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*For my mother
whose bread had
the best taste in the world*

I

I was born in a small Hungarian village between the Ukraine and Slovakia, on a Thursday night, May 3, 1932. That day it rained, my mother told me, and she said rain brings bad luck, but I like it, and I always have. For it to have rained in that season was exceptional, and so was my birth, since my mother did not want more children: there were already too many in that little house, which was crumbling under the weight of the years. But people, the poorer they were, the more children they had, since it was only in bed that one could take shelter from the cold during the long winter months.

The town was already dark in the afternoon. A few oil lamps barely illuminated the small rooms of the house. Our house was made of two rooms and the kitchen, with a roof of reeds that, here and there, let the rain pass through. No one could sleep in the small room because the water came in; my brother Laci, my sister Eliz, and I slept in the other one. My parents slept in the kitchen. The rest of my family—Leila, Margo, and Peter—were in Budapest where they worked in a tailor shop.

My father, a butcher and merchant by trade, tried all kinds of work without managing to earn enough for the family. He was always traveling, but rarely did he come home with money; he was nervous, skinny, and sad, full of rheumatism and holes from the bullets of the war of '14. He never wanted to go to the synagogue—that was the subject of all the arguments that happened in our house. I could not say that mine was a calm, happy family; our poverty increased every day and so did the fights. We would quarrel over nothing. My mother was thirty-nine years old, but she seemed much older with her few teeth and her beautiful, but bitter and suffering face. She always wore a kerchief on her head as observant Jews do, and when she wasn't shouting she was praying.

I was barely seven. I went to school and I was glad, because that was my only refuge from the family quarrels. The other days, when I could no longer stand anyone, I would go to the nearby forest and, stretched out on the frozen mud, cry for long hours. When my back hurt and I was hungry, I would go home, where my mother would rub my hands and feet to warm me up again. Many times I went out just for this: when I returned my mother was affectionate, and she caressed me tenderly with her chubby, soft hands.

A few Jewish families who had grocery or haberdashery shops lived in the village; the other inhabitants were almost all Protestant peasants. Sunday mornings they went to the service at the only church. In the afternoon the women gathered in groups in front of their houses, and I liked to listen to

their gossip; the men went to the pub to drink or play skittles. Those who could read bought the local newspaper from the mailman, and they read out loud for the others, or else they spoke of the last war or of the one that was always drawing closer. It was 1939. In the evenings they went home early. The whole village slept and only the dogs barked in the dark.

I often went with my schoolmates to the river Tisza, which was frozen, and we played with sleds. But when I came back with dirty clothes and wet shoes I could not go to school, because I only had one pair of shoes. I would put them on the stove to dry, but if there wasn't wood, I would have to wait too long. So my mother would loan me her high heeled shoes, which would fall off in the mud while I was walking. Winter was the hardest time because the storms often carried off entire pieces of the roof, and we had to run with pots to catch the rain that came in. We often lacked wood and even food. When I saw my mother's face blue with cold, and my siblings bent over the stove, which exhaled suffocating smoke, I would go to the forest to steal dried wood. If I didn't manage to take any because there were guards, the food would take all day to cook, and when it was ready to be eaten there would hardly be any left: everyone had tasted it too many times. During vacations I went to work with Eliz for an extremely low wage or for a bit of food—apples or spoiled prunes. I only liked holidays: we ate more, and sometimes my father returned from his travels with candy, shoes, or new clothes. Those days were happy and full of joy. I would improvise songs. My mother would smile, watching my father with pride and tenderness. Then he would give her a pinch on the arm as a sign of affection. I would watch them, and inside I would feel like crying.

While I was growing up, life continued with the usual fights and the usual worries, and when I saw that food was lacking I went to steal eggs and chickens from the neighbors, but only from the rich ones because I was too honest to rob the poor. My mother prayed, asking God forgiveness for our sins, but I thought it was right and did not consider it a sin. In order to buy little things for the house, we had to pay with our food supply, as the whole village did, or else go into debt. My mother made bread once a week, on Thursday, and it was the happiest day of my childhood. She would sigh with satisfaction when she saw the five large loaves, and she would say that we would have another week without worries because when there was bread there was everything. The first day we could eat as much as we wanted, but then we had to reduce our rations to make it last until the next Thursday. It was hard to get that much flour together, and we did not always succeed.

In the village there were also rich families who rented their land to the poor, to whom they conceded a small portion of the harvest as compensation.

The privileged society consisted of the town hall's employees, the municipal doctor, the pharmacist, the schoolteachers, and the two Protestant pastors. The most feared and respected inhabitants were the gendarmes, who lived in a large barracks and had themselves called "Excellency." The poorest of

the poor were the gypsies camped near the forest. They had many naked, starving children. They lived on charity. Some of them helped build houses and stables, but few people gave them work or help. Most people wouldn't even let the gypsies get near their houses. The gypsies were hated, and they lived in an inhuman manner. My father often brought home one of them whom we called "Uncle" and to whom we would give rags and tatters or something to eat. He joked with us, and he spoke the truth when he said that the Jews and the gypsies are equals—hated by everyone, they are always going, going without ever stopping, because they have no place that belongs to them.

In the spring of 1941, Eliz left for Budapest with her patched and repatched clothes and her little suitcase tied up with string that I had dyed brown with shoe polish. My mother had scolded me because, she said, the string could just as well be white, by God, Eliz was no princess! We took Eliz to the station, which was far away, outside of town. She cried and begged my father to let her come back home. But we had no future in our village; in Budapest she could learn a trade that would be useful all her life. On the way back from the station, my father stopped at the pub, as he did so often. If he wasn't making money, he drank out of sadness; if he was making money, he drank for joy.

Eliz's stay in Budapest lasted a month. Then she came home saying that the people there were too complicated and there were so many streets she didn't know and the women dyed their hair and painted their lips— a disgrace. She would rather stay at home. I asked her what she had seen in the big city, and as if sickened, she told me she had seen a film in which a man and a woman kissed each other in public. I explained that it was all fake, but she, almost irate, insisted that they were kissing. She said there were electric lights, theaters, magazines, and beautiful stores, as well. But they didn't interest her. I listened to her story of that unknown, faraway world, and I thought that, in a few years, when I finished school, I would leave and marry a rich man so that I would be able to help my family. I assured my mother that as soon as I could, I would go to Budapest to work and with my first earnings I would have her teeth fixed, and my father's too, because they already looked like two old people.

Spring brought happiness to the village. The peasants would go to the fields with their shoulders tanned by the sun, and often, with smiling faces, they sang melancholy songs. We children would walk barefoot. The sun gave life to everyone. I would even manage to forget the hardships of the winter. I would no longer think of the past; I worried only about the future. We would wait for the fair that came once a year and represented a big event and entertainment for the village. We would buy clothes for the whole year.

But that spring was less happy, and one day while I was going out to play with my schoolmates, I heard for the first time the schoolteacher greeting the doctor with a "Heil Hitler." Summer passed, and another winter was about to end. The pallid sun was melting the ice, and the snow was turning

into deep mud. These were the warm days that I adored. On certain days the water came all the way up to our door because our house was low-lying, and we made canals so that the water would flow into the river. People spoke of nothing but war and the Germans and occupied Poland. As soon as school was over, my family decided to build a new house since ours was by then uninhabitable. We stayed temporarily with my uncle. Eliz and I helped the gypsies do the building, and people watched and said, "See, they're all right, even if they are Jews. They do all the work like us poor, honest folk. But why aren't they rich?" I greeted them by name. I felt strong and happy about the new house, where it wouldn't rain indoors, where the roof would have tiles like the houses of the rich, and where everything would be better. The work went quickly. We brought wood for the roof; only the floor was still earth. We had been working for two months. The materials were ready and in a few days the house would be finished.

In the new house there was one room and the kitchen. It certainly wasn't large. As soon as the roof was ready, we moved in. I was proud. Outside, the house was white with a red roof and a facade sprinkled with green and yellow cement, just like rich people's. With a deep sigh I often stopped to look at it. After school I came home happy because it would seem taller than before, and newer, even if it was small. My life seemed different then. I was no longer afraid that the roof would cave in, even though the roof wasn't perfect and did let the rain come through here and there. One day we'll fix it, said my mother, for now let's thank God for this too. My father, looking around, swore and spoke about the war, about society, about the poverty that would get even worse, and about hatred. He said that nothing had value, since everything would be destroyed. He said that everything was useless. Watching my mother, he laughed nervously, asking her if perhaps she expected the Messiah to save us.

We felt the war more and more, and life became ever more somber. My father went off as a soldier to Czechoslovakia. It was 1942. Then they sent him back home because a dirty Jew was of no use to the army. When we went swimming in the river people got out of the water because, they said, we dirtied it. On Saturdays children ran after the old men returning from the synagogue and pulled their beards and spat on them. The fascists grew in number. Our family suffered less than the others because we were the least observant. Only on Friday evenings would my mother light the candles, and with a white kerchief on her head she would hide her face in the palm of her hand, as required by our religion, and pray, crying. Then she would lift her head and ask God for our salvation.

We ate less and less; for Jews everything was prohibited by law. We were afraid to go out in the evenings because once my brother was beaten while he was going to get water. Even at school we would hear kids saying, "Jewstink." Jewish children wouldn't play with me, saying that I wasn't Jewish enough, that my father drank, and that I no longer knew what I was. I was left with a few Christian friends who sometimes defended me. About that time, on two occasions I found my father

drunk in the pub. The whole town laughed about it and chattered for a week about the drunken Jew. He cried, and I felt very sorry for him. I felt closer to him than to any other person. He asked me if I detested him like all our other relatives, but I convinced him that I adored him.

In order to live, we rented some land that we cultivated for next to nothing. Eliz and I worked as day laborers and were paid with a little food. I liked the work. The dirt was black and hot. We harvested big yellow potatoes.

I sensed that something had to happen. The alarm sounded frequently, and after five o'clock we Jews could not go out. I wanted to go to the circus that had arrived in town, but my mother forbade me. She was afraid of everything. I saved some coins from work, and I went to the fair. There was something of everything: cows and horses, fabrics, sweets; there were even parrots that with their beaks pulled out of a box little slips of paper with your fortune written on them. The fair lasted a week. I went there early in the mornings, eight kilometers on foot. People argued, shouting, and concluded their deals by spitting on their hand and then shaking hands with the buyer. After walking around for hours, I bought a heart-shaped cake, painted with colors that were certainly poisonous since, I was warned, they had to be washed off before eating the cake. I bought a bright kerchief for my mother. I wanted her to look younger. When the fair week was over, life resumed as before, and we headed toward winter. My sister Margo had married and had had a son, and my mother was happy to be a grandmother. My brother was suffering from appendicitis, but the town doctor refused to see him. By then he had been saying, "Heil Hitler" for years. We called the people who healed with herbs, and often they managed to make his pain go away. At school the hatred for us Jews was growing, and our schoolmates amused themselves by insulting us in all sorts of ways. The schoolmistress grieved, and, while drying off my dirtied face, she tried to explain to me that all people were not like this.

On the way back from school I walked slowly, for a long time, and I thought about what was happening to me and around me. I looked at the land I loved, the houses and the trees that were dear to me. I watched the faces of the people who passed me on the street. I would have liked to ask, "You too? All of you hate me?" The earth, the houses, and the trees receded from me. Many of the people I had grown up among no longer greeted me, or they pretended not to see me. I felt alone. One day I walked for a long time in the streets, and I looked for people I could say hello to, and laugh and joke with, as I once did. I found very few who asked about my parents as they had before. It was dark when I got home. My mother had searched the whole town for me. She was in despair, and I did not want to recount what had happened to me. I fell asleep full of pain. In the morning my mother asked me where I had been. I told her and spoke to her of my anguish. She asked me a lot of questions. But Eliz, affectionately, turned it all into a joke, saying that I was moody and that perhaps I had annoyed people with ill-timed questions.

For that moment I hated her. I left, slamming the door, and went to school. I no longer wanted to think about anything. I tried to be happy, but my anguish weighed me down inside, and for the first time I was certain that people can be cruel and wicked, that yesterday's friend can be an enemy today. I felt so pained that I wanted to die. Instead that day at school they were nice and smiled at me like before and I was happy.

I would have liked to ask forgiveness of everyone, I who had judged them to be wicked. I would have liked to cry out, "I love you all." We played together, but later the atmosphere seemed gloomy to me, and I tried to assure myself that everything really was as it had been. Then I wondered instead if the other children were being superficially kind towards us, we who were dying little by little. I did not want to think, but I could not not think.

In the evening, to distract ourselves, Laci and I fled the house and went to the circus. I wanted to see what would happen and what our parents were afraid of. The tigers and bears did acrobatics, and I thought of nothing but life, and I was happy again. When we got back I found my parents arguing jealously, and I discovered that my mother loved my father. Laci and I imitated the bears, and while I was doing acrobatics I broke my arm. The village sorcerers managed to reset it. With the excuse that my arm hurt, I would play all day long. I was almost twelve years old. I had developed, too much in fact. I wore braids with ribbons of various colors, and I felt like a woman with many plans. I thought about the boys who would become men and that perhaps I would marry one of them.

2

It was Passover, 1944. It was a sad holiday. My parents barely spoke to one another, and they paced back and forth in the house, and I didn't know why. Later my mother and father told us that the Germans had arrived in the village. I asked why we should be scared, but they did not answer. I felt bad. My mother, perhaps just to have something to say to me, asked me to carry the pots that we only used at Passover to the attic, and she added that it was entirely probable that we would not use them again.

In the evening my father held my mother's hand, and we children sat close to them. I rested my head on my mother's lap, and she fondled my hair, which she had not done for some time. I so enjoyed being petted. Love, peace, and silence: in the dark they scared me. I begged them to speak. "Don't be so quiet; I'm going crazy," I said. Then my mother began to talk about the Bible and about the sufferings of the deported Polish and Slovak Jews. She told us about that she had had an awful dream—that she had seen people burning. She said that a very sad time would come for us too, but we were children, and we shouldn't be afraid because God was with us. The important thing was not to leave one another, no matter what happened. She was trembling. She got up, and for the first time she offered my father a little glass of cognac, which he for the first time refused. I felt there was no help for us. A thousand thoughts crowded my mind. Suddenly I remembered that there were walnuts

in the house and that I could take them and hide them without anyone noticing. I left the kitchen and went to the attic with my treasure. I made sure they were hidden well, and then I stopped and murmured to myself, "I'll eat them when I get back. Will I come back? But from where?"

The kitchen seemed darker than usual when I came down. Outside, it was after the curfew, and our faces were illuminated by the light that filtered through the black paper covering the windows. It seemed like a funeral wake. I wanted to run and scream, "But who's dead? We're still alive, so why aren't you talking? What are you looking at?" But I wasn't able to say a word. It was almost midnight when I went to bed, but before I fell asleep, I went back to the kitchen to see my parents holding each other close. I kissed my mother's round arm and my father's worried face, and I put covers on them as if they were children. Then I returned to the bedroom on tiptoe and got into bed next to Eliz who was almost asleep. She pulled me close to her. Caressing me, which happened rarely—only when she really felt love for me—she kept repeating, "Ditke, Ditke, my little sister, I won't beat you up anymore, you'll see." It was a darker night than others. Not even a thread of light came through the windows, or into our hearts. Curled up in bed, all I wanted was a little sleep. It seemed as if time would never pass. I felt that my strength was abandoning me, that I was falling down, into darkness.

I woke up at dawn as they were knocking loudly on the door and shouting, "Wake up! Outside! Quickly! I give you five minutes, you animals!" I did not know if this was reality or a dream, but the voice only got clearer and I could hear them kicking the door. I saw my father get up in his long underwear and go toward the door, then stop and look at us. We got up immediately and, trembling, we went to my mother. We understood that this was not like the times they came to confiscate our furniture or for my father who did business which was not permissible for Jews. My father took a step backwards, uncertainly, telling us not to be afraid.

The gendarmes came in swearing. "Outside!" they said. "Take with you no more than one change of clothes, leave your money and your gold behind! Everyone in front of the house in five minutes!" I heard a child crying near our house, and I saw a large Jewish family gathered together a few steps away. My mother put her hands in her hair and screamed and implored God. My father paced back and forth in his underwear searching for something—just what was a mystery to us; then with hope in his eyes he showed the gendarmes his war medals, saying that he had fought valorously for the fatherland. But they laughed and threw the medals away, shouting that the medals were worthless, like us, like our lives, and that we were filthy dogs, and that if we didn't hurry, with a few kicks we would get much quicker.

There were arguments and reciprocal insults, but the law is the law. My mother began to prepare a bundle, and when she asked where they would be taking us, they did not answer. I looked for the

things I loved so that I could hide them. I hoped to find them all when I returned. My mother yelled at me because even at that moment I thought of nothing except my toys. In five minutes we were ready. I stopped for a moment to look at our new house, the trees, the garden. To me they seemed long dead. The weeping willow beneath the window was bent all the way to the ground, and its branches were human beings who had been hung, so many dead limbs falling down. The village was dark, and the houses were closed up. I said goodbye to them tenderly. We walked hand in hand, lifelessly. They made all the Jewish families that were sleeping get up.

The village began to wake up. It was time to work, and the peasants, seeing our sad caravan, stopped in the street, and with tears in their eyes they held out their hands as a greeting. They were forbidden to touch us and even to say goodbye. They ran along the road with bread and food. But they couldn't give it to us. We reached the synagogue. Inside, the whole community was there. We greeted each other with resignation. The men and the women stood up before the Torah, saying, "Hear us, God of Israel," but he did not hear. He was without ears, and without eyes, and the dead spoke with the dead. Every hour the gendarmes came to ask for money and gold, searching in the most unbelievable places. They made us strip naked, the men separated from the women, and they poked their fingers in all the holes an animal can have. It made me laugh. I was not ashamed in front of them. They always found something to carry off.

We stayed all night in the synagogue. I looked around and I became aware of the world I was living in, and I observed, but no longer as a child, what was happening. The next morning, early, they took us to the station. While having us cross the entire town, they kicked us and spat in our faces. They were having fun, the new masters. It was striking for me to see how people change their skins just like serpents and spit up poison. The population stood in their doorways. Many cried. Most of them were poor, since the rich don't have many tears. I observed these sorrows and laughed nervously. At the station they threw us into cattle cars.

After a few hours of travel, we arrived in Satorjauhely, where the ghetto was. Large numbers of us lived in one house. The streets where we could go were marked, and the hunger began. Those who were better informed said that we had only just begun; I already wanted to see the end. Our destination was secret. My mother cut her hair off completely as, according to our religion, she should have as a bride. She said that God had punished us because when she married she had not cut it, and, she said that she did not want to go to the next world with long hair, since then we would also be punished in purgatory.

I thought that the next world would be another surprise, since I did not understand the world I was living in. Then they started undressing us again to search for the usual things, and they always found something. The order came to cut our hair short, since the ghetto was getting full of lice. I was

turning twelve, and it pained me to have to cut my hair. My mother trembled with the scissors in her hand and asked me to forgive her. I laughed to encourage her, and I told her it would grow back, that with short hair I would look like a young wife. I looked for a mirror. My face was... . But then I almost convinced myself that I was much more interesting.

We spent five weeks in that ghetto. My brother Peter reached us with much difficulty, since Jews could not travel. There were six of us. Leila and Margo were missing, and we no longer knew anything about them. I sang and danced, often angering everyone. My mother would say, "Poor thing! She's a half-wit. That's just what I needed!" Singing and dancing saved me from madness.

On May 23, 1944, they took us out of the ghetto to a synagogue as big and beautiful as a theater. All the people of the region were clustered there, sighing and crying in a chorus. The air was full of smoke, and it was hard to distinguish one face from another. We were not allowed to go out. I got more and more nervous. The monotonous songs of prayer pained me. The men prayed out loud, weeping. I looked for my father who was praying with them. Fortunately, after several hours, all of us went out in rows of five. Our caravan was beginning. We were many: old people, young people, and children. And everyone was spitting on us. Laughing, the young Nazis said, "Come on, you old moron, walk! Finally, you're all dying and going to hell! Why don't you talk to your God, maybe the Messiah will save you!" I could not stand to hear these insults. No one had the courage to reply, but I screamed, "Pigs! Filthy animals!" My mother begged me to keep my mouth shut. A young man in uniform approached me. I looked at him with contempt and called him a pig. He looked at me and said that it was a pity that I should die so young and beautiful, that my face was not as dirty as that of the others and if I were a little older he would be disposed to soil his bed with me. "With your mother!" I replied. But I was shaking with fear.

Mother couldn't walk any more. Her face was pained and pale; she complained of having a headache. The May sun was hot. I watched the flowers in the gardens and the children who rode their bikes while sticking out their tongues at us. What a joy, I thought, to go on living and to be able to see the world as it really is and never again to see people like this.

I was tired too, and I was thinking of myself. I breathed deeply to reassure myself that I was alive. At the station the kicks and shoves began again. They stuffed eighty of us into a cattle wagon. It was dark, and we did not know where they would take us. Many people were saying that they would take us to Siberia, others said to work camps. Everyone said something different. The train began to move. I had only one desire: to leave quickly, to get out of there to any other hell, but out of that town that I had so loved. My mother combed and fondled my poor short hair and told me that soon I would have my long braids again, with ribbons of many colors, the way I liked them. She looked through the little we had for a miserable red ribbon, and she put it in my hair. Then she caressed me

as if I really had long braids. No one spoke much during the trip, but from time to time someone in the wagon stretched out a hand to give a bit of food to the others, and once a dress and beautiful new shoes. I wondered about the meaning of this resigned generosity.

The train stopped abruptly. I heard an unknown, hard, and hurried language being spoken. I understood that we were at the German border. We had always thought that our Hungarians would never permit us to be taken away! With a crash they threw open the door and shouted that they wanted our gold, that they would ask for the last time and then they would shoot. They weren't joking. They also asked for our wedding bands, and the crying started again. It is the last thing a man and a woman take off. It was the symbol of their love, happy or unhappy, but always precious. In the end everyone gave their rings, and I hoped that there was nothing left to give. But every day this scene was repeated, and something always turned up.

When they opened the wagon I was so scared, but sometimes they distributed a little water and emptied the stinking buckets. We took care of our business in front of each other. It was humiliating, and I thought, "Good thing we don't eat much!" We often lacked water too.

After four days of travel, the train stopped. I heard a voice shouting, "Alle heraus, schnell!" In an instant we were all on one side of the wagon. I saw many barracks and many bald women with striped prison uniforms and numbers on their collars. Suddenly, I could no longer see my father and my brothers. They were pushing us forward hurriedly, dividing the men from the women. I saw my mother crying and talking, and I couldn't understand who she was talking to. She said to me, "Look, your father's on the other side." He too was crying and waving to us tiredly. Then he shouted, "I love you all. Forgive me for everything."

And my mother answered, "Forgive me, too. I have always loved you." I pulled her by the arms to tear her away from her pain. She begged me not to lose sight of my father as he got further and further away; she couldn't see him, since she didn't have her glasses. Then she screamed in my face, "They've taken him away, and Peter and Laci too, and we'll never see them again." My mother, Eliz, and I were left. And they kept pushing us forward. I saw them tear my cousin's little girl from her arms, and I asked myself if this was the end. I could not believe that a hell like this existed in this world or the next. We had to throw away everything we had. While walking I saw, lying as if they were dead: toys, dolls, photos. Mothers were screaming, they did not want to leave their children, and the Germans were swearing horrendously.

A row of SS was to our right, and another row was to our left. In the middle other Germans separated us, shouting and shoving. "Right, left, right, left!" I did not know then that left meant the crematorium's ovens and right, forced labor. To the right, the young; to the left, the old and the

children, the useless. They threw me to the left with my mother, and Eliz screamed, “Don’t take me away from my mother. I want to die. Kill me!” and my mother begged Eliz to go to the right where they were pushing her and to remember what she had told her about the Polish and Slovak women who had been in brothels for years. “Careful, my child, don’t get yourself noticed, go where they want you to, go... .” I squeezed my mother’s arm with all my strength. Suddenly, I felt a soldier pushing me to the right. He was almost whispering, “Right, right.”

I refused. My mother fell on her knees and spoke in German to the soldier. “Leave me my little baby, leave her, don’t take her away,” she said. But the soldier pushed her back with his rifle, and by beating me he forced me to go to the right. I ran and shouted, “Eliz, they separated me from Mama, Eliz. Eliz, wait for me!”

I quickly caught up to my sister. They shoved us into a barracks where, in the corners, there were piles of overcoats, furs, underwear, and heaps of hair that seemed like silk threads of every color. Our feet trampled on photographs of children and old people. We tripped over wooden legs, shoes, and the souvenirs that others who had passed this way before us had tried to hide until the last moment. I felt as if I were drunk. I could not get my thoughts to hold on to anything. Someone grabbed me and undressed me. In an instant I found myself naked and, beneath the razor of a woman in a black uniform, bald. I heard women shouting order after order in languages that were incomprehensible to me. They were deported Poles and Slovaks, all Jews: our Kapos. We had to obey them, without making a scene, because they in turn were overseen by the Germans, and they would be punished if we did not follow their commands. They warned us not to say whether we were sisters, or relatives, or less than sixteen years old, or more than forty-five years old, because of course we would have been separated. Meanwhile, a robust woman cut off the rest of our body hair. And everything was done violently: they disinfected us, and they gave us a suit of rough gray cloth. Wooden shoes and a number. After that moment the number was our name. Then in rows of five, as usual, and so on. The name of the place was Auschwitz.