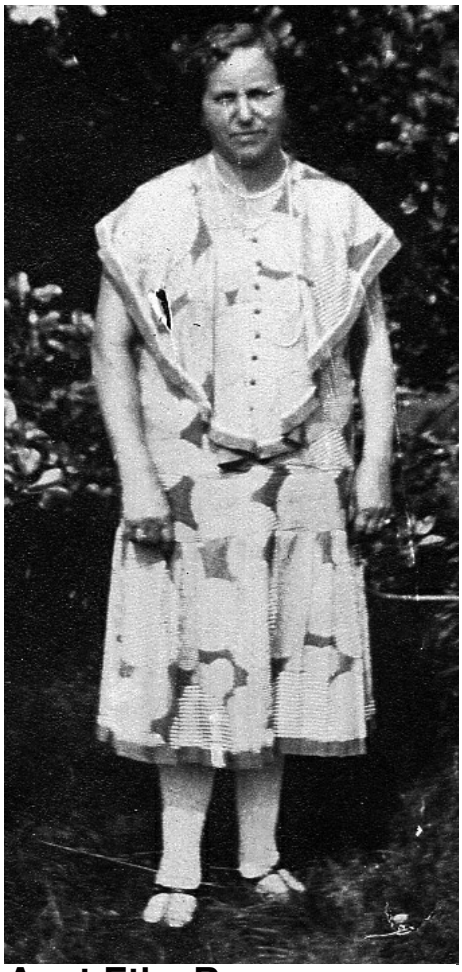
Chapter 3. America

I

At Ellis Island, Malvina passed through immigration along with some thirty other passengers from the SS Lafayette. The ship's manifest listed her as Malka Feldmark, a twenty-five year-old female, Occupation: Student. Second Officer Monsieur Le Croadec Louis swore responsibility that the ship's surgeon, Monsieur Hamon du Fougeray, had examined each and all of the aliens on board and, according to his records, Malvina was in good mental and physical health. Her height was listed as five feet four inches, her hair brown, her eyes maron (dark). Although she had been born in Poland, her country of origin was entered as Russia. The city of her birth, though, does appear as Lodz, Poland's second largest city (at that time, Poland belonged to Russia).

Under Nationality the word Russian next to her name had been crossed out and replaced by Hebrew. Her papers declared that she was neither a bigamist nor an anarchist, and that she had never been to prison, an almshouse, or "an institution for care or treat-



Aunt Etka Rosen.

ment of the insane or supported by charity". They also stated that she was not entering the country on the basis of any "offer, solicitation, promise or agreement, express or implied, to labor in the United States". The immigration officer recording all this was a Mr. Donovan.

She had intended that her final destination be Paterson, New Jersey, where Aunt Etka lived. But the authorities, learning that she had a brother Ben Margolius in Chicago at 2039 Kendall Street, insisted on sending her there instead. With only twenty-five dollars in her pocket (this had to be listed on her records, since it was less than the fifty-dollar minimum required for all those entering the country at the time) she was powerless to counter their decision. Ignoring her protests, they put her on a train for Chicago, never bothering to notify Etka, who was expecting her in New Jersey. When Etka learned of this decision later, she is said to have fainted from shock.

During the months that followed, Malvina stayed with her brother Ben and his wife Liba. The night of her arrival, they took her to a family gathering. A few of the cousins present she already knew from Poland, but most she had never met before. She would soon become extremely close to the Tecotzky and Bild families. Anna Tecotzky, elderly matriarch and first cousin of Malvina's mother Dina, immediately took to her and became extremely protective. Once, several weeks after that night, Ben complained to Anna that his wife didn't see eye to eye with Malvina about many things.

"Better take care of Malka!" Anna counseled him wryly. "You'll never have another sister, but you can always get yourself another wife!"

That first evening as Malvina sat in the Bilds' parlor, as they referred to it in those days, she was able to understood very little of the conversation around her. Then the daughter of the hostess came into the room dressed up, ready to go out on a date.

"Fargest nit dem key!" ("Don't forget the key") her mother called out to her in Yiddish.

All but the last word was in Yiddish, but she used the English word “key” instead of the Yiddish “shlisel”. Not understanding, and assuming that the entire sentence was in Yiddish, Malvina sat there astonished. In Yiddish “key” means a cow.

"Now where can there be a cow in a crowded city apartment like this?" she pondered, glancing furtively around the room.

Malvina was less than comfortable in her brother’s home. Ben, still bitter that his mother had sent him off to America when he was only eleven, stormed about constantly, deploring the injustices of life. He assured Malvina that a revolution was coming, and that when it came, all the aristocrats of the world would be swept away. She sometimes wondered if he included her as well!

Ben and Liba Margolius.

Liba, though a good-hearted woman, nagged, complained, and whined constantly. She disapproved of Malvina, a young married woman who came to America without her husband. When Malvina explained the circumstances and suggested that, until Jacques arrived, she would like to go out looking for a job such as doing cross-stitch embroidery, Liba was horrified.

"A married woman doesn't go out to work!" she admonished. "A married woman stays home and takes care of her house and husband!"

More and more Malvina sought out other relatives and friends, trying to spend as little time with Ben and Liba as possible.

One night, after visiting the Tecotzkys, she returned rather late to her brother's apartment. Everybody was already asleep and, not wanting to awaken them, she avoided turning on the light. Once in her room, she changed quickly into her nightclothes in the dark and climbed into bed. Suddenly, from close at hand beside her came the sound of a loud snore. In panic, she shrieked.

Immediately, the hall light snapped on. Ben and Liba came rushing into the room.

“What happened?” they yelled flinging on the lights. “What happened?”

There, not two feet from Malvina, lay a huge man on a cot. Speechless with fright, she pointed.

"So what's all the excitement?" Ben shouted.

"What are you getting so upset about?" Liba snorted. "It's only my brother-in-law Mendel!"

Malvina had never seen Mendel before. As she sought to regain her composure, Liba sniveled, "He just came in from Washington tonight. Now that I have you here, I have no place to put him! So I put him on a cot in here with you! So what's the big problem?"

* * * * * * * *

Malvina was desperate for outside company. Shortly afterwards, Ben happened to mention that there was a gathering planned for Russian-speaking people at the home of somebody from work. Malvina begged to go there with him. Ben said he had no intention of going, since people would probably be discussing literature and art (which failed to interest him) rather than the political situation. She pleaded with him, coaxing him for so long (assuring him that he had only to bring her there and she would find somebody else to take her back) that at last he grudgingly gave in.

The next night they boarded a trolley and, after riding over an hour and changing to a second car for still another long ride they finally reached their destination. After seeing her inside, Ben left.

She found the evening delightful. First a speaker gave a short lecture on Russian literature. This was the first time since arriving in America that she had heard a non-political discussion in a language she could understand. Afterwards a lively exchange followed. It left her exhilarated. The place was filled with people from Europe, and she soon got to know some of them.

Among these was a tall, heavy-set man, awkward, wearing horn-rimmed glasses, and with a thick mane of bushy brown hair combed straight back from his forehead. His voice was booming and authoritative, and since he spoke both Russian and Yiddish as well as English, she was able to speak lengthily with him. He told her that he had been born in Russia, had come to the United States at the age of fifteen, and had grown up in Kansas City. Only recently had he settled in Chicago, where he now practiced law. His name was Ben Weintroub, and later he became one of Malvina's and Jacques's dearest friends.

That evening he told her of a new project he was starting, about which he was high-

ly enthusiastic. At his own expense he was founding a quarterly magazine to be named *The Chicago Jewish Chronicle* (later changed to *The Chicago Jewish Forum*). In glowing terms he explained how, despite its title, he wanted it to include literary contributions by writers of all minority groups, not only Jewish, an extraordinarily novel idea at the time.

Malvina, in turn, related her present circumstances. They went on to discuss books and current events, and the evening passed most enjoyably. Then, realizing how little she knew her way around, Ben offered to see her safely home.

Ben Weintraub.

They left the gathering and, chatting, boarded the first of the two streetcars on their way back. When they got off at the juncture to change trolleys, he suddenly excused himself. Leaving her standing on the street corner, he entered a near-by restaurant and disappeared. Puzzled, she found herself alone at the trolley junction. She assumed that he had gone inside to use the rest room, but after waiting for over fifteen minutes, she walked over to the restaurant window to peer inside. To her indignation she caught sight of him shooting pool at a table with a few of the customers.

Cold, shivering, and unable to believe her eyes, she grew incensed. Rushing blindly back to the corner, she boarded a trolley, the first she saw coming, not even bothering to check its number. Before long she began to smell the stockyards of Chicago. This alerted her that she must be headed in the wrong direction. At the next stop she got off, crossed the street, and changed to another streetcar heading back. Eventually, after a long and exhausting trip, she managed to find her way home.

Exhausted, she fell into bed. In the middle of the night, the telephone rang, waking everyone in the apartment. It was a frantic call from Ben Weintroub. He shouted that he had lost Malvina while taking her home and, unless they knew where he could find her, he was about to call the police. When her brother called her to the phone, Malvina roundly berated Ben Weintroub for his irresponsibility and rudeness. How did he have the

audacity, she demanded, to leave a woman stranded by herself on a freezing street corner in a strange country while he went inside to play pool!

He protested vehemently. He had done nothing of the sort, he retorted. He had gone inside to use the rest room, and then decided to buy her sandwiches for the rest of the trip home. While he was waiting for the food, a stranger had asked him to fill in for a player just called away from the game, and he had politely obliged till the food was ready. He apologized profusely over and over, insisting that it had all been a misunderstanding. When he had come outside and found her missing, he had panicked. Not knowing her address or the name of her brother, he had spent the last couple hours waking up people from the party in the middle of the night with inquiries until he got the right number. Now he abjectly begged her forgiveness.

The next evening he showed up unannounced at the Margolius apartment, bearing a gift (a book in Russian) as a peace offering. By the time Jacques arrived in the States and met Ben, they could all laugh together over the incident. The deep friendship he forged with both Malvina and Jacques would grow ever stronger and endure for a lifetime.

* * * * * * * *

As for Jacques, it took several months, but he eventually did reach the United States. After Malvina's departure from Bordeaux, he had found work near the docks as an electrician. All the while he watched for a chance to sail to America. After a number of months he got a job from one of the steamship companies in the engine room of a boat heading for New York. Collecting his few belongings, he boarded ship with several other recruits and immediately was put to work shoveling coal below deck for the entire crossing. When the ship finally docked in New York harbor, the crew was at last permitted up on deck. Seeing daylight for the first time after more than a week in the engine room, they were met by the glare of sunshine and the sight of the Statue of Liberty, land, and a new city before them. Six hours of shore leave were granted before the ship was due to head back to Europe.

Once ashore, he and his fellow stevedores ambled along the streets of New York, drinking in the sights and atmosphere of the city so new to them. Jacques remained alert for an opportunity to break away. Eventually they decided to stop at a small restaurant for lunch. Jacques excused himself to go to the men's room. Once inside, he found a small window, climbed outside, and hurried out into a nearby adjoining street, losing himself in

the crowds. From there it proved relatively simple to take a train to Chicago, where he and Malvina were finally reunited.

II

Soon after he arrived they got their own apartment. Jacques went to work as an engineer for Republic Flow Meters Company, where he would remain employed until 1929. He was eventually promoted to Department Manager, earning a moderately good salary and achieving a considerable degree of responsibility. Malvina also went to work, doing cross-stitch embroidery and giving French lessons to private pupils at home.

To augment their income, though, they decided to rent out the second bedroom of their apartment. One of their acquaintances recommended a young woman as a tenant. After only one week, they rued their decision.

Her living habits were abominable. She never threw anything out. Trash piled up both inside and outside her bedroom door. In a huge pot on the kitchen stove she boiled not only her dirty laundry but also the rags she used during her monthly periods. The stench permeated the entire place for days. Although both Malvina and Jacques spoke to her separately and on many occasions, nothing changed. After about three weeks, they decided to ask her to move out when the next month’s rent came due.

Just around this time Malvina caught the flu. In 1918, an epidemic of tremendous proportions struck America as well as other parts of the world. Thousands lay sick, available medical care and facilities lagged behind the tremendous demand, and huge numbers of people died.

Extremely weak and feverish, Malvina was confined to bed for weeks. Much of her long dark hair fell out, her limbs failed her, and she completely lost her voice.

At the very start of her illness, before they could speak to the tenant about moving, her rent for the following month came due. On the very last day, while Jacques was at away work, she suddenly burst unannounced into Malvina’s bedroom. Flinging her money down on the bureau, she cheerfully cried out, "Here is my next month's rent!"

Desperately Malvina tried to sit up in bed and refuse the payment, but she lacked the strength to even rise on one elbow. Not a single syllable came out when she tried to speak. Frantically she gestured and made squawking noises, but the woman turned her head, pretending not to hear.

"I do hope you feel better soon!" she sang out sweetly as she danced out of the room, pulling the door shut behind her.

By the time Jacques returned home that evening, she had already left for the weekend. Now they had to endure her presence for yet another month.

Malvina gradually recovered. Little by little her strength returned, her hair grew back in, and eventually she regained her voice. As the month passed, the living conditions in the apartment grew even worse. The foul smells emanating from the tenant's room became so strong that they invaded every part of the house. Garbage kept piling up, and what had seemed like an impossible situation grew even worse. At last, after spending several days watching for her, Malvina finally cornered her one afternoon stealing out of the building.

"You must find other accommodations immediately!" Malvina told her firmly. "You can't stay here any longer. You have to be out by the end of this month."

The woman protested furiously, insisting that she had no place to go and had no intention of moving. Malvina stood her ground. She warned that, if the woman failed to leave by the given date, they would call the police to escort her out. With a snort of disgust, the tenant turned and marched angrily out the door.

During the next week, they saw her dragging boxes into her bedroom as she began to pack. Meanwhile the laundry procedures in the kitchen continued more frantically than ever.

On the last day, when they returned home from work, Jacques and Malvina found the apartment empty. Sighing with relief, they suddenly spotted a note on the dining room table.

"I'm expecting several packages to arrive," it read. "The minute they come, you are to mail them immediately to my new address!"

When they opened the door to her vacated room they stood frozen in disbelief. Not only was the stench overpowering, but the sight before them was even more shocking. All around, covering the floor, the bed, and the rest of the furniture, lay piles of rubbish, scraps of garbage, empty food cans, accumulated litter, and extra debris from the packing. Pieces of rope, sheets of newspaper, and torn wrapping paper lay strewn on top of the rest. Trash heaped high on the bed spilled over onto the rug. The floor was covered from wall to wall. Garbage even bulged out of partially closed drawers.

Jacques was speechless with rage. Trembling with anger, he announced to Malvina, "I'll take care of this!"

Leaving the apartment, he went in search of packing crates. Returning with three large ones, he went into the tenant's former room and, gathering as much trash as he could, he packed it firmly into the three boxes. Tying each with heavy cord, he took them to the post office, mailing the packages off to the tenant's new address COD.

The next few days passed quietly. They scrubbed the floors and walls, washed windows, disinfected rugs and furniture. Leaving the windows open day and night helped to slowly rid the room of the rank odors.

That Saturday afternoon, as Malvina glanced out the window, she stopped short. Storming down the boulevard, fists clenched, came their former tenant, bearing down on their building.

"Let me handle this," Jacques directed. Before long a heavy pounding shook the front door. Calmly he rose to open it. There stood the tenant, fuming with rage.

"How dare you!" she shrieked at him. "How dare you pack all that junk and mail it to me! How could you! What kind of people are you! What nerve! Who do you think you are?"

Wide-eyed, Jacques gazed back at her. "But isn't it yours?" he asked quietly.

A moment of stunned silence followed. Dumbfounded, the woman stared at him, at a complete loss for words. Then, with a gasp, she turned on her heel and strode out of the building. They never saw her again.

* * * * * * * *

Soon after moving into the apartment, Malvina got acquainted with one of her neighbors, a bombastic older woman from the floor below. Despite her authoritative manner, she was actually quite hospitable. During Malvina's visits, she would declaim knowingly in Yiddish on a variety of topics, while Malvina, timid and overwhelmed, yet anxious to learn the ways of her new country, listened in awe. The woman frequently served a rich sponge cake that Malvina found delicious. After a time she gathered up courage to ask for the recipe.

"Oh, it's very easy," the woman sniffed off-handedly. "You use all the usual things."

"What usual things?" asked Malvina, who had never baked in her life.

"Why, flour, sugar, eggs, milk, of course. Don't you know? And don't forget the baking powder and baking soda. There's nothing to it!"

Not wishing to appear ignorant or inexperienced, Malvina nodded and thanked her.

Once back in her own apartment, she hastily jotted down what she could remember. The next day she set out to bake. In a large bowl she blended a dozen eggs, two cups of flour, a couple cups of sugar and, when it came to the baking powder and baking soda, having no idea about quantities she poured in a full box of each. Transferring the batter to a large baking pan, she placed it into the heated oven and left the room while it baked.

A few minutes later, suddenly and without warning, a thunderous boom shook the place. Rushing into the kitchen, she was greeted by the sight of the oven door flung open, still vibrating from the shock of the explosion, while the cake pan itself lay all the way across the room. Partially cooked batter covered all the chairs, table, and cabinets. Even the floor, windows, and ceiling were splattered. The cake had literally jumped out of the oven!

On her next visit to the neighbor, Malvina, ashamed to admit what had happened, guardedly brought up the subject of baking. Carefully wording her questions so as not to appear ignorant, she finally elicited information that baking powder and soda are to be added by the teaspoonful, not the whole box! During the conversation, the woman asked her repeatedly if she happened to know what had caused the loud explosion and tremor that had shaken the building the other day. Everyone else in the apartment complex was talking about it. Malvina feigned ignorance, claiming she had heard nothing. The woman continued to glare at her suspiciously, unable to fathom how she could have missed such a resounding commotion, but Malvina never confessed.

Baking a sponge cake eventually became one of her culinary accomplishments. She usually baked twice every week, so that she would have some ready for unexpected company as well as the family. Everyone raved about it, and she used to say, "It's too good to even put icing on it!" Once in a while she would serve it with a spoonful of jam or a dusting of powdered sugar, but never anything else.

Her cheese pie, exceedingly rich and creamy was made with a graham cracker crust. This was long before cheesecake had become popular; the only one well known at the time came from Lindy's Restaurant in New York. Several people who had eaten it there assured Malvina that hers actually rivaled it.

Another unusual dessert she prepared especially well was pineapple meringue pie, a variation of lemon meringue pie with a crushed-pineapple filling instead of the lemon. Years later, Ephraim Ostrofsky, the college-age son of her schoolteacher friend in Chicago, remarked that he “would sell his soul for a slice of Mrs. Feldmark's pineapple meringue pie!"

Malvina's oatmeal cookies were also outstanding. One of her secrets was making sure that the walnuts remained in excessively large chunks.

III

Once settled in Chicago, both Jacques and Malvina enrolled in night school to learn English. Most of the others there were Russian immigrants, and soon they formed a large and warm circle of friends. Together with Ben Weintroub and the Tecotzky family, these people would remain in close contact with them for the rest of their lives, even after they moved away from Chicago.

Among these had been Morris Grodsky, one of their teachers at the school. Morris was born in Odessa, coming to the United States as a child. He was a structural engineer during the day and taught English several evenings a week. He sported a dark moustache, smiled readily, and turned out to have a warm sense of humor. He was highly intelligent, and people took to him quickly.

His wife Rita had been born in the village of Neizhin near Kiev (not far from Chernobyl). She had arrived in America at age eighteen, along with five siblings and her widowed mother Vera Bloom. By the time Jacques and Malvina met her, she had grown into an extremely beautiful woman, tall, with classic features, greenish eyes, and blue-black hair worn in a high pompadour at the forehead and pulled back into a bun at the nape of the neck. She had worked briefly as a fashion model but now sold blouses in a department store, after a brief stint of nurses training and some pre-med college. In 1918, Morris had been drafted into the army and sent briefly to a base in Oklahoma, where Rita accompanied him.

They were a charming couple, lively, cultured, and well informed. They were also extremely hospitable. The apartment where they lived was located at a corner where two trolley lines crossed. It routinely became a stopping point where friends dropped in unannounced, just to say hello before changing streetcars. The place soon became a social center where everyone expected to meet interesting people and enjoy lively discussions. In 1923 (three years after their only child Masha was born) they moved to a building with six apartments that Morris co-owned with his father. Previously his father had owned a grocery store and worked as a day laborer. Now he devoted all his time to caring for the building, acting as its janitor.

The third floor apartment across from the Grodskys was often without tenants. Sometimes when the gathering of visitors in their place swelled to an unwieldy number, Morris and a guest or two would sweep as much of the furniture as possible into the vacant apartment. Then they would crank up the victrola and everybody would dance, sing, and make merry for hours in the enormous vacated living room. Rita's mother Mrs. Bloom lived three houses east on Division Street. A dynamic and charming lady, vivacious and spirited, her clever sense of humor quickly made her a favorite among their friends. Young people loved her, many deliberately seeking out her company.

One friend of Rita Grodsky was a pretty young woman, conspicuous for her beautiful long hair which reached down to her knees. In the early 1920s, women were beginning to bob their hair, cutting it into the extremely short style of a flapper. Hairdressers and even men's barbers were besieged with requests from ladies asking for this short, boyish, close-cropped look instead of the long tresses they had worn pulled back into thick buns and secured with heavy amber hairpins.

One day Rita's friend announced to her husband that she, too, wanted the chic, new, shingled haircut. He exploded.

"How could you even think of such a thing?" he demanded. "Cut off that magnificent hair? Why, that was what I fell in love with when I first met you!"

She pleaded that short hair was now the style, that she looked old- fashioned with her hair at its current length, and that short hair would be chic and easy to take care of, all to no avail.

"I forbid it!" he stormed. "I absolutely forbid it! Cut off your hair and I'll divorce you!"

They fought for days, both in public and privately. The more she protested, the more adamant he became.

Then one day, without saying a word to anyone, she went to a barbershop and had her hair cut down to a shingle. The style was so short that it exposed the back of her neck. The difference was startling. She looked like an entirely different person.

Her friends complimented her enthusiastically.

"You look absolutely marvelous!" they told her.

"It's so stylish! So becoming! So different! It’s stunning!"

As for her husband, it took him three full days before he even noticed!

* * * * * * * *

Another woman whom Malvina and Jacques met at the Grodskys' seemed delighted to make their acquaintance.

"You must come visit me," she insisted at the end of the evening. "It was so interesting talking to you. Come for dinner. Shall we say next Wednesday? Six o'clock?"

They accepted. The following Wednesday, when they arrived, she greeted them warmly.

"Come in! Come in!" she cried. "I'm so glad you could make it."

They all sat down in the living room, and she immediately engaged them in lively conversation. They discussed a variety of topics, chatting for over three hours. Never once did she offer anything to eat. By nine thirty, exhausted and faint from hunger, they got up from the sofa and said their good-byes.

"This has been absolutely delightful!" the hostess exclaimed. "You must come again! Please!"

To which Jacques replied, "Yes, we will – but not for dinner!"

* * * * * * * *

Still another friend of the Grodskys constantly complained about her husband who, she said, was like a baby, unable to fend for himself unless she was around to take care of him. That summer she wanted to rent a vacation cottage on Lake Michigan, with plans to spend the entire months of June, July, and August there, while he remained in the city and came for weekends.

My only worry," she confided to friends, "is that if I'm not around, he won't even change the bed sheets at home."

With the brutal heat of Chicago summers, this was a genuine concern. Then she hit upon a solution. Before leaving for vacation, she covered the mattress with ten bottom sheets, one on top of the other.

"Now all you have to do while I'm away," she instructed him, "is to pull off one sheet each week. Just one! It's not the best solution, but at least it's better than not changing sheets at all."

He promised, and every weekend when he came to visit her and she asked him how things were back home, he assured her that he was getting along splendidly.

Finally in September she returned to the city. There to her dismay, she found that

not once had he pulled off a single sheet. He had slept on the original top sheet for the entire ten weeks!

* * * * * * * *

Samson and Rose Liph were another couple from the night school that Jacques and Malvina got to know well. Samson was an agriculturist who had come to the United States at age fourteen, gotten his college degree in Lansing, Michigan, and after that had taught school before going to work for the Jewish Agricultural Service in a program headed by Baron De Hirsch.

This organization aimed at establishing farmlands in the Midwest for Jewish farmers. Their theory was that, if Jews went back to the land, this would somehow help combat anti-Semitism. The organization lent money to the farmers, and Samson traveled continually to various parts of the Midwest, working closely with individual families. He was a meek, retiring, soft-spoken man, unusually reserved and withdrawn, but highly respected in his profession.

His wife Rose, whom he had known while they were still children in Russia (they were cousins), had come to America some years later. In the old country, she had trained as a dentist. They married as soon as she arrived. Later they had two daughters: Lenora born May 14, 1919, and June, born in 1923.

When Rose talked, her voice could be heard across the room. She argued loudly and in a heavy Russian accent, shrill, screeching, waving her hands wildly, sometimes even banging her fist on a table to make a point. Highly excitable, she was prone to unexpected and sudden outbursts of hysteria. Whenever this happened she would shake nervously, her heavy rimmed glasses bouncing up and down on her nose. Although basically a well-meaning woman, she behaved erratically. It was hard to picture a couple as different in temperament as Samson and Rose.

Once Malvina heard that a lakeside property on Lake Michigan might be available at a good price. One small lot was located in a small summer-resort community in a town called Fox Lake. Another woman she knew was also interested, so together they set out on a daylong bus excursion to explore the situation. After looking over the plot of ground, Malvina suddenly recalled that the Liphs, with their infant daughter Lenora, were vacationing in Fox Lake.

"It would be nice to stop in and say hello," she suggested to the other lady.

"Do you have their address?" her friend asked.

"No," replied Malvina, "but we won't have any trouble finding them."

"How can you be so sure?" her friend wanted to know.

"You'll see, believe me," answered Malvina.

Walking over to the local taxicab stand, she approached one of the drivers.

"Excuse me," she began, "but I'm looking for a couple who arrived here a few days ago. She would have been walking in front of him. And he would have been carrying the baby."

As the driver still looked puzzled, she added, "And, oh yes, the baby would have been wearing black diapers!"

The driver nodded suddenly. "Oh sure!" he exclaimed. Then shouting over to another cabby, "Hey, Joe," he called, "remember that funny couple? Where did you take them?"

Five minutes later Malvina and her friend were sitting in the Liphs' cottage.

"How did you ever find us without an address?" Rose Liph wanted to know.

"Oh, we managed somehow," Malvina replied, with an enigmatic smile.

IV

Ben Weintroub soon became one of the Feldmarks' closest friends. There was a long period early on, though, when they saw nothing of him. Somewhere around 1920, during one of their frequent discussions, he and Malvina got into a disagreement. He completely disappeared from their lives. It was not until four years later, when Josy was born, that an enormous bouquet of flowers reached Malvina at the hospital. They were from Ben, who had in the meantime married and now had two daughters of his own. From then on their friendship resumed as if nothing had happened. They remained the dearest of friends for the rest of their lives.

Despite their warm relationship with him that spanned several decades, Jacques and Malvina never once got to meet Ben's wife. On one occasion Jacques did catch a glimpse of her for only a moment. When he was visiting Chicago after having moved to Philadelphia, he was invited by Ben to a weekly group that met every Friday night in the Weintroub house. Ben limited these gatherings only to men, and that night his wife came into the room just to bring cake and tea for the guests, then promptly disappeared for the rest of the evening.

Ben had begun the custom of inviting friends to the library of his home once every week to exchange ideas on current issues: politics, religion, art, law. Those present (mainly lawyers, judges, publishers, and university professors) were extremely well informed, and the guests varied from week to week. The one thing he always insisted rigidly upon was that never were there to be any women present because, as he once confided to Jacques, they would inevitably trivialize the conversations. Although Malvina was one of Ben's closest friends, and though he respected her opinions highly and often engaged her in philosophical discussions on many topics, she was never included in any of these gatherings. Jacques, on the other hand, was always welcomed and attended several. He reported that the discussions were on a scholarly level, always stimulating and challenging.

Malvina and Jacques continued to respect Ben's wishes not to meet his family. Over the years they never intruded on his privacy nor questioned his decision. They once heard a rumor that, during the period when they had had no contact with him, two of his future wife's brothers had approached Ben demanding that he "do right" by their sister. Soon afterwards she converted to Judaism and he married her.

Ben did talk continuously about his older daughter Laura, who was the apple of his eye. In the years to come, whenever he visited Jacques and Malvina, he would wax eloquent about her, proudly recounting details of her growing up, her beauty, her accomplishments, her popularity. The other daughter, like his wife, he seldom mentioned.

* * * * * * * *

From the moment she first met her cousin Elizabeth Tecotzky, Malvina liked her enormously. She and Elizabeth spent a great deal of time together and grew intensely fond of each other. Their mothers (Anna Tecotzky and Dina Margolius Feldmark) were not only first cousins, but best friends as well.

When Malvina first arrived in the United States, she was (according to her immigration documents) twenty-five years old while Elizabeth, not yet married, was in her early twenties. Charming, intelligent, well read with an alert inquisitive mind, Elizabeth also had a delightful sense of humor and an enthusiastic contagious optimism that endeared her to everybody. Her voice was especially beautiful, musical and bell-like, but she suffered from a weight problem. Though of average height, she weighed close to two hundred fifty pounds.

This never caused her to display any self-consciousness, nor did it deter her from

Elizabeth Tecotzky.

enjoying an active social life. She was immensely popular with those her own age. Her friends called her "The Butterfly", and at parties she was seldom without several young people gathered around her. With a genuinely confident air she flitted among them, laughing, chatting, always the center of attention, holding court among groups of them eager for her company.

During the days before Jacques arrived in America, when life at the Margolius household had become intolerable, Malvina spent as much time as possible with the Tecotzkys. Whenever her friends wanted to reach her, they knew to look for her there. Ben Weintroub called frequently, and usually it was Elizabeth who answered the phone. Before long, their brief chats stretched to almost an hour before Elizabeth finally got Malvina to come to the phone.

Ben was smitten. "Your cousin is really intelligent," he told Malvina. "And charming!

"Is she good-looking, too?" he eventually asked.

Malvina tried to evade the question. Out of a sense of loyalty and affection, she could never bring herself to say anything uncomplimentary about Elizabeth.

When Ben kept pressing the question, she finally answered as off-handedly as possible.

"Of course!" she told him.

Now Ben insisted that he wanted to meet Elizabeth.

Malvina panicked. Trying to put things off, she changed the subject every time he brought it up and, when he kept persisting, she made one excuse after another. Several weeks went by this way. Meanwhile, the phone conversations between Ben and Elizabeth grew more and more frequent, and more and more involved.

Finally Ben confronted Malvina.

"I spoke to your cousin yesterday," he announced firmly, "and she said she wants to meet me, too. So I'm leaving work early on Thursday—four o'clock," he continued over Malvina's protests. "I already made the arrangements. We'll meet in the park across the street from my office; you know where that is. I'm bringing along a friend to keep you company so I can give my full attention to your cousin. Now be sure to bring her—she

told me she wants to come!"

Malvina was dumbfounded. To her consternation, she found that Elizabeth indeed was just as eager to meet Ben as he was to meet her.

"He sounds wonderful!" she told Malvina. "I can hardly wait!"

There was no way out.

That Thursday, with a heavy heart, Malvina brought Elizabeth to the park. Sure enough, there on a bench sat Ben with another gentleman. Spotting Malvina, he sprang up, rushed over, and firmly announced that once he met Elizabeth, he wanted Malvina to leave them alone together so they could get to know each other. Therefore to underscore this, he introduced his friend and then asked, looking around, "So where is your cousin?"

"Here I am!" sang out Elizabeth joyfully. "Right here! It's so nice to finally meet you!"

Afterwards, Ben reproached Malvina angrily. "Why did you lie to me?" he admonished her. "How could you do such a thing to a friend?"

"But what did you expect me to do?" she exclaimed. "How could I say anything bad about my cousin?"

It was some time after this that Ben and Malvina had a parting of the ways that lasted for a few years. It was during this period that he met the woman who eventually became his wife.

Elizabeth, on the other hand, married her first cousin Sam Tecotzky, son of her father Isaac's brother Mendel. They went to Buffalo for their wedding license, since Illinois banned marriages between first cousins. Elizabeth's father went with the couple as a chaperon. On the way the train stopped in Indiana, where they were greeted by a group of Sam's "landsleight" (neighbors) from the town of Goniads where he had grown up, the Moorans and the Farbers bringing gifts to the soon-to-be-married couple.

Sam, about a head shorter than Elizabeth, was equally stout. A jovial sort, he was warm, generous, and gregarious to a fault. He worshipped Elizabeth fervently. Even after their children Melvin and Dena were fully grown, he would still proclaim his adoration and excessive joy at his wife's companionship.

"Why should I want to go out anywhere?" he would ask. "I can always stay at home and enjoy a good game of gin rummy with my wife"

"She is my queen," he would declare to everyone. "She is my queen!"

Their marriage would last for close to forty years.

V

The dearest of all Malvina's Chicago friends were Celia Kirson and her sister Frieda Kirson Bild. Originally from Vilna, Lithuania, they were indirectly related, since Frieda had married Malvina's second cousin, Sam Bild. One of Frieda's suitors had been Sidney Hillman, prominent labor leader who later became Chairman of the CIO's Political Action Committee. But Frieda never showed more than a platonic interest in him, and her marriage to Sam Bild was a happy one, though childless.

Frieda had two sisters living in Chicago, but devoted herself mostly to the younger one, Celia. The older sister, Rebecca Kirson Weinberg and her husband Herman had three children: Fannie, Sam ("Mookie"), and Mitchell ("Mickey").

Fannie remembered foreign stamps on letters coming to her aunts from their two brothers in South Africa (they also had two other brothers living in Oklahoma). A cousin Louis Kartoon who worked as the only Jew in a machine shop taught her about the Bible. A friend of her father once gave the family a Kimball piano free, and Fannie, after several lessons, became quite proficient. In high school she won a scholarship for writing an essay for a newspaper ad, allowing her to attend the Glenn Dillard Gunn School of Music for a short while. She eventually graduated from the University of Chicago and went into social work, becoming a supervisor for the city of Chicago.

Malvina, Celia Kirson, and Frieda.

Her brother Sam, two years younger, was also bright, and in addition he was outstanding at sports. He pitched marvelous games, striking out so often that the neighborhood boys would carry him around on their shoulders, cheering. Unable to pronounce his Yiddish name Shmuel, though, they sounded it out as Shmookie or Mookie which was where he got his nickname. As an adult he would refer to himself as Samuel Kirson Weinberg, and later achieved prominence as a Professor of Sociology at the University of Chicago where he wrote eight books on criminology, with special attention to the topic of incest long before it became acceptable to talk about it openly.

As children, Fannie, Mookie, and their brother Mickey spent a great deal of time in Frieda's home. Here she and Celia had an enormous influence in raising them. Together they supervised every aspect of the children's upbringing. From babyhood on they read them unabridged versions of Greek mythology and Buckle's *History of Civilization* instead of fairy tales. They taught them world history, literature and philosophy even before the children entered school. The two older ones, especially, thrived on the deep, complex discussions of ethics, logic, politics, and metaphysics that went on in the home.

Their Aunt Celia never married. She was strikingly beautiful, very petite, with dark-hair, huge expressive brown eyes framed by heavy eyebrows, and a trim figure, but her movements were gawky and clumsy. Barely five feet tall, she always wore size 3-1/2 or 4 shoes, with precariously spiked heels that she tottered on. When she got excited she would sometimes leap into the air in joy and enthusiasm. She had a loud, hearty, ringing laugh, and she laughed often. People took to her, and wherever she went, people came.

She attended the Chicago Medical College, where she studied with Dr. Kretchmer, Head of the AMA. She became a general practitioner working for the City of Chicago, with patients at the Mt. Sinai Hospital. In Frieda's apartment where Celia lived, one room was set aside as an office, with a cabinet for holding drugs, a desk, a chair, and a table for examining patients. Once a friend called with a complaint and asked if Celia could come see her. Celia agreed but, unable to find her hairpins as she was getting dressed, she never left the house.

Frieda pampered her like a child, referring to her as "The Philosopher" and "The Savant." No man was ever good enough or worthy of Celia, according to Frieda. Celia spurned every man who ever tried to make romantic overtures, and there were quite a few. She held her own with anyone, eager to discuss any topic on any subject, and usually she won every argument.

She and Frieda were regulars at the Lawndale Civic Center on the West Side of Chicago. This was a largely Jewish neighborhood in those days, with a temple on almost every block. It housed the Jewish Theological Seminary. On Jewish holidays people met here not for prayers or discussions, but just to sing. It was a richly intellectual area, with a large immigrant population. Frequently attending the activities were doctors, lawyers, chemists, Hebrew teachers, and their friends Dr. Spiro and Dr. Selitz. Celia engaged then all in conversation, and they flocked to her.

There was also a Yiddish Club, The Jewish People's Institute, with weekly meetings that Celia and Frieda both attended regularly. Frieda, an outstanding cook, made

latkes and baked cakes for many of the meetings. Sometimes even the writer Bernard Malamud, who was connected with the Jewish newspapers and who was well known for his harsh, less than liberal ideas and for the articles he wrote on philosophy, came to the meetings. Celia once lectured there on *Anna Karenina*, while their psychiatrist friend Dr. Low lectured on *Hamlet*. Malvina once related how, after a lecture on Dostoievsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, Celia posed a question to the speaker, a specialist on Russian literature. He stepped back astounded.

"Now that," he turned to the audience and announced with feeling, "is a question!"

Fannie later told Josy that, whenever Malvina came to visit (usually two or three times a week), the Bild-Kirson household would turn into a "salon" with Celia holding court. They discussed all manner of ethical, moral, and literary topics, with the children also being asked to participate. Sometimes Celia would round up speakers to come as guests and lecture in the home, with the discussions becoming as challenging as in a college classroom.

The friendship between Malvina and the two sisters was the strongest and deepest of her life. Long after she moved away from Chicago, they kept in frequent contact. Malvina and Jacques continued to regard people like Celia, Ben Weintroub, the Tecotzkys, the Grodskys, and the Liphs as the most intimate of all their friends.

VI

One day Malvina received a letter from her mother, still living in Europe. Dina wrote that the son of her friend in Poland was now also living in Chicago, and suggested that Malvina and Jacques look him up. Bernard Shoelson soon became a constant visitor to their apartment.

Even though they got to know him well, he always insisted that they continue to address him as "Shoelsen." He was a bachelor who worked as an accountant, and though he proved to be a pleasant enough fellow, he was highly eccentric: excitable, nervous, and flying into a rage when least expected.

He was the first person they knew to buy a car, which was considered a status symbol in those days. Everyone generally referred to it in awe, as "a machine."

"Let's take a ride in the machine," people would say.

Such an outing, with no particular destination, was considered an "event", some-

thing that hinted at luxury and high-class living.

As soon as he learned to drive, Shoelson came to the Feldmarks and proudly invited Jacques out for a ride. No sooner had they settled inside the vehicle than Shoelson began to issue directions.

"Sit back!" he commanded, raising his voice. "Don't touch anything! Keep your feet in front of you! Push the door handle down! Don't you know it's not safe to drive when the door's unlocked?"

"Now how do I start this?" he mumbled to himself.

As the car began to inch forward, he ordered, "Keep your eyes on the road! You never know what's going to happen next!"

Suddenly he stepped heavily on the gas and the car flew forward, almost hitting two pedestrians.

"Why didn't you warn me they were there!" he shouted, as Jacques sat frozen in the seat beside him.

For the next five minutes Shoelson kept muttering to himself, swearing at other drivers, complaining about the road, and cursing the traffic, the vehicle's construction, the unreliability of automobiles in general.

"You take your life into your hands when you drive, you know," he informed Jacques, who was too frightened to answer.

Suddenly coming to a red light, Shoelson jolted the car to an abrupt stop. Both men ricocheted back and forth in their seats.

"Why didn't you tell me the light was red?" he yelled at Jacques.

At this point Jacques quietly opened the door, got out, and announced, "Thank you very much. I'll see you back at the apartment!"

Leaving Shoelson open-mouthed behind the wheel, he turned and walked to the nearest corner, where he boarded the next streetcar for home. Not till several weeks later, after Shoelson had become more experienced and confident behind the wheel, did Jacques agree to ride with him again.

* * * * * * * *

Some time before this happened, Dina and her husband Joseph Feldmark (the parents of Jacques and Malvina) found themselves stranded in Germany. Stashek, Dina's youngest and the only one of her children left in Europe, had married as soon as World


Dina Margolius Feldmark.

War I ended and emigrated with his wife to Mexico. Now Dina and Joseph found themselves alone in Germany, unable to get back to their families in Poland.

Joseph, meanwhile, had taken ill. He went into the hospital and shortly afterwards, died there. Now Dina found herself widowed for a second time. She was alone in a foreign country with no family nearby. It took a few years before Malvina and Jacques were successful in bringing her to America. During those years, living conditions in post-war Germany worsened. As inflation grew rampant, Dina lived on whatever Malvina and Jacques were able to send her. Malvina mailed packages as often as she could, but it was impossible to be sure any would reach the person they were intended for. Most bundles got torn open as soon as they arrived in Germany, their contents stolen.

One time Dina wrote that she desperately needed shoes. To make certain that her mother received them, Malvina wrapped each shoe in its own individual package and mailed them on separate days. She reasoned that one shoe by itself would prove useless to anyone wanting to steal it. She proved to be right, for both bundles eventually reached her mother intact.

Dina finally did make her way back to Poland, but a few more years passed before she could finally get to America.

Shortly before she was ready to leave, Bernard Shoelson's mother came to pay her a visit. In a long, heart-to-heart entreaty, Mrs. Shoelson poured her worries out.

"My poor son in Chicago!" she lamented. "Forty-one years old, all alone in a strange country, and still not married! You must swear to me," she pleaded to Dina, "that you'll find him a nice wife once you get to America!"

Dina promised.

It was the middle of 1923 when she finally sailed. On the boat coming over, she had an accident and fell, injuring herself severely. From that time on, and throughout the rest of her life, she remained crippled, requiring assistance to walk even more than a few feet. The original plan had been for her to live alternately with her son Ben Margolius as well as with Malvina. But the way things worked out, she was unable to get along with Ben or his wife Liba, and though she did stay with them for a few short periods, she ended up living permanently with Malvina.

Dina arrived in Chicago in 1923, a few months before Josy was born. Once settled, she turned her attention to the matter of Bernard Shoelson. Discussing the situation with Malvina and Jacques, she asked for their help. They decided that a young unmarried cousin in her late thirties named Helen Janowitz, might be the perfect candidate.
Malvina phoned the Tecotzkys, apprising them of the situation, and together they concocted a plan.

One hot summer evening, Malvina invited Shoelson for dinner. After the meal, he proposed, as he usually did, that they all go out for a ride in his "machine".

“We can show your mother the city,” he offered.

"How nice,” they all agreed.

After riding for a while, Jacques suggested, “ Why don't we go by the lake and head south?"

Soon afterwards they found themselves in South Chicago.

“Oh look,” Malvina called out. “We’re near the Tecotzkys. Why don’t we stop in and say hello.”

Agreeing, Shoelson parked the car, everybody got out, and soon they were all welcomed into the apartment. The Janowitzs and their daughter Helen also happened to be visiting at the time. Anna Tecotzky made tea, everybody sat down at the dining room table, chatting jovially, and eventually someone mentioned that Shoelson had a "machine".

"Oohs" and "ahs" came from around the table. Then Anna Tecotzky suggested that it would be nice if Shoelson took Helen out for a ride in his machine. The two left, and were gone for over an hour. As she got out of his car to come back into the apartment, Helen left her umbrella behind. Shoelson did not discover it until the following morning. Enraged, he telephoned Jacques.

"What are you trying to do to me?" he shouted. "You want to fix me up with that girl! She left her umbrella in my car, and she probably did it on purpose! Now I have to call her up to return the umbrella!"

"So don't call her if you don't want to," Jacques replied mildly.

"No!" stormed Shoelson. "I will call her! After all, it's her umbrella!"

A few months later, Shoelson and Helen were married. They enjoyed a long and happy life together, eventually producing four children, among them a pair of twins. But whenever anyone hinted that theirs might have been an arranged marriage, both would deny it heatedly.

"It was love at first sight," they would scoff, protesting vehemently.

VII

Malvina had been pregnant in 1921, but had had a miscarriage. In 1923 she was expecting again. Celia Kirson referred her to an obstetrician at St. Anthony's Hospital. This was located on the south side of Chicago, while Malvina lived at 867 North Sacramento Boulevard on the far north, and had to ride about two hours to get there.

Jacques never owned a car, nor had he ever driven one. Malvina was due to deliver on the third of February , but that day passed with no sign of labor. The next morning it began to snow. Jacques, ever punctual, decided to leave for work a bit early because of the bad weather. On his way there the snowfall increased, and by the time he arrived, it had turned into a blizzard. The winds were whipping higher and higher, the flying snow growing thicker by the minute, and all streets were now virtually impassable. It took him three and a half hours for what was usually a thirty-minute ride. No sooner had he arrived than he was greeted by the news that Malvina had phoned. She had gone into labor.

Not a bus or trolley car was running, nor were any taxis answering calls. Jacques panicked. He had to have a car, he shouted, from somebody, anybody! He declared that he would drive it, even though he had never been behind a wheel before. A kindly fellow worker with a car offered to drive him. With difficulty they made their way outside, fighting their way to the car and struggling to get the doors open. After several failed attempts the driver finally got the engine started. The vehicle inched forward, and they slowly made their way through streets lined with high snow-banks, theirs being the only car moving. It took more than three hours to reach the apartment. There they found Malvina in heavy labor.

With difficulty they assisted her to the car and, through streets barely visible in the storm, drove painstakingly along at a snail's pace, often on the pavements. It took several more hours to reach the hospital, but they need not have hurried. Malvina continued in labor throughout the night, and it was not until early evening of the following day that she delivered. Whether her obstetrician ever made it to the hospital remains unclear. The delivery, though long, turned out to be uncomplicated. Weighing in at seven pounds eight ounces, measuring twenty-one inches in length, Josy finally arrived at five after six in the evening on the fifth of February, 1924.