Chapter 17. Grade 11

I

At the start of eleventh grade, Josy received Gratz High School's Mercantile Library Award. This entitled her to one year's free membership at a privately owned library on Tenth Street in Center City. Halfway between Market and Chestnut Streets, it had been founded by Benjamin Franklin as the first library in the American colonies. In 1940 membership cost ten dollars a year. The Gratz award was presented each year to the eleventh grader showing the most literary promise. Josy felt tremendously honored to receive it.

Even after she had left high school, she continued to frequent the place, usually on Saturday afternoons. It smelled old and musty, imbued with atmosphere. Several old men met there regularly, playing chess in remote corners of the cavernous reading room. One

had a long white flowing beard and looked to her exactly like a reincarnation of Walt Whitman. She heard that Whitman had frequented the library when he lived in Camden across the river.

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That year, encouraged by her success with tenth grade Plane Geometry, she signed up for Solid Geometry, a one-semester course. There were only five girls in the class. The teacher, a tall young fellow with glasses, looked as if he had swallowed a yardstick. He lacked Mr. Anders' gift for clear explanation, and the course was dull and lackluster. Josy ended up with a B. Later all that she remembered from the course was the endless teasing of a redheaded boy seated in front of her.

"That you, a mere girl," he sniveled, wrinkling his nose in disdain, "should choose to take Advanced Math is beyond me! Girls belong in the kitchen!"

Every day before class he made similar remarks to her.

"What it really means," suggested some of her friends, "is that he 'likes' you. He just wants to see you get angry."

But Josy found it so unpleasant that she tried to arrive at the last minute to avoid hearing his comments, sometimes almost coming in late.

In 11B she began what was to be a full year of Algebra II. The teacher, Mr. Garbrick, believed in rapid drill. He demanded speedy answers, walking up and down the aisles firing questions in swift succession at students in each row, never slowing his pace. Whenever a pupil hesitated, Mr. Garbrick punched him in the shoulder, then continued on to the next student. He went a little easier on the girls, but Josy still dreaded his approach. Once, in trying to make a point, his foot accidentally slammed into a wastebasket near his desk.

"Aha!" cried the class clown, Matthew Feinberg, from the back of the room, "The teacher just kicked the bucket!"

While the class roared with laughter, Mr. Garbrick glared. Scarcely missing a beat, he flung a second question at the student he was quizzing who, unfortunately, hesitated and got an extra punch for his delay.

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Dr. Harold Abrahams.

In 11A they started Chemistry. The teacher was Dr. Harold Abrahams, a warm-hearted, charming gentleman, very old-world in his bearing and dress. He stood barely five feet tall, but presented a dapper appearance. Always impeccably groomed, even in hot weather, he usually dressed in a three-piece suit with a bow tie. Spats covered the tops of his shoes, giving him a Victorian appearance. When he sauntered down the hallway, he usually had a walking stick swinging by his side.

Dr. Abrahams lavished great affection on his students, especially on Josy's class, and they responded warmly. Enthusiastically he introduced the wonders of first-year chemistry, thrilling them with the concept that inside every atom was a miniature universe comparable in structure to the solar system itself. He made Chemistry exciting. On lab days he presented experiments as if they were acts of magic, helping the class explore to their hearts' content with their Bunsen burners, test tubes, and brightly colored liquids. One Friday he even took the class on a tour to the University of Pennsylvania Chemistry Building, insisting on walking with them all the way back to Gratz High some four miles away because it would be turning dark before they arrived and he refused to ride on the Sabbath. Josy later mused that if Dr. Abrahams had remained at Gratz High till the end of this one-year course, she might have gotten a better background and been motivated to take chemistry in college. Unfortunately, at the end of the term he was reassigned to Central High School for Boys.

The entire class was heartbroken. They threw him a farewell party on the last day of school. As in the previous year with Mr. Anders, they relegated the task of writing a farewell poem to Josy. After ice cream, cake, several speeches and a few small gifts, she read her poem aloud.

POEM TO DOCTOR ABRAHAMS
(Written June 17, 1940)

We wonder, on this final day
How quickly all has passed,
The fun we've had in chemistry
Was much too good to last.

We meet, the last time in this room,
Reluctance in each heart,
To know that now the time has come
When we from you must part.

You've been so very kind to us,
You conquered, came, and saw,
Now all of us know perfectly
Each formula and law.

Your sympathy has led us on
To rediscover all,
To smile alike at gain and loss,
To remedy each fall.

To look into our hearts and souls
With truth and honesty,
And with our deeds to show the world
What we were meant to be.

To judge with justice, to define
The things of wrong from right,
If once correct, to carry on
To victory each fight.

The love you've put into our hearts
And minds of chemistry,
Shall always hold you in esteem,
A lasting memory.

What more, dear teacher, should we ask,
What else that should come true,
Just this: that luck and happiness
May ever follow you.

That you may think, in years to come,
Of all of us, your friends,'
Recall the pride we have in you,
A pride that never ends.

The girls all hugged Dr. Abrahams tearfully, while the boys, many close to tears, manfully shook his hand. Because of that poem, Dr. Abrahams still remembered her when they met again years later.

II

Strawberry Mansion was a beautiful neighborhood in those days. On the west it bordered Fairmount Park. On the other side Twenty-ninth Street formed a sharp dividing line, separating it from the black neighborhood to the east. Railroad tracks underneath a long winding bridge connecting Columbia and Girard Avenues formed its southern edge, while twelve blocks to the north the neighborhood ended abruptly where Lehigh Avenue faced Laurel Hill Cemetery. The community was mainly Jewish, with Yiddish often heard on the streets. Thirty-first Street, the business area, had pushcarts lined up on both sidewalks, and noisy bargaining between shopkeepers and passersby continued all through the daylight hours.

A couple blocks into the park stood the Robin Hood Dell, the summer home of the Philadelphia Orchestra. This large open-air hollow nestled between grassy slopes, with some two hundred rows of benches in tiers facing a stage sheltered by an overhanging eave. Concerts were free and some people even brought blankets and sat on the grassy slopes rather than the benches to listen to the classical music. Josy went often, occasionally with her mother, sometimes accompanied by her cousin Leah Margolius (Ben's daughter) and Leah's husband-to-be Bernie Kabacoff. On the way home they frequently stopped at Pflaumer's for the best ice cream in the city.

Thirty-third Street was a tree-lined promenade. People strolled there as on a boardwalk, stopping to rest on the stone and wooden benches, four or five to a block. At one end of the promenade (Ridge Avenue) a three-way intersection housed a car-barn (terminal of the Number 39 trolley), Pflaumer's Ice Cream Parlor, and Cherry's, a water-ice hangout.

Cherry's was always a hub of noise, especially on summer evenings. Zoot-suiters loitered outside, sipping water ice, hooting, and commenting loudly on the pedestrians strolling by. They considered themselves the height of fashion. Unable to stand still, these faddish young men twitched, wiggled, and, when not shoving one another in jest or catcalling loudly to the girls strolling by, showed off their jitterbug dance steps. Clad in suits (often green) with jackets hanging almost to the knees, long watch chains dangling from their pockets, they preened and displayed themselves like peacocks on the corner. Josy and many other girls made it a point to cross Thirty-third Street to the side adjoining the park to avoid these swaggerers. Matthew Feinberg, the class clown from Josy's homeroom, could be counted on to be the noisiest of the bunch.

Once while Malvina was resting on a park bench, an old lady sat down beside her. She began making conversation in Yiddish when a couple boys, tossing a ball, accidentally bounced it off the bench. Although nobody was hit, the old lady grew irate. Screaming an obscenity in Yiddish, she gave the boys her opinion in no uncertain terms.

"Oh, nuts to you, Lady," yelled one of the fellows.

Turning to Malvina, she threw her hands in the air and exclaimed, "Noh niss villen zay!" ("Nuts yet they want me to give them!")

Once in a while, especially on holidays or weekends, Josy and her friend Flora Kaplan hiked into Center City about three miles away. They took Thirty-third Street to the Benjamin Franklin Parkway, ending at Sixteenth and Chestnut. Here at Woolworth's Five-and-ten Cent Store they indulged themselves in a newly concocted soda-fountain treat called a "Chocolate Mondae". For twenty-five cents (an extravagant sum) they got a combination of ice cream soda and sundae. Served in a tulip-shaped glass, the bottom layer was carbonated chocolate soda. Above, supported by the wider part of the glass, came a scoop of vanilla ice cream topped with chocolate syrup, whipped cream, and a cherry. Perched on stools and leaning against the counter, they reasoned that they had earned this extravagance by walking. Sometimes they even walked back home, but usually they took the A bus, feeling a bit guilty, but with stomachs satisfied.

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Jacques's store, the Keystone Appliance Company, fared better in its Strawberry Mansion location. Crowds gathered outside the Park Movie across the street at Thirty-first and Diamond, especially in the evenings and on weekends, and this was good for business. Slowly the family grew financially more comfortable, but Jacques never felt at ease as a businessman. His skills lay in engineering, especially its theoretical aspects, not in interacting with customers. It especially irked him to bargain over prices.

One evening he came home particularly distraught.

"There's one woman who keeps coming back over and over," he told Malvina. "She's driving me crazy! She calls me 'Doll'! She calls everybody 'Doll'.

"Tonight she came back for the fourth time. She said, 'Doll, I really want to buy that radio you showed me last week. But you have to do better. Give me another five dollars off! I saw that same radio in Wanamakers, and it played much nicer music there!'"

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Around this time Malvina began to notice problems with her vision. She found a small lens, half of a pair of somebody's lost eyeglasses, and she took to using it for close work and reading. It was a single piece of glass, held in place by a cracked black frame. The nose-bridge of the original was still attached, and Malvina used this as a handle. She held the device up to read fine print or look at something closely. Both Jacques and Josy teased her relentlessly, saying it made her look like a British peer, but she refused to give up the contraption.

One Saturday afternoon while shopping at Gimbels Department Store in Center City, Josy was looking through a pile of gloves when she found tucked under them a gadget exactly like her mother's lens! It even had the remnants of a nose-bridge, with a crack at the corner of its black plastic frame.

"Unbelievable," she murmured to herself. "Imagine, there actually exist two of these things!"

Putting the piece into her pocketbook, she took it home to show Malvina.

As soon as she entered the apartment her mother greeted her by saying, "Well, you and your father are going to be very happy! You know that little eyeglass piece you both make fun of? I lost it today. So I won't ever be able to use it again!"

"Yes you will, Mom!" Josy answered resignedly, pulling the piece out of her pocketbook. "I found it at Gimbels! You must have been there just before I was. I guess it was meant to belong to you!"

Indeed, Malvina had been shopping at Gimbels just an hour before Josy got there, and this was her lens. Shortly afterwards, an ophthalmologist confirmed that she needed bifocals, and she never used the lens again.

III

As summer vacation approached, Josy told her parents she wanted to go to New York by herself.

"What for?" they asked her.

"To get the feel of the city," she replied. "To explore! To have an adventure!"

"And where would you stay?" they wanted to know.

"Oh, I'd find a small rooming house somewhere off Times Square, nothing very expensive or elaborate."

"By yourself?"

"Of course!" she responded. "I could go with a girlfriend or by myself. It would only be for a couple of days."

She was only sixteen, and the answer was an emphatic "No!" They argued for over a week but Josy failed to convince them. She found it hard to understand why.

Shortly afterwards, Malvina's brother Stashek visited New York on business and stopped in Philadelphia for a couple days. Malvina invited their brother Ben to come have dinner with them. This was the first time the brothers had met in over thirty years. Since his wife Liba was away visiting her sister's family in Washington, Ben arrived alone. Malvina had prepared an elaborate meal to celebrate, and for a while everything went well. After dinner Jacques returned to the store, which stayed open late some nights. Then the reunion began to deteriorate.

"So how are things with you?" Stashek asked Ben. "Are you satisfied packing dishes for Wanamakers?"

"And how does it feel to be a capitalist?" he retorted.

Stashek simply laughed. "I'm comfortable," he replied.

This infuriated Ben. He lost control, launching into a tirade against the enemies of the Soviet Union.

"The revolution is coming," he cried, "and you and your entire class will be wiped out!"

In vain Malvina tried to restore calm. Stashek merely laughed, but Ben shouted louder and louder, wagging his finger in his brother's face with every remark. Finally drawing himself to his feet, he screamed, "To hell with the upper classes—you and all your kind!"

He stomped out of the apartment, shaking his fist, still shouting from down in the street, "You'll see! We'll get rid of you! You and all the capitalists!" while Malvina screamed out the window for him to come back and Stashek sat there merely shrugging. The result, however, was that he invited Malvina to bring Josy and come to Mexico for the rest of the summer.

"We have to remain close as a family," Stashek declared. " I'll pay for your train fare. I can afford it!"

She agreed, but no amount of coaxing could convince Josy to go along. She vivid-

ly recalled the ten weeks she had spent in Mexico several years earlier. She had no desire to sit cooped up in her uncle's apartment, listening to arguments between Stashek and his wife, and fighting with her cousin Alejandro. She remembered drinking milk that had been boiled and had a skin on it, avoiding fresh fruit and vegetables for fear of stomach upsets, and yearning for ice-cream sodas and teenage company. Since her parents had refused her permission to go to New York, she now suggested that instead, she accept an invitation from her friend June Liph to stay in Chicago.

They settled on a compromise. She and Malvina would take the train to Chicago together (the "Trailblazer" made the overnight trip in just fifteen hours). From there Malvina would continue by herself to Mexico City, leaving Josy behind with the Liphs. She would pick Josy up for the trip back home a few weeks later. It sounded perfect. Any hesitation Josy felt was allayed when she reminded herself of the good times she and June had shared before.

"I always told everyone that June was my best friend ever since we were little kids," she kept reassuring herself.

She and her mother left for Chicago together. After a couple of days there, Malvina took the train for Mexico City. The next morning the Liphs, their daughter Lenora (nineteen), June and Josy set out by car for Union Pier for the weekend. Two hours away in Indiana, the town of Union Pier was a charming summer resort with sand dunes on the beach of Lake Michigan. Every summer the Liphs rented a cottage there.

That Saturday was exceedingly hot and muggy. It was well into the afternoon by the time they arrived. As soon as they unpacked, Mrs. Liph announced they had to go shopping. She insisted on cooking for tomorrow's Sunday dinner, and the farmers near Union Pier, she declared, were known for their katchkehs (the Yiddish word for "ducks").

Lenora immediately announced that she had already made plans to meet some boys at the beach and quickly disappeared. Josy and June were left to go on the shopping expedition.

"I have to have a fresh katchkeh," Mrs. Liph told her husband as they got into the car. "It has to be fresh!"

"But katchkehs are all fresh if you buy them while they're still alive," he protested.

"Never mind!" she argued, talking more to herself than to him. "Not everybody has fresh katchkehs. I'll know a fresh one when I see it,"

"Yes dear," he replied meekly.

They set out with the girls in the back seat. Mr. Liph drove, his wife ordering which

Josy and June Liph with boys at Union Pier, 1940.

road to take, where to turn, which farmhouse to try. At each stop everybody had to get out of the car to cool off while she inspected the katchkehs, warning the farmers, "Don't try to cheat me! I want a fresh katchkeh, a really fresh one!"

The excursion took three hours. The summer heat was intense and after a while, on June's suggestion, Mr. Liph let both girls stand on the running board (one on each side) of the car while he drove slowly up and down the dusty road waiting for his wife to make a selection. The wind blowing through their hair felt exhilarating and gave some relief from the heat. By the time Mrs. Liph found a suitable katchkeh, most of the afternoon was gone. They finally got to the beach for half an hour, diving into the cold breakers just before sunset.

The next day Mr. Liph again took the girls to the beach, but not till after they had first ridden around for a couple hours looking for ripe tomatoes. Again Lenora avoided the expedition, having left the house by the time the others got up.

That afternoon the lake water was icy, a sharp contrast to the heaviness of the air. Each time they dived from a nearby pier, Josy savored the shock of relief from the humidity. One time she hit the water flat on her stomach, slapping against it so hard that the sharp sting lasted for minutes. Later she and June went for a walk and met some older boys. June said she knew them, but Josy was not sure how true that was. They ended up taking pictures together on the dunes with her small box camera. By now she was congratulating herself on having made the right decision to come to Chicago. This was going to be a summer of fun and adventure after all.

Early that evening, after a heavy dinner of herring, soup, duck, potatoes, corn on the cob, tomatoes, and pie, they all drove to an open pavilion a few miles away. Here the Jewish Arbeiterung Society was holding a picnic. Hundreds of people milled about inside the pavilion and on the neighboring grounds. At one point, who should come walking by but Celia Kirson.

Mrs. Liph approached her, chatted for awhile, and then pointed at Josy. Celia stared, blinked unbelievingly, and then gave a loud whoop. Disregarding her high-heeled shoes and narrow skirt, she leapt over one of the picnic benches to fling her arms around Josy, screaming, "Dahlink! Dahlink! My own dahlink girl!" as everyone turned to stare. They remained at the picnic till ten o'clock, then said good-bye to Celia and set out for Chicago. Next morning, Mrs. Liph explained, June had summer school and would have to get up early.

"Yes," she murmured, glaring pointedly at her daughter, "She has to go to summer school every day. She didn't do so well in her studies last year."

June squirmed and shrank back into the seat of the car, trying to disappear into the cushions.

"I'll be back for lunch," she whispered to Josy. "Then we can do something together."

Early the following day, Josy was awakened by shrieks from the next room.

"You're going to be late!" Mrs. Liph was screaming. "You'll never make it!"

It was six o'clock in the morning.

"But school's only a block away, Ma!" June protested. "It doesn't start till eight."

"Never mind," argued Mrs. Liph. "You get up now! I'm walking you to the door to make sure you get there on time."

"Oh Ma," begged June, "Please don't come into class with me! It's embarrassing!"

A few minutes later at the table, Mrs. Liph nagged, "Eat your breakfast! Come on! Hurry up! You're going to be late!"

It was not quite seven o'clock. Turning to Josy, who had stuck her head out the door, she sighed, "You just can't trust that girl for anything! Why can't she be like her sister Lenora? Tell me! Why?"

Josy slunk back into bed, mumbling that she wanted to sleep a little longer.

By eight thirty, after she had gotten up and helped herself to breakfast, Mrs. Liph returned.

"I spoke to her teacher this time," she assured Josy. "Maybe that will help! That girl! That girl!"

She continued to mutter while Josy slumped further down in her chair, trying to read. Suddenly Mrs. Liph sprang up and grabbed her by the arm.

"Come with me!" she ordered. "Come with me! I want to show you something!"

Dragging her into June's bedroom, she rushed to the bureau, flinging open one

drawer after another, pulling out sweaters, socks, and underwear, throwing everything on the floor.

"What shall I do with her?" she screamed. "That girl has everything! Sweaters! Look at all these sweaters! And blouses! And dresses!" She swung open the closet door and started to hurl dresses onto the rug. Weeping, she pleaded with Josy, "Tell me what to do with her! I don't know what to do with her. Tell me what to do!"

Frightened, Josy tried to back out of the room, but Mrs. Liph kept pulling her back. The tirade went on for over half an hour. When Josy finally managed to extricate herself and inch backward into the living room, she grabbed a book, threw herself into an armchair, and pretended to read. Not to be put off, Mrs. Liph followed, plunking herself down on the sofa, yelling hysterically for several minutes more.

Terrified, Josy had no idea what to do. A couple days earlier she had overheard June complain to her father.

"You have to learn to fight your own battles," was his only response.

She had heard that he stayed out of town on business more than he was home. Now she began to realize why. Recalling stories of how Mrs. Liph had dressed her babies in black diapers, and remembering how two summers earlier, she had beaten June publicly after stripping her of her bathing suit on the beach, Josy realized this was an extremely sick woman. Now she was frightened, not only for June, but for her own sanity if she were to remain with this family much longer. She also resented Mr. Liph for not standing up to his wife to protect June, instead ignoring the situation.

After a while Mrs. Liph went into the kitchen, and Josy wrote a long letter to her father recounting everything in detail. She went to the mailbox, then took a long walk so she could stay out of the apartment till June came home for lunch.

"How will I ever be able to stand a month of this?" she pondered.

As it was, an unexpected turn of events solved that problem. The next morning she awoke feeling ill. Her stomach ached and she felt nauseated. She recalled the sharp stinging pain from two days earlier after diving into the lake, and wondered if this could be the result.

Shortly after breakfast, she asked if she could go back to bed. June had already left for school, and Mrs. Liph told Josy to go lie down. She awoke at noon, feeling even more uncomfortable. Her cramps were so severe that all plans for the rest of the day were canceled. As the hours drifted by, her pain grew more intense. By suppertime her only relief came from lying doubled over on her side.

Mrs. Liph phoned her physician, who recommended warm tea, aspirin, and rest. Lenora had a date with a medical student that evening. Instead of going out to dinner as planned, they decided to eat at home while he watched Josy, asking her repeatedly exactly where she hurt. At eleven o'clock she felt the pain switch sharply to her right side, and he concluded that it must be appendicitis.

Mrs. Liph phoned Dr. Kirson, who directed them to a nearby hospital where she had physician's privileges. She met them there, and both she and the emergency room doctor confirmed the diagnosis. They summoned a surgeon, but since Josy was still a minor, they needed parental permission for surgery. There was no way to reach Malvina on a train by now somewhere in Texas, so they phoned Jacques in Philadelphia. By now it was two o'clock in the morning.

When he answered the phone, the first thing he heard was Mrs. Liph screaming, "We just ran Josy over to the hospital!"

Half awake, and having just received Josy's letter describing how she had stood on the running board of a moving car, he immediately concluded that she had been run over. It took several minutes of anguished explanations and repetition till he finally understood what had happened. Still in shock, he gave permission for the surgery. He begged Celia (who had grabbed the phone away from a hysterical Mrs. Liph) to call him back as soon as the operation was over. Then he hung up and phoned the hospital back so he could speak to Josy directly.

"Don't be afraid," he consoled her, "don't be afraid. It's going to be all right."

He promised to leave for Chicago the next day. As soon as he hung up, dazed and in a panic, he dialed Simon and Emma Sokolff, waking them in the middle of the night. Half an hour later, his doorbell rang. Standing there with coats over their pajamas were Simon and Emma.

"We couldn't let you be alone at a time like this," they told him.

They stayed till daybreak, even after Celia had called saying that the operation had gone well and Josy was out of danger.

A few hours later Jacques took the Trailblazer to Chicago. He arrived the following morning, going straight to the hospital. As soon as he entered Josy's room, he began to sob.

"Just lie back and rest," he told her.

"I'm fine!" she chirped, happy to see him and full of chatter about the events of the past week.

"Imagine if you had gone to New York by yourself the way you wanted," he reminded her. "You would have gotten sick in a boarding house! That would have been a fine kettle of fish!"

She had to agree.

"Just one thing," she begged after they had talked a while. "Please, please don't make me go back to the Liphs!"

He agreed on one condition. Sternly he admonished, "Don't you ever," and here his voice rose firmly, "ever again stand on the running board of a moving car!"

In complete surprise, she agreed. With all the excitement of recent events, it had not occurred to her that this, of all things, would be what she was scolded for.

He remained in Chicago for three days. Various friends came to the hospital to see Josy and to visit with him, among them Ben Weintroub, the Tecotskys, the Grodskys, Celia Kirson, and of course the Liphs, as well as various relatives Josy hardly remembered.

Sonia Estes entered the hospital room leading a tall, extremely handsome man who was completely blind, introducing him as Tom Corley, her "friend". Josy was charmed by his gracious and pleasant manner, his delightful sense of humor, and jovial personality. Knowing that Sonia was still married to a Mr. Estes, whom neither she nor her parents had ever met, she asked no questions. She lay back on her pillow and enjoyed the visit, even though she never saw Mr. Corley again after that.

Celia Kirson came every day, and they decided that, after being discharged, Josy should go stay with her. Jacques told the Liphs that as a physician, Celia would be better able to take care of her. It was also agreed that Malvina not be notified about the surgery until she got back from Mexico. There was no sense in upsetting her after the fact.

Not until five days after the operation was Josy allowed to get up. Having been bedridden for so long, she found her first few steps excruciatingly painful.

The night before Jacques left for home, Rose Satt, a distant cousin of the Tecotskys came striding into the hospital room. It was seven o'clock in the evening, and Josy and her father had been looking forward to spending his last evening in Chicago together (visiting hours ended at eight o'clock). Rose, mindless that she was intruding, nodded briefly at Josy, then rushed over to Jacques and hugged him warmly. Grabbing his arm, she announced, "Come on, you're taking me out to dinner!" Caught unawares, he found himself dragged out of the hospital room. Almost in tears, Josy lay back helpless and bitterly disappointed, knowing that she would not see him or her mother again for the next sever-

al weeks. Actually, Jacques did manage to poke his head in the doorway briefly the next morning before leaving for the train station. He had been as unhappy about Rose's visit as Josy, but had no idea how to extricate himself.

The nurses, aware that Josy was only sixteen and recovering from surgery in a strange city away from her parents, were extremely solicitous. They fussed over her, pampered her, popped in and out of her room constantly, brought treats and lavished all sorts of small attentions on her. She was so touched that she made it a point to return to the hospital a couple weeks later to thank everybody. She was disappointed to find that most of them had forgotten her completely.

The hospital stay lasted ten days, and then Celia took her home. Celia lived in a four-bedroom apartment with her niece (Fannie Weinberg, in her early thirties) and her nephew (Samuel Kirson Weinberg, nicknamed Mookie), a couple years younger. Fannie was a social worker for the city of Chicago. She was the one who had come to Atlantic City for a convention a few years earlier and had been unable to locate the Feldmarks' apartment there. Now she was still on vacation in the Canadian Rockies the day Josy arrived, but she returned home the following evening. Her brother Mookie was in the process of working on his Ph.D. dissertation in Criminology that year. A few months earlier he had actually lived inside a prison for several days to gather data. Bespectacled, soft-spoken, and gentle in manner, he spoke to Josy often about his work, which she found fascinating.

They had a small collection of classical records that they encouraged her to play as often as she wanted. Her favorite was Lawrence Tibbett singing Figaro's aria from "The Barber of Seville". She played it several times each day.

When Fannie arrived home Josy took to her immediately. Fannie was jovial and entertaining. She regaled the family with colorful accounts of her vacation, and after she started work again, she came home at night full of stories about her clients. She once described a family she had visited to see if they qualified for welfare. The mother spent most of the interview complaining about bills and enormous expenses. After each item she threw up her hands and exclaimed, "It's all true! I swear it's all true!" Every time she did, her parrot in the living-room cage shrieked out in

Fannie Weinberg, 1940.

Yiddish, "Azoy zoocks dee! Azoy zoocks dee!" ("That's what you say! That's what you say!")

Fannie always made time for Josy. She took her to lectures, movies, and concerts on evenings and weekends, treating her as a grown-up. Mookie, urged on by Celia, once took Josy to the movies to see a Mickie Rooney film. At one point on the walk home he grabbed her elbow to steer her away from a cellar entrance where he had spotted rats.

She found living in Celia's apartment pleasant, far better than at the Liphs. Just one thing bothered her, and at first she was at a loss to know how to deal with it. In letters to her father, she referred to the problem as the "B-B's" (they had made up this signal earlier for "bedbugs"). Celia, overly protective, insisted that Josy sleep beside her on a daybed they opened up each evening. Throughout the night Celia continually grabbed her wrist, felt her pulse, and bent over her listening to her breathe. But worse was that the couch was infested with bedbugs. Josy felt them crawling over her, and she found her arms and legs covered with bites and scratches. She was desperate, not knowing how to handle the problem, and embarrassed to even mention it to Celia.

Ben Weintroub visited one afternoon and she mentioned the problem to him. Even though he had been sworn to secrecy about telling Malvina of Josy's surgery, because of the bedbug problem, he eventually decided to write to Malvina about recent events and tell her that Josy needed her. Long before his letter reached her, though, Josy found a solution to the difficulty.

She noticed that behind the kitchen was an extra bedroom nobody was using. Pleading that traffic noise kept her awake, she asked to use this room, since it faced a quiet side street. Eager to please her, Celia agreed. There were no bugs in this bed, and the problem was solved. Josy enjoyed lying there when she first woke each morning, gazing outside through the screen in the open window next to her bed. The room was peaceful and cool, and viewing the houses and trees across the street through the fine mesh of the screen made them look like a needlepoint pattern, giving her a sense of serenity.

During the long days while Fannie was away at work, Celia at her job for the Chicago Clinics, and Mookie in his room working on his thesis, Josy took a blanket and went across the street to the wide median strip in the middle of Independence Boulevard. There she spread out the blanket and lay on the grass, ignoring traffic in the adjoining lanes and read for hours. It was the beginning of August and, though the afternoons were humid and windless, lying there reading under a tree on the grassy strip was pleasant. Slowly she regained her strength.

Ben Weintroub had given her a copy of *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* by Agatha Christie, who immediately became Josy's favorite mystery author. She also read some of the British romantic poets, having heard that the 11B course in English next term would include works by Byron, Shelley, and Wordsworth. Fannie introduced her to the daughter of a distant cousin, a girl her own age named Anita Kartoon, and the two occasionally went to a movie together.

A week after she left the hospital her uncle Stashek, on his way back to Mexico, stopped by to see her. He gave her as a gift a box of matches that he had received from a business client. Celia, Fannie, and Mookie all found it shocking that he brought this as a present, rather than a book or a box of chocolates, but Josy laughed it off, pleased that at least he had stopped to see her.

Meanwhile back in Mexico, Malvina was making it a point to spend more time with her nephew Alejandro. He was now eleven years old, and had become even more spoiled and manipulative than before.

On one occasion when they went for a walk together in Chapultepec Park, they passed a vendor selling apples. Knowing how much Alejandro liked apples, a taste she remembered he had acquired during his visit to the United States, she asked, "Alejandro, would you like an apple?"

She saw his eyes grow big with delight, but his response, waiting to be coaxed, was simply an indifferent shrug of the shoulders.

Displeased at his ungracious attitude, she decided to teach him a lesson.

"All right, then" she replied and kept walking without stopping to buy anything

It was obvious that he was deeply disappointed. He had wanted her to beg him to accept the treat, but was shocked when she never did.

A little further on they came upon another vendor.

"Do you want an apple now, Alejandro?" she asked.

"Si, si, por favor!" he answered eagerly, upon which she promptly bought one for him. It was a lesson she felt he badly needed.

The August that she was in Mexico City was when Trotsky, the Russian Marxist revolutionary, was assassinated there. It happened in a neighborhood not far from Stashek's house and just days before her return to the United States. Later back in Philadelphia her brother Ben would occasionally tease her about her having been so suspiciously close to the scene.

It was then that she received Ben Weintraub's letter relating that Josy had had her

appendix out, had just come out of the hospital, and everything else that had happened. Immediately Malvina began to pack to come home. Stashek argued in vain that there was no reason for her to leave so early. He had just seen Josy two weeks after her surgery; and he assured Malvina that she was completely recovered, and well cared for at Celia's.

Malvina refused to change her mind. The following day, they took her to the train station in Mexico City, where she departed for Chicago. Just before the train left, her sister-in-law took Stashek aside, arguing vehemently with him about giving Malvina the money he had promised for her trip.

"She's here already," Gucia argued. "What's she going to do? You don't have to give her anything now."

Josy never heard how that situation got resolved.

Wanting to notify those in Chicago that she would be arriving weeks earlier than expected, Malvina waited to cross the border. Then once inside the train in Texas, she called the conductor over.

"When can I send a telegram?" she asked.

"When you get to Palestine," he replied.

"What an anti-Semite!" she thought. "You never know when you might find one in any part of the world!"

Then the train pulled into a small town named Palestine, Texas and the conductor returned to help her.

By the time she reached Chicago, three weeks had passed since Josy's operation. Grudgingly, she accepted Celia's invitation to stay at her apartment along with Josy. She still had not entirely forgiven Celia for her neglect several years earlier, but had to agree that she was indebted to Celia for her care of Josy. The two women resumed their friendship, though Malvina always retained a few misgivings.

During that last week before they returned home, she visited many of her old friends: the Grodskys, the Tecotzkys, Ben Weintroub, and the Liphs. She found that she still felt as close to all of them as ever.

One evening shortly before leaving Josy went by herself to a national convention of the American Youth Congress, which was meeting in Chicago that year. She wondered if she would see any people from home there, and she thought she recognized a few who looked familiar from a distance, but she was too shy and seated too far away to approach them. What did impress her immensely was hearing the baritone Paul Robeson address the crowd and introduce a new song, "Ballad for Americans". It was an electrifying experience.

She saw June Liph one more time before leaving Chicago. She felt deep sadness for what her friend had to endure in coping with her mother's frenzied, erratic behavior, and the misguided indifference of her father. After that she never saw June again. Though they continued to correspond for a time, June's letters eventually stopped. Late in 1945, Mrs. Liph wrote that June was being treated for "mental problems". She begged the Feldmarks to let June come live with them. But by then Malvina was in the hospital for her final illness, and the arrangement never worked out.

In the spring of 1946, when Mrs. Liph heard that Josy was to be married, she wrote pleading that Josy write to June but not mention her oncoming marriage.

"June would be jealous," Mrs. Liph wrote.

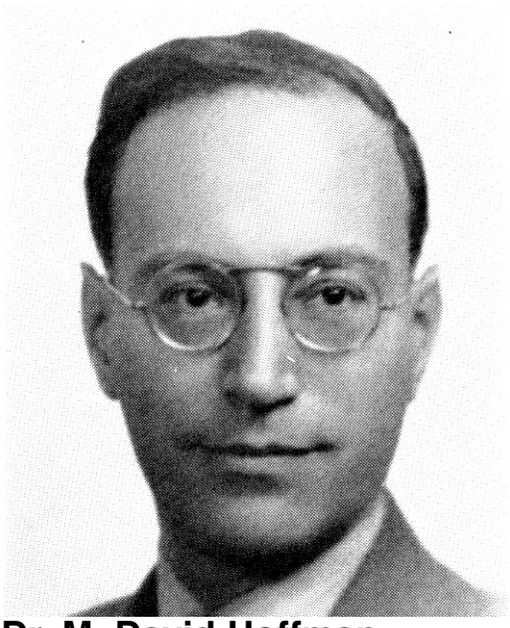
They later heard that June had committed suicide. Confined eventually to an institution, she had been strolling along a pier by Lake Michigan with another patient (a young fellow) when she suddenly broke away and threw herself into the lake, where she drowned.

Josy never learned all the details. She did hear that Mrs. Liph wanted to accuse the young man of pushing June into the lake, but at this point her husband finally rebelled. Refusing to support such a story and get an innocent patient with problems of his own in trouble, he started divorce proceedings, claiming that "enough was enough". He later remarried and once visited Josy in Philadelphia. Though she accepted him into her home, she could never bring herself to entirely forgive him for the neglect she felt had contributed to his daughter's tragedy.

IV

School reopened in September. The English teacher in 11B was Dr. M. David Hoffman, father of her friend Miriam and Head of the Department. The situation was awkward with his daughter in the class. Everyone watched with amusement as Miriam and her father studiously avoided eye contact and never addressed one another directly. Once, in the corridor after school though, Miriam forgot and screamed, "Daddy! Wait for me!"

Dr. Hoffman was a tall, thin, bespectacled man. His usual expression included a grin at one corner of his mouth. Generally he tilted his head to one side as he walked. While teaching he sat behind his desk, leaning back in his chair that rested precariously on its two back legs against the blackboard just behind him. He never fell, but came pre-



Dr. M. David Hoffman.

cipitously close many times. Everyone watched in apprehension, but he continued to lecture coolly, ignoring the unease he was causing. The closest he ever came to an upset occurred when one of the boys, asking a question about Wordsworth's poem "Intimations of Immortality", guilelessly referred to it as "Imitations of Immorality". Dr. Hoffman guffawed loudly while his chair rocked back and forth against the blackboard, righting itself at the last minute.

He was a splendid and ambitious teacher. Completely unorthodox in his selection of material, he covered an extremely broad spectrum, starting with a unit on Walt Whitman, then moving on to the standard curriculum, which included the English romantic poets. Each student was required to memorize two dozen lines from Shelley, Keats, Byron, Wordsworth, or Coleridge and recite them to the class. Josy chose the sonnet "Ozymandius" by Shelley, and the first two verses from a more obscure poem of Byron, "The Isles of Greece", which she got from an anthology found at Leary's Bookshop.

Towards the end of the term Dr. Hoffman presented a unit on local color in creative writing. Everyone had to select a specific area of the United States, research it thoroughly, turn in a paper, and present an oral report. Josy chose Philadelphia. As she worked on the project she realized how attached she felt to the city. She was sorry that on the day of her presentation Dr. Hoffman was away at a meeting and unavailable for comment. The class, familiar with the topic, seemed to enjoy the report on a city they knew so well, and the substitute teacher gave her an A.

It was around then that she first got to see Chinatown. One Saturday, while she was visiting Frances, Mr. Jacobs took a few friends out for dinner and the girls came along. For Josy it was an enthralling experience. Never had she tasted such exotic dishes: lemon-flavored chicken, egg roll, water chestnuts, bean sprouts, Chinese vegetables completely new to her. They sipped green tea from tiny delicate translucent cups. The waiter showed them how to use chopsticks, standing over them as they practiced. In those days, one had to go into Chinatown for Chinese food. It took some twenty years before Chinese restau-

rants would begin to spring up in other parts of the city.

Later Mr. Jacobs took the group for a walk along Race Street. They browsed in souvenir shops fragrant with the scent of sandalwood and incense. Josy was enraptured by the exquisite trinkets—porcelains, silks, jades, pictures carved out of cork against delicately painted backgrounds, and she bought a miniature statuette of an elderly Chinese man carved out of sandstone as a souvenir which she kept ever afterwards.

She wrote a short article about Chinatown for the *Spotlight*, trying to recapture the mystical atmosphere she found so exotic. Mr. Edgar Williams, faculty sponsor, liked it enough to promote her to Features Editor for the coming 12A term. This gave her more responsibility, as she answered only to him and Ted Freyman, student Editor-in-Chief. She had been on the *Spotlight* staff ever since coming to Gratz, but now she increased her after-school time there to three times a week.

For a while she was friendly with her classmate Isobel Rutenberg, movie critic on the *Spotlight*. Isobel got two passes each week to a first-run movie in Center City so she could write a review of the film for the paper. One time she took Josy along as her guest. They went to one of the more elegant theaters downtown, the Boyd at Nineteenth and Chestnut, where they saw *Back Street*, with Margaret Sullivan and Charles Boyer. Josy came out depressed, heartbroken that the Margaret Sullivan character, in arriving just one minute late at the pier, had missed the ferry that took the Charles Boyer character back to the city and out of her life for the next decade, changing their destinies forever. She and Isobel came close to tears when, on his deathbed, he had to gasp his last remaining words to Margaret Sullivan by using the telephone.

Behind Isobel's back classmates referred to her as "The Snob". She had a way of talking down to people except on the rare occasions when she unexpectedly waxed warm and eloquent. Then she bestowed her friendship as a gift, implying that though others had failed to merit her time and attention, this new person was worthy. It was a flattering assumption that rarely lasted more than a week, after which Isobel moved on to somebody else. She bandied about a complex vocabulary, speaking disdainfully and in an overbearing way, alienating most people, though it generally took several encounters before they recognized what was happening. When Josy's turn came to be favored, Isobel confided how much she admired her skill at poetry—they were well matched, she affirmed, Josy in writing poetry, Isobel for her original short stories.

Isobel once got into a heated discussion with Ruth Fingerhut, who sat next to Josy in History Class. Ruth came dressed that day in a polka dot blouse and a plaid skirt.

Disdainfully Isobel announced to a large group that girls "with class" never combined polka dots with plaids. Her tone was particularly scornful, and Ruth, close to tears, broke down.

"Well, you may be right," she responded, her voice catching, "but my family just can't afford fancy clothes. So you'll just have to get used to seeing me like this!"

Isobel, chastened for once, retreated in silence.

Josy concluded that most teenagers she knew fell into one of two categories. Some were frivolous, concerned exclusively with dating, jitterbugging, swing music, and boy-girl gossip, while the others, more intellectually inclined got passionately involved in political causes. Most of those she knew from this latter group belonged to the American Students Union, a branch of the group whose national meeting she had attended in Chicago. Unfortunately Young Communist League members had infiltrated the ASU, and they were the ones dominating most of the activities. Most were unwilling to express an opinion until they first checked to see if it followed the "party line". Unswerving, dogmatic, relentless in spewing out propaganda, they focused on gaining new members. Prominent in this group was a senior named Hal Reinholt, one year ahead of Josy at Gratz.

She and Frances Jacobs had met Hal at an ASU meeting one day after school. Frances immediately agreed to go out with him, but after a couple of dates lost interest. From then on, Josy suspected, Hal was using her to get back to Frances.

Every day he waited after school, coming upon Josy "accidentally" in the halls, outside the building, or on her way to the bus stop. Then he walked alongside her, spouting Communist doctrine, arguing heatedly about the weaknesses of capitalism, justifying the Soviet-German Non-aggression Pact of 1939, and making plans to picket for a free city college (a cause his group adopted). Josy had no interest in him or his organiztion, but she found it difficult to avoid him. He caught her at unexpected places, then argued the party line, often delaying her while one bus after another passed by.

All this ended unexpectedly one day. While they were standing at the bus stop arguing, a drunkard staggered by. Hearing their raised voices, he turned, stumbled over and, reeling on his feet, growled at Hal, "Hey, Buddy! Why don't you quit? Can't you see she already won the argument!"

While Hal gaped in bewilderment, Josy laughing, climbed onto a passing bus, leaving him staring in disbelief on the corner.

* * * * * * * *


Mr. Palmer Flowers.

The 11B History teacher was a mild-mannered gentleman in his sixties named Palmer Flowers. His name seemed to suit his genial personality, yet he had an impish side to his nature.

Josy heard that one bitterly cold morning when he saw a group of boys trudging wearily on their way to school, he stopped his car to talk to them.

"You fellows tired of walking?" he asked.

"We sure are, Sir," they responded, hoping for a ride.

"Then try running!" he shouted, laughing as he drove away.

On another occasion in class, a student was having difficulty pronouncing the name of a foreign city.

"That's not how you say it," Mr. Palmers corrected. "Try pronouncing it like this." He put his thumb into his mouth behind his upper front teeth to demonstrate, and suddenly his entire dental plate sprang out. Calmly he returned the piece to his mouth and continued with the lesson as if nothing had happened.

Another teacher with a strange side to his nature was Mr. Morin from the French Department. A droll fellow with a drooping jaw, the eyes of a basset hound, and a mournful expression, his caricature-like appearance made it hard to know when he was joking. It was said that he and Miss Bernstein, Josy's French teacher from tenth grade, barely spoke to each other. Apparently they had been working in the foreign language closet storing books at the end of the term when she exclaimed, "Look at all these old books here in a box!"

To which he replied, "Why are you so surprised? When you get old, they'll put you in a box, too!"

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The most colorful member of the faculty, however, was without a doubt Mr. George A. H. Bernard, Josy's French teacher in 11B. A native Frenchman, he spoke English with a heavy accent and a high-pitched and strangely accented twang. Nobody who saw him could ever forget Mr. Bernard.

He was short in stature and, like Dr. Abrahams the Chemistry teacher, dressed every

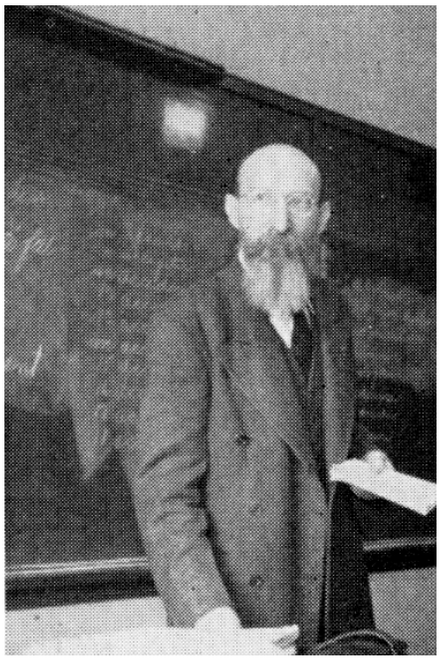
day in a buttoned-down three-piece suit regardless of weather. His shirts must have been stiffly starched, for he continuously stretched his neck, shaking his head from side to side while peering and blinking from behind small, wire-rimmed glasses.

But the most startling aspect of his appearance was his baldness. The top of his head was, as the expression goes, "bald as a billiard ball", and he compensated for this by wearing an immensely long, thick, brown beard that reached toward his waist. The contrast between his bald crown and spreading beard never failed to shock, for in those days only an occasional elderly patriarch could ever be seen wearing a beard.

Mr. Bernard spoke English with a heavy accent that few students could understand. He spouted such expressions as "I of-ferred' eet to heem, but he re'-fust me!" and "That man was a loo´tnant!"(lieutenant). Every so often, when a pupil seemed visibly confused, he would gesticulate wildly, convulsively waving his arms and shouting hysterically, "Eet ees thees! Eet ees thees!"

Every day at the beginning of class he called roll. This caused no end of confusion. One girl from the tenth grade, Claire Fine, younger and less sophisticated than the rest, had been permitted to take advanced French, and she was more lost than anyone. Every day when he got to her name, Mr. Bernard would scream at the top of his lungs, "Mees Feen! Mees Feen!"

Unable to recognize her name, she never answered, so he marked her absent. After eight weeks, she got called to the office. They wanted to know why she had cut French for the entire first report period.



Mr. George R. Bernard.

"I never cut!" Claire protested. "I was there every single day."

"You were not!" the attendance officer replied. "Mr. Bernard marked you absent every day this term!"

Claire sat there speechless for a moment. Then she retorted, "How come, then, I got an A on my first period report card?" She pulled copies of several French tests out of her book bag. All were graded with 90s and 100s.

The attendance officer scanned them, completely baffled. Finally, with a sigh of bewilderment, she replied "Well, just don't do it again!"

The identical scene was repeated each new report period.

Claire was marked absent and continued to get As in French, while Mr. Bernard continued to call roll in the same way for the rest of the year.

* * * * * * * *

When Josy started 11B her parents bought her a typewriter. This proved a mixed blessing, for her Chemistry grade suffered as a result. Whatever time she should have devoted to studying, memorizing, and organizing the material, she spent instead typing the notes she had taken in class. Soon she was ill prepared for exams. Her Chemistry marks dropped, and she began getting Cs and Ds instead of the A's that had come so easily with Dr. Abrahams the previous term. Mr. Oser, her current teacher, observed her closely, puzzled, but not till six weeks before the end of the course did he finally call her in.

"Are you sure you're studying each night?" he wanted to know.

Josy assured him that she was, but still her quiz grades kept dropping. Then with just one month to go before the end of the course, he spoke to her again. This time she happened to mention how hard she was working, transferring everything correctly with her new typewriter.

"But are you actually studying the material, or just typing it?" he asked. "Forget about the typewriter! Concentrate on the material itself."

After that, for the remainder of the term she got all A's. But it was too late to catch up, and she ended the year with a low B. She finally had learned how to study, but unfortunately not soon enough.

V

Outside of school she read a great deal on her own. Her parents suggested various books, many by European authors she had never heard of in high school: Tolstoi, Dostoievsky, Turgenev, Maeterlink, Sigrid Undset, Boccacio, Sienkiewicz, and the French writers Balzac, Maupassant and Rostand. She read a book by the Chinese author Lin Yutang which she enjoyed a great deal, and also some of Rabahindreth Tagore from India. It all made her realize that literature as taught in American public schools was generally limited to English-speaking writers. Years later when she became an English teacher, she

would design a special project with a broader scope on foreign authors for her more advanced classes.

She reread Romain Rolland's *Jean Christophe*, based on the life of Beethoven. She had enjoyed it enormously in ninth grade, having read it then mainly during study hall at Cooke. It had impressed her so much that she was inspired to read *The Soul Enchanted* by the same author. Now she went through *Jean Christophe* for a second time, appreciating it even more.

She continued her music lessons, her mother insisting that she practice at least one hour every day. Usually this came between five and six in the afternoon, following a walk in Fairmount Park and while Malvina was preparing supper. Any time Josy stopped for a moment to rest and finger a few keys testing out new harmonies, Malvina would call out from the next room, "Stop grampling!" Josy, knowing exactly what she meant, returned to the serious work Mr. Potamkin had assigned.

She had learned DeFalla's "Ritual Fire Dance" and Debussy's "Clair de Lune" and loved them both. "Clair de Lune" captured for her the very essence of the moon's mystery. As she played it she tried to visualize a clear image of the many changes in the moon's shape and color, from ivory through bright gold, with clouds drifting across its face. She thought this helped her get more expression into her playing. Because she was so deeply engrossed in the Debussy music, she never afterwards lost her sense of wonder about the moon, even after humans had stepped onto its surface. It always continued to remain an exotic, even a spiritual magical object to her.

Of all the numbers she studied, however, she felt the deepest affinity for De Falla's "Ritual Fire Dance". For years to come friends would remark that this piece was her best piano work. She would try to conjure up an image of savages dancing around a fire, and this somehow inspired her to lend an extra spirited interpretation to the number.

She spent a great deal of free time reading poetry. She preferred to read it silently, lingering over especially beautiful passages. Increasingly she grew intrigued with the color and imagery of Amy Lowell's writing, and hunted in the library for whatever works by this poet she could find. A collection entitled *Legends* was particularly lovely. She discovered the tiny, charming, gem-like haikus of China and Japan, and it amazed her to see how richly, delicately, and completely they could capture a mood in just three lines. Many a Sunday afternoon she would spend at the main branch of the Free Public Library at Nineteenth and Parkway, searching for more examples of exotic poetry.

While there she usually ended her visit on the second floor. On a small balcony pro-

truding above the cavernous reading room she would pore over psychology books on adolescence. Too embarrassed to take these home, she secretly devoured whatever she could find on the subject, hoping to learn more about it and understand herself better. She did have the courage to ask her parents about philosophy, though. She had heard them bandy the term about repeatedly.

"What exactly is philosophy?" she would ask over and over. None of the answers satisfied her. Finally Jacques summed it up. "It's the way people think about life. There are many ways of thinking about it. You'll understand more when you get older."

While this answer proved satisfactory for a time, his last sentence irked her. This was exactly how Celia Kirson had referred to the Dostoievsky classic *The Brothers Karamazov* when Josy said she wanted to read it.

"This is a book, Dahlink," Celia had insisted, "that you are not ready for yet. You have to be older and more mature to understand it."

This was all it took to drive Josy straight to the library to borrow and read it immediately from cover to cover.

"I did understand it, and I loved it!" she later reported to Celia in a letter.

"But you didn't get everything out of it," Celia wrote back. "Wait till you're older. You'll see!"

Josy did reread *The Brothers Karamazov* two or three times as an adult. Each time she enjoyed it more. She finally accepted that Celia had meant there were many levels in the book that it took maturity to fully appreciate. Yet Josy never regretted having read it in her teens. It led her to other books by Dostoievsky, one of which she *was* fully ready for. This was a little-acclaimed novel that he had written around the age of twenty called *The Insulted and Injured*. She enjoyed it so thoroughly that she wept when she had to part with the characters after finishing it. Years later, however, when she tried to reread it, she was surprised to find it a bit juvenile. Yet how sorry she would have been to have missed it at exactly the right time of her life!