy in their day. That next week she read them avidly, and for the next two years, she would borrow from the library every book by these pulp romance writers she could find.

The psychology book interested her even more. She was amazed to discover that there existed a field of study directly concerned with human behavior. Although Malvina insisted that this particular volume was hardly a good presentation of the subject, Josy was entranced. There was an especially vivid description of a small boy who, having hurt himself near the river, waited until he got home three blocks away before beginning to cry. Her fascination with psychology continued to grow to the point where, when she eventually got to her junior year in college, she would seriously consider choosing psychology instead of teaching as the field she would major in.

That summer someone lent her a who-done-it. It was her first mystery story, and she loved it, but afterwards she skulked around the house apprehensively for at least a day or two, fearful whenever she was alone in the house, afraid to enter a room before first turning on the light. Though left with the nagging sensation that she had wasted her time reading junk, she still found the mounting suspense, tension, and challenge of trying to solve the mystery exciting enough to make this new type of reading one of her favorites.

She always associated the heat of that summer with a Deanna Durbin movie, *Mad About Music*. One Saturday afternoon on the hottest day of that year she went by herself to the Broad Theater, diagonally across the street from her father's store. The place was air-conditioned to the point of chill. Together with the film, which she thought was the best she had ever seen, she would always recall the delicious sensation of feeling the sweat on her brow and over her body freeze instantly as soon as she entered the lobby.

V

That summer June Liph and her mother came from Chicago to visit. The last time Josy had seen June they had played together as little children. They had had so much fun back then that, since the age of six, she continued to refer to June as "my best friend". Now they got the chance to become reacquainted. They treated each other pleasantly enough, yet long silences crept up during which they had nothing to say to each other. From time to time June dropped hints of risqué jokes and innuendoes that Josy failed to understand, but as soon as June realized how naïve and uninformed Josy was, she quickly changed the subject.

Malvina and Mrs. Liph decided to take the girls to Wildwood for a couple of days. It would be Josy's only time at the shore that year, and she looked forward to it eagerly. Once there, she looked up her friends Shirlee and Millie Granoff and, with June, they spent all their time together, on the beach in the daytime, the boardwalk at night. June grew more relaxed and, with the other girls along, she and Josy soon grew more at ease with each other.

Everything went along pleasantly until one afternoon when the four of them went walking on the Boardwalk and returned half an hour later than promised. Mrs. Liph met them in a fury. Always eccentric (she was the one who had dressed her two daughters in black diapers as infants), she now appeared mentally disturbed as well.

Grabbing June (already fifteen years old) by the hair, she pulled her bathing suit off and whipped her mercilessly in front of everybody on the beach. It was a frightening spectacle, and only the intervention of Malvina and Mrs. Granoff got her to stop. The next day she and June left to go back to Chicago, while Josy and her mother returned to Philadelphia. It was two more years before she would see June again.

Later that year Josy returned home from visiting Shirlee and Millie Granoff in South Philadelphia one Saturday evening.

"You should see Mrs. Granoff!" she told to her mother in disbelief. "She's getting so fat! Really fat! She should really take off some weight"

The following week Mrs. Granoff delivered a healthy baby boy!

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Early that September Malvina's cousin Hy Margolius, out of work and dejected, came from Paterson to visit. He ended up staying for the next six weeks. Josy came to regard him as a big brother, and her parents made him feel completely at home. Gradually he regained confidence and considered returning to work in a Passaic, New Jersey jewelry store. He liked the owner's daughter, Irma, and was trying to decide whether or not to marry her. His father (Malvina's Uncle Wolev) had begged Malvina for help.

"He likes the girl," Wolev had complained. "He has no job. Her father owns a big jewelry store and could make him a partner. And he's already twenty-five years old! What's he waiting for?

"Talk to him," he begged Malvina. "Talk some sense into him."

During Hy's long stay that autumn Hy and Malvina spoke about it many times. Eventually he did go to work in the jewelry store, and the following year he married Irma. Josy wondered how much her mother's advice had affected his decision.

VI

When school reopened, Josy's weekly piano lessons resumed. This year Mr. Potamkin decided that a few of his advanced pupils should take an additional course in harmony; this cost fifty cents a lesson. He hired Blanche Rendelman to teach the group on Saturday afternoons. They met for a few sessions in the studio to the right of his front entry hall, a small room with a single baby grand piano. At the same time Mr. Potamkin or his wife Eugenie would be giving lessons in the huge living room at the left, the one with the two baby grands. The entry hall between formed a barrier that kept both rooms soundproof.

There were four others in the class. One a boy named Leon Messa, was two years younger than Josy. He was the son of a professional musician. Later she found out that Leon was the only other student Mr. Potamkin taught for free. Eventually he gave Josy and Leon fourhanded work to do together. Seated at each of the two pianos in the big living room, they found this interesting and fun. A four-handed version of Ernesto Lecuona's "Malagueña" was their best number, and they learned it well enough to perform at the end-of-the-year recital. Josy found it a completely different experience from working solo, and a pleasant distraction from the routine of her regular lessons.

She liked Blanche Rendelman and found her harmony classes interesting, too. From

those few lessons she learned some basics that proved helpful as she advanced in her study of music.

Occasionally she would get into line late Saturday afternoons waiting for the doors to open at the Academy of Music when they sold a limited number of tickets to that evening's concert. The seats were in the last few rows of the amphitheater ("the peanut gallery"), up some seven or eight flights of steps, and there was no elevator. Everybody arrived breathless after the long climb. The seats felt dizzyingly high, but they were cheap, and the area always got filled, usually by students and others enthusiastic about music.

Sometimes she stood in line for two hours or more, and had many interesting conversations with the various people waiting. Once she stood next to a girl her own age who claimed that her father played in the orchestra. Because of this, she bragged to Josy, she would be able to get in backstage after the performance to be introduced to the soloist (none other than Sergei Rachmaninoff that night). Josy was extremely jealous. But her own innate shyness, or something in the girl's manner, held her back from asking to accompany her backstage after the performance. She regretted this, and reproached herself about it repeatedly later.

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Late that autumn Sonia Estes, an acquaintance of Malvina, called with the news that she was moving back to Chicago. A couple years earlier, when Sonia had first come to Philadelphia, she had introduced herself as a cousin of Jean and Elio Hersh, whom Malvina had first gotten to know as cousins of the Grodskys from Chicago. Sonia was separated from her husband, and had recently undergone a tragedy. One of her two adult sons, an epileptic, had died after falling on top of a radiator and lying there helpless for hours until someone rescued him. Malvina found it hard to understand how Sonia, discussing her grief, emphasized above all her difficulty in getting a hairdresser appointment before the funeral.

Sonia Estes.

Josy, too, felt uncomfortable in Sonia's presence. She would stare at Josy fixedly while recounting in great detail stories from her own childhood. When she was a young girl in Russia, Sonia

had been told by gypsies that she had psychic powers and could see into everyone's heart and mind and know exactly what each person was thinking. This sent shivers through Josy as she listened under Sonia's penetrating stare.

The previous summer, Sonia had gone to a vacation camp and come home with sun poisoning. She went out walking with several others, who got lost and found themselves in a treeless landscape (the women in halter-tops and shorts) and wandered around for hours. Sonia, with her red hair and fair skin, proved especially vulnerable. She returned to Philadelphia with second-degree sun poisoning, too sick even to stand up. Malvina went to her apartment unbidden, staying for three days, to take care of her until the worst was over, refusing to return home until Sonia was able to start managing for herself.

"All it takes for my mother to befriend somebody," Josy realized, "is for that person to have a misfortune. She's too soft-hearted to see anyone even the slightest bit unhappy, and a lot of people take advantage of her good nature."

In 1938 the Spanish Civil War was at its peak. Committees in many American cities collected supplies and clothing to send to the anti-Franco forces. That fall Sonia called Malvina asking her to come along to the Spanish War Collection Headquarters.

"It's a real opportunity!" she declared. "Some of the richest women give away shoes and clothing worth a fortune. We can help ourselves to whatever we want!"

Malvina declined firmly, telling Sonia how shocked she was.

"Oh, don't be such a goody-goody!" Sonia laughed. "Everybody does it!"

After that, Malvina saw little of her. But when she learned that Sonia was moving back to Chicago, she relented.

"Since she's leaving for good," she told Jacques, "we might as well part on pleasant terms."

She offered to make Sonia a farewell dinner.

"Invite whomever you want," Malvina told her, "and we'll hold it here at our house."

They planned a party for the day after Thanksgiving, and Malvina started preparations well in advance. Around eleven o'clock the day of the party Sonia arrived just as it was beginning to snow.

"I was afraid of the bad weather," she said, "so I thought I'd better come early."

She had invited thirty people. Malvina was unsure where to fit everyone in that small living room on Camac Street, but nevertheless she bought a tremendous amount of food, all of which she started preparing a couple of days before.

By two o'clock that afternoon several inches of snow had already settled on the ground. Another guest, a man whom the Feldmarks had never met, arrived by three. He, too, wanted to make sure that he got there before travel became a problem. By six that night, the roads were impassable and by eight everyone else on the guest list had called to cancel. The food for thirty people had to be shared by Josy, her parents, Sonia, and the other guest. Both visitors remained overnight, Sonia in the spare room at the back of the second floor, her guest on the living-room sofa downstairs. They all ended up having a jolly time, telling jokes, playing games, singing, holding long discussions, and laughing a great deal. Malvina gave Sonia the mounds of food that remained to take home the next day. It made for a pleasant good-bye to a casual acquaintance.

VII

Things were not working out well at Jacques' store. He was unhappy as a businessman, ill at ease with the routine and especially in dealing with customers. All his working life as an engineer, he had focused on mathematics and theories, mostly behind a desk. Now he was uncomfortable spending his time bargaining over prices.

Desperate to help, Malvina came up with a plan to get him away for a while and possibly augment the business. Through her brother Stashek in Mexico, she hoped they could add an import-export line to the store. Daniel Berkowitz, Jacques' partner, acknowledged that the idea bore looking into. They decided that Jacques should go to Mexico in February to look into the possibilities.

Not wanting to leave Malvina and Josy alone during the six weeks he was away, and realizing that there would be no income from the store during that time, they arranged with Maurice Falik, the widower and former neighbor from Duncannon Avenue, for the two families to move in together. In return for paying very low rent at the Falik's home, Malvina would cook for everyone, keep house, and look after Maurice's two children. Diana was now six, and Herby ten.

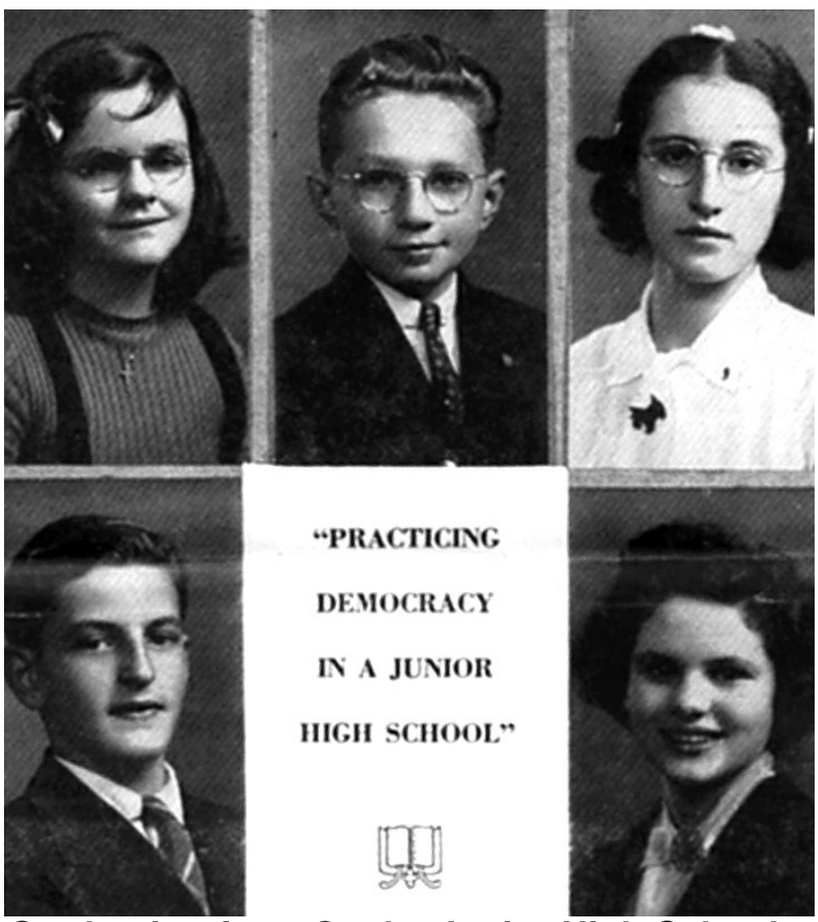
They sold most of their furniture, except for Josy's baby grand piano, which they placed in the Faliks' living room, and their bedroom pieces, which went into two of the bedrooms upstairs (one for Josy, the other for her parents). During the Christmas vacation they left Camac Street and moved into the Falik's house at 5127 North Sixteenth Street. They had lived on Camac Street for just under eight months.

Josy was delighted to be living with Herby and Diana, which felt like suddenly acquiring a brother and sister. Jacques would not leave for Mexico until mid-February, six weeks away, so moving early gave both families time to get used to each other.

In the beginning everyone got along splendidly, except for the occasional teasing Josy endured from Herby. A mischievous ten-year old, he repeatedly looked for ways to gain attention, annoying her by shouting while she was practicing the piano, hiding her things, and jumping out of corners to startle her. Upon urging from the three grown-ups, they always patched things up. It also pleased Josy that living just a block away from her classmates Frances Jacobs and Miriam Hoffman, she got to walk to school with them both, which helped them all grow closer.

Early in January she came home from school one day with the news that she had won the essay contest, and her essay would be one of the two read at Cooke's graduation. Malvina, seated at the dining room shelling peas, burst into tears of joy and pride.

Soon, though, they were arguing. Josy refused to memorize the essay and recite it herself. Apprehensive at the thought of getting up on stage, obsessed with the idea that she might forget a line in front of a large audience and determined not to spend her last night at Cooke in a state of nervous anxiety, she refused to change her mind. Jacques and Malvina argued with her for days, but nothing dissuaded her. Finally her teachers agreed to let another girl, Doris Rosenblit (whom Josy barely knew) recite the essay for her. Josy was delighted, her parents less so. They finally resigned themselves to the arrangement when they heard that Josy would be called upon to stand up as the author, and her



Graduation from Cooke Junior High School.

name would appear on the printed program.

Graduation exercises took place at eight o'clock Monday evening, January 30, 1939. The title of her essay was "What Junior High School Did For Us". Unfortunately, on the printed program it came out as "What Junior High School Did To Us". It had been a foregone conclusion that she would go to Olney High School at Front and Duncannon. Except for the boys going to Central High in its newly opened building in Oak Lane, and the girls traveling all the way to Girls High School in Center City, everybody from Logan living east of Broad Street went to Olney, everyone west to Gratz. For eight and a half years (in the apartment building on Duncannon Avenue and the house on Camac Street) she had lived east of Broad Street. But when she moved to Mr. Falik's house just one month before graduation, this placed her west of the dividing line, so instead of Olney she went to Gratz. This chance circumstance produced unexpectedly happy results. The three years she spent at Gratz High would remain among her fondest memories of all of her school days.