Chapter 22. Junior Year

I

For some time now Josy had been struggling with a decision that had to be made by the time she became a junior. She knew she wanted to major in English, but she had trouble deciding whether to stay in the College of Liberal Arts for a purely academic education or choose a curriculum that would prepare her for a career in teaching. In her heart she favored the academic route. But realizing that this might prove less than practical she finally transferred to Penn's School of Education at the beginning of her junior year. She sensed some disapproval from a couple faculty members when they heard of her decision

One was Dr. Stine. He had been her professor for the second half of "History of the English Language" when she was a freshman. Now she found out that he chaired the English Honors Project. This offered no college credit, just an opportunity to do research.

Only English majors were eligible. Students in the program selected a topic and, under the tutelage of a faculty member, wrote a thesis during their junior year. Its purpose was to give extra training and prepare them for graduate work. The idea intrigued her intensely; it reminded her of the English Honors Program she had enjoyed so much back in high school. She approached Dr. Stine for permission to register.

"I heard," he remarked, "that you've recently switched to the School of Education."

"That's right," she replied, "but I'm still an English major and I'd like to apply."

"I'm sorry," he told her. "The program is open only to Liberal Arts students.

"But what harm can there be to admit me?" she countered. "I'm still at the University, and it won't cost the school a cent to have me in the program."

"But it's never been done before!" he protested.

"Why not permit it to be done now?" she asked.

"Because it's never been done before," he reiterated.

"But the University won't even have to give me credit," she pointed out. "There's absolutely nothing the school has to lose by letting me into the program."

"But it's never been done before!" he gasped, unable to come up with any other answer. The very thought of change seemed to horrify him.

To her every argument, he kept stammering, "But it's never been done before!"

Although she continued to appeal, advancing every argument she could think of, there was no convincing him. Firmly he refused and finally got up and walked off shaking his head in disbelief that a student would have the audacity to even suggest a change in the prescribed order of things. Josy never did get to do the project.

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One of her favorite courses was Abnormal Psychology. The class, observing from the rising tiers of seats overlooking the huge amphitheater in Houston Hall, watched as Dr. Murphy interviewed patient after patient from Penn's Psychology Clinic, all of them children. A variety of disorders passed before him, living examples of the numerous mental problems cited in his lectures. Most remarkable was a pair of five-year-old twin girls, both Mongolian idiots. Dr. Murphy pointed out how strangely identical they were, even down to the whorls of hair that grew in the same pattern on both their heads. The course was among the more memorable Josy took that year, and it convinced her to try to cram in as many psychology courses as she could before graduating.

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One day back during her sophomore year, a girl sitting across the table from her in Penn's Library had called across to her, "Is your 'cookie' in the army?"

With the war on, many girls were wearing pins designed with military insignia, and this girl had noticed on Josy's lapel the one with sergeant's stripes that José had sent her.

She introduced herself as Bertha Delovitz. She lived in Strawberry Mansion, it turned out, not far from Josy. Her "cookie's" name was Bill Dennis, but she called him "Dee". He was serving in the 101st Airborne Division in Europe.

"Where is your 'cookie' stationed?" she wanted to know. Josy told her "The CBI – China-Burma-India."

They chatted for a while, and later occasionally ran into each other on campus. Now in their third year they got to know each other better. Once Josy had declared a major in English with a minor in French, and Bert a major in French with a minor in English, they found themselves taking several classes together.

One day while walking up to her second-floor classroom in College Hall, Josy noticed Bert sitting disconsolately in the window nook between floors, staring unseeingly out of the window. Stopping, she asked what was wrong. Part of the 101st Airborne Division, it had been announced, had been captured by the Germans, and Bert's boyfriend was in the 101st. That morning his family had received a telegram informing them that he was missing in action. Josy did what she could to comfort Bert, insisting that she come to class now. Sitting alone in the hallway would accomplish nothing, she told her. Reluctantly Bert agreed.

The following week one of Bert's friends claimed she had seen a photo of some prisoners from the 101st in *Time Magazine*. An American soldier who looked like Dee had appeared on the sidelines, sitting on the ground behind a barbed-wire fence. Bert and three of her friends went to the Main Library to look it up. Indeed, the fellow did look like her boyfriend, and later they would learn that it had actually been Dee. At the time, though, this was still uncertain, and everyone remained distressed not knowing for months whether he was dead or alive.

Bert Delovitz.

Bert spent every spare minute away from school in the

company of Dee's married sister Frieda. Josy sometimes saw them together in the stores, at the movies, or taking walks in the neighborhood. She made every effort to get closer to Bert, and for a while they grew friendly, making it a point to sit together in all of their classes.

One day Bert asked, "Didn't you say your 'cookie' was in the CBI? I know somebody stationed there. His name is 'José Ginsburg' or 'José Goldberg' or "José Rabinowitz', something like that."

Immediately Josy realized they were talking about the same person. Bert didn't really know him, it turned out. She had met him once through his classmate Martin Kiefer, a first cousin of Dee. Bert only knew that somebody from her class at Girls High had been corresponding with him, and she assumed that he had been this girl's boyfriend. Now she was shocked to learn that Josy was the one wearing his pin.

She began to regard Josy with suspicion. Soon Josy gathered that Bert, for reasons of her own, wanted to keep her away from Dee's family. Shortly afterward, when José sent her photos from India and she brought them in to class to show her friends, Bert called out, "Oh, they're great pictures! Let me borrow them to show Dee's family? They know him! They'd love to see them!"

"Oh, I can't let them out of my sight," Josy replied, "but I'll be glad to go with you and show them to his family myself."

Quickly Bert replied, "No, that's all right. I'll just tell them I saw the pictures."

Josy found this odd, but said nothing. A few weeks later, when she and her classmate Rosalie Noble were shopping together in Gimbels, they ran unexpectedly into Bert. She was in the company of an older woman with dark hair pulled tightly back into a bun. Josy correctly guessed that this was Dee's sister Frieda. They all stopped and remained chatting for over five minutes.

Eyes darting nervously back and forth, Bert avoided introducing Frieda. Neither did she mention that Josy knew José or had photos of him. Bert seemed to be deliberately signaling her to say nothing and, naively, Josy complied. They parted without any introductions having been made.

All this hurt Josy deeply, for she was anxious to meet anyone who knew José, especially since his family had moved away and she had no contact with anyone nearby with whom she could exchange news of him. Yet Bert's uneasiness with the situation was unmistakable. Josy wondered if perhaps Bert was afraid that she might say something to discredit her with Dee's family. It was obvious that she remained distinctly uncomfortable

with the fact that Josy knew José, but the exact reason for this never became entirely clear. Yet when Dee eventually returned from the army, Bert did invite Josy to their wedding. It all remained very strange indeed.

II

Reminders of the war affected everyday life. Bond rallies were held regularly. Air raid drills were conducted. Lights got turned out in public buildings and blackout curtains were pulled shut in private homes after the warning whistles blew, while volunteer air-raid wardens went from house to house to check that lights remained invisible from the street.

Sugar and meat were rationed. People took containers of used fats to butcher shops and turned them in for two free "red points" and four cents cash per pound (the fats were then used in the manufacture of medicines and munitions). They also turned in used tin for scrap metal after first punching out the tops and bottoms of opened cans, tucking these flat pieces into the remaining cylinder, and then stepping on it all to flatten it compactly.

Josy's piano teacher Frank Potamkin applied to the Rationing Board for special consideration to buy extra gas for his car.

"Why do you need extra gas?" they wanted to know. "What do you do for a living?"

When he told them that he was a piano teacher, they stared at him in astonishment. He had a hard time convincing them that his livelihood depended on driving from neighborhood to neighborhood to teach his many pupils.

"Never heard of that before," they shook their heads in disbelief, but finally granted his request.

The patriotic thing for young women to do was to serve as hostesses and socialize with the servicemen stationed nearby. From 1944 through 1945 Josy went to the USO at the YMHA on South Broad Street every Friday night. Occasionally she played the piano there when they asked for entertainment.

On one occasion while repairs were going on, everyone was asked to report to the USO in the basement of the Academy of Music two blocks away. Here Josy sat among the spectators that night, listening to music and watching a few sailors jitterbugging with hostesses. Forty-five years later, on a tour through the Academy, the guide led her downstairs to that same basement. An enlarged photo of a typical evening at the USO caught Josy's eye. To her surprise, she located herself in the picture, seated among a group on the side-

lines, her hair arranged in the high pompadour style so popular at the time, while the spectators gazed mesmerized at the dancing couples.

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Near the end of 1944 her cousin Melvin Tecotzky, now a soldier, was stationed in Camp Kilmer, New Jersey just an hour by train from Philadelphia. Since it was too far to travel home to Chicago each weekend, he came to the Feldmarks whenever he got a weekend pass.

This got to be a regular event. For months Malvina prepared elaborate dinners for him, and he arrived every Saturday, staying till Sunday evening before heading back to camp. He and Josy got to know each other better, again becoming good friends the way they had as very small children. They both liked poetry, and among other things shared their mutual appreciation of Alfred Noyes's "The Highwayman". They also enjoyed sharing recollections of family stories. Their families had stayed in contact long after the Feldmarks left Chicago, remaining exceedingly close over the passing years.

Melvin Tecotzky, 1944.

Both Melvin and Josy had birthdays in February. As February 1945 approached (Melvin would turn twenty-one) his parents decided to come to Philadelphia to celebrate with him during one of his weekend visits with the Feldmarks. Jacques suggested making it a grand occasion by inviting other family members and friends to join them that Saturday night.

Sam and Elizabeth arrived Friday morning. The train trip had been arduous for them. Both were obese, especially Elizabeth, and even simple movements under ordinary conditions were strenuous for her. They traveled fifteen hours, sleeping overnight on the train. When they finally arrived, both families wept with joy at seeing each other for the first time

in five years. Sam and Elizabeth cried over and over again that this alone had made it worth all the trouble. They spent the rest of Friday and all day Saturday catching up, sharing stories and memories, joking, and delighting in each other's company.

Sam was especially jovial. Whenever Elizabeth appeared at the top of the staircase on the second floor, he stood at the foot of the steps below, regarding her three hundred-pound frame in adoration, clapping his hands and singing out, "Here comes my queen!"

He insisted on running out to Thirty-first Street at least four or five times that day, buying lox, bagels, pastries, and all sorts of delicacies for the party. Running a fish business of his own back in Chicago, he felt completely at home in the stores here. He joked with the merchants and anyone who would listen. Exchanging stories about business here and in Chicago, and about the Jewish community back in Europe, he chatted so jovially with the shopkeepers that before long he had them calling him by his first name and looking forward to his next visit as that of an old friend. For weeks afterward, every time Malvina came in to shop, they would ask about her wonderful cousin from Chicago and when he was coming back.

That Saturday night the guests began to arrive. Each time the doorbell rang, Sam and Elizabeth jumped in excitement, certain it would be Melvin. Every time, though, it turned out to be somebody else (Aunt Liba, Uncle Ben, their daughters Mary and Leah and their husbands, the Sokoloffs). Soon the house was crowded with people, but still Melvin had not arrived. By ten o'clock they realized that he was not coming. The reason must have been that he got shipped out, probably overseas.

Sam and Elizabeth were heartsick. Sam tried to comfort his wife, but there was little he could say. Everyone sat there disheartened, feeling helpless. Because they had made this long and difficult journey, Sam and Elizabeth got to realize sooner than otherwise that their son was on his way to a war zone. What had started as a jolly evening turned into a night of gloom. The party ended with people dispersing around one o'clock, trying to impart words of hope, comfort, and sympathy to the Tecotzkys. Sam and Elizabeth continued to remain with the Feldmarks all day Sunday and then, in sad spirits, took the train back to Chicago Monday morning.

Elizabeth and Sam Tecotzky.

Melvin had indeed been shipped out to Europe. This had happened unexpectedly the preceding Thursday on the very day he turned twenty-one. On board ship, realizing that everyone would understand the truth when he failed to show up, he was even more dejected. He spent the next several months in Europe, fighting in France; then in Cologne, Germany; then along the Rhine River; in the Ruhr; and later in Dusseldorf. Before the fighting ended, the army sent him on to Czechoslovakia, where he remained until the European conflict was over.

Later he would be attached to one of the two infantry divisions sent back to America preparing to take part in the invasion of Japan. He was spared the invasion itself when the atomic bomb ended the Pacific war in August 1945. After a quick visit home in September, he was then sent to Yokohama, Japan, serving in the occupation forces in central Honshu from September until February 1946, at which time he was finally discharged at Camp Grant, Illinois. Sam and Elizabeth later acknowledged that, in coming to Philadelphia, they had at least gotten to see the Feldmarks one last time, and for this reason their trip had not been entirely wasted.

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That year would be the last that Josy studied piano with Frank Potamkin. Traveling to his house in Elkins Park took an inordinate amount of time away from her studies, something she felt she could ill afford as the academic demands at Penn increased. The whole trip, waiting for transportation included, took close to two hours each way.

During her first year at college she had rented a tiny room on campus (on the fourth floor of Irvine Auditorium) in which there was an upright piano. That year her roster had allowed her free time between eleven and twelve on Mondays and Wednesdays. From her bench at the piano in the cubicle she was able to look down at the treetops on Thirty-fourth Street while she practiced. It was an isolating experience and, by the time she got to her sophomore year, her roster left no free time to schedule these practice sessions.

Now during this last year Mr. Potamkin had her record Chopin's "Minute Waltz" on the wire recorder. This was a newly available piece of equipment, and the whole experience proved novel. The only speaking Mr. Potamkin allowed her to do on the recording was to recite her name and the title of the piece. She mailed the recording to José, then stationed in Burma, but unfortunately the transcription proved scratchy.

It was towards the end of this junior year that she took her last piano lesson. She would remain ever grateful to Mr. Potamkin for the eight-year scholarship he had given her. Although (as Halina Wolkowicz once pointed out to Malvina) he also got some benefit by exhibiting an accomplished student to attract new pupils, Josy never doubted that the greater benefit had been hers. Aside from the training and rich musical background he had given her, his direct and pragmatic approach to pedagogy would later prove invaluable when she became a classroom teacher. Her appreciation and realization of everything he did for her continued to deepen through the years.

III

In the second half of her junior year, one of her courses at Penn was Modern American Literature. Dr. Quinn, Head of the English Department, taught it, and this was his last year before retirement. Already he was frail and in poor health and had difficulty with his lectures, stopping to cough after every few words. He seemed out of touch with what was going on in the classroom, completely unaware that at the back of the room a group of boys had formed a circle to place bets on when he would cough next. Money changed hands continuously throughout the course, while the professor droned on.

The year was 1944, so Josy was amazed by his comment that he considered everything correctly labeled "modern" American literature to have been written before 1920. Because he was retiring, Dr. Quinn announced, he felt in a rather mellow mood and had decided to "forgive" Sinclair Lewis (for exactly what he never explained). This was the first time that he was including even passing mention of such novels (written in the 1920s) as *Babbitt*, *Main Street*, *Elmer Gantry*, *Dodsworth*, and *Arrowsmith* as part of modern American literature.

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Another prominent member of Penn's English Department was Dr. Harbeson, whose lectures were intensely popular. Each came close to being a vaudeville act. Boys from the Engineering College required to take at least one English credit fought to get into his classes. Josy wished that he would give more attention to the literary works themselves

rather than so much time to the lives of authors. Often she came away feeling she had been privy to literary gossip rather than analysis, interpretation, and criticism.

To his credit, Dr. Harbeson exerted an enormous amount of effort to make his classes colorful and entertaining. Occasionally someone would catch sight of him in the English office before class, rehearsing in front of a full-length mirror. He preened, caricatured, and pranced around, pirouetting and cavorting as he practiced each grimace and gesture of his so-called "spontaneous" lectures. Among his more colorful phrases were allusions to "long-haired men and short-haired women", and an arbitrary insistence that the most beautiful of women were unquestionably those with dark eyes and blond hair. Once, in satirizing some of the lesser playwrights, he ended the lesson with a verse that he had written himself, ending with the line "Mademoiselle de la Sauce Mayonnaise". This delighted the class thoroughly, though not everyone was quite sure what he was talking about.

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Not all the professors in the English Department were so inspiring. In one course Josy turned in a paper stating that Thomas Hardy's novel *Tess of the Durbervilles* had failed to impress her deeply, since in places the writing style seemed simplistic. She was comparing this to what she had read of Tolstoi, Dostoievsky, Hugo, and Cervantes. The professor returned her paper with a C, plus a nasty comment about her failure to appreciate Hardy's nuances. Nowhere did he hint as to what these nuances were or how she could grasp them. She could almost hear his hiss of disapproval.

IV

During her junior year, she advertised to give piano lessons in the neighborhood. Only a couple of prospects applied. One was a ten-year-old girl, Zita Rosenstein, with flaming red hair and glasses who giggled nervously and displayed odd mannerisms. She came to Josy's house each week for her lesson. Josy found her disquieting and actually unpleasant. She disliked the child more and more as the lessons progressed. One day, however, she stopped herself.

"It's not fair," she told herself, "to resent this child so much. After all, she never did anything against me. If I'm to continue taking her money, I must get over this distaste."

Without expressing any of this, she concentrated hard on overcoming her aversion. For the next several weeks, she made a deliberate attempt to ignore Zita's peculiarities. Then to her own amazement, one day she discovered that she actually had begun to like this child genuinely and unconditionally just the way she was. The piano lessons continued for several more months until the end of the school year, but after that never resumed. Yet Josy realized that she had learned far more through this experience from Zita than Zita had ever learned from her.