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Eugene L. Pogany
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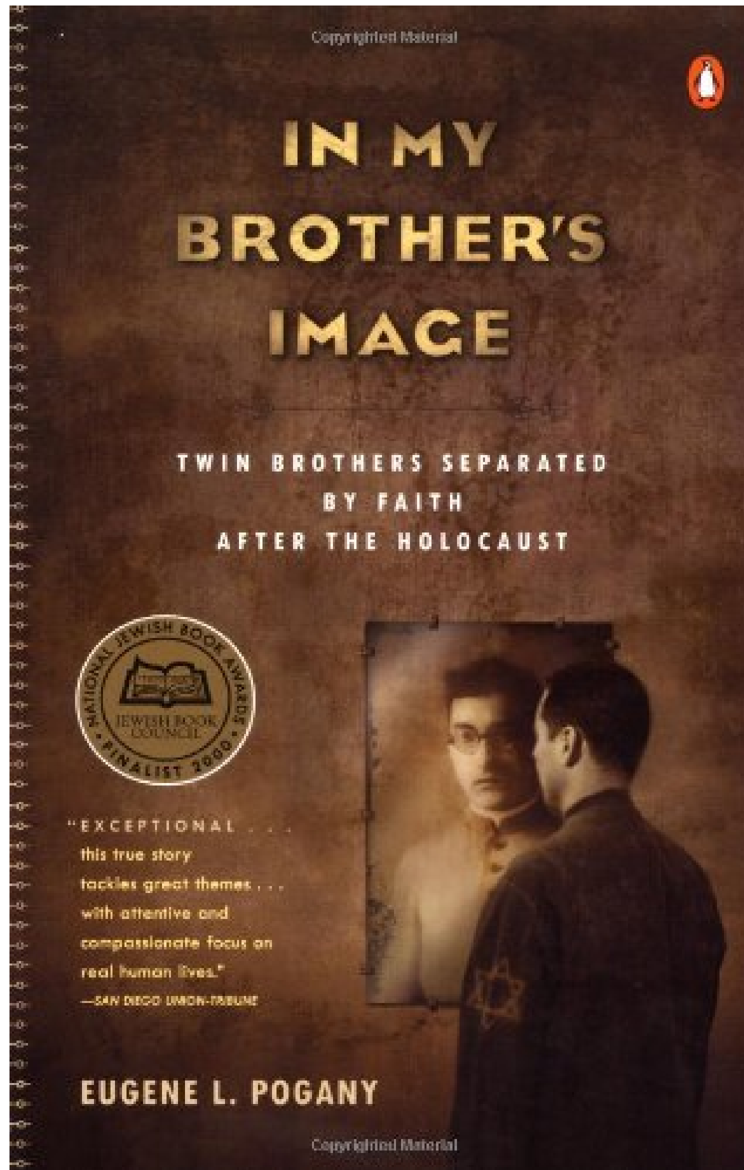

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Eugene L. Pogany : In My Brother's Image: Twin Brothers Separated by Faith after the Holocaust before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised In My Brother's Image: Twin Brothers Separated by Faith after the Holocaust:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Recommended Reading for Christians and JewsBy Elaine B.

BlattThis is a beautifully written book by Dr. Pogany. In one poetic sentence he summarizes why he believes he needs to write this book."Privately I couldn't help but feel that we were tiptoeing through a minefield of sorrow and grief and that someone needed to address ourcollective losses more directly and begin to lay them to rest." It is different than any other book I have read about WWII the Holocaust. I recommend it highly..0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. What an amazing story. I heard Eugene Pogany speakBy BubbeloveWhat an amazing story. I heard Eugene Pogany speak, and was entranced as I was reading his book. Two brothers, separated. and brought up in separate lives. The roles in which they lived and became is extraordinary. Actually, I read this book a while back, and I will read it again.You will be amazed at each one's life style. I will not say more since it might spoil it for you. Try it - you will like it!0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Its a good saga but unfortunately to my mind the ending is ...By joy bermanIts a good saga but unfortunately to my mind the ending is a bit disappointing. But it is apparently a true story so I guess that's really how it ended for this war-torn Religiously confused family . definitely a great read and engrossing story.

In My Brother's Image is the extraordinary story of Eugene Pogany's father and uncle-identical twin brothers born in Hungary of Jewish parents but raised as devout Catholic converts until the Second World War unraveled their family. In eloquent prose, Pogany portrays how the Holocaust destroyed the brothers' close childhood bond: his father, a survivor of a Nazi internment camp, denounced Christianity and returned to the Judaism of his birth, while his uncle, who found shelter in an Italian monastic community during the war, became a Catholic priest. Even after emigrating to America the brothers remained estranged, each believing the other a traitor to their family's faith. This tragic memoir is a rich, moving family portrait as well as an objective historical account of the rupture between Jews and Catholics.

"Highly readable and deeply inspiring.... I recommend it to all readers who wish to know more about what happened to European Jewry during the Holocaust." --Elie Wiesel"A gripping, wrenching tale, a powerful addition to the Holocaust literature." --The Boston GlobeAbout the AuthorEugene L. Pogany is a practicing psychologist in Boston. A frequent speaker on anti-Semitism and Jewish-Catholic relations, he has written for Cross Currents, Sh'ma, Jewishfamily.com, and the Jewish Advocate.Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.Praise for In My Brothers ImageThis is not just another story of the Holocaust. It is a lesson in tolerance...and it is written in tears from deep within the soul.Middlesex Jewish StarMoving...[Pogany] makes us understand the complexityand feel the heartbreakof his familys one-of-a-kind history.New York PostProfoundly riveting and morally compelling.The Philadelphia InquirerA tool...to help move Christians from...mere defensiveness to...moral ownership for the part that Christians played in the evil of the Shoah.Father David C. Michael, The PilotRemarkable...There is much to recommend about this book for anyone interested in World War II and the Holocaust. There is also much to recommend to any Jew or Christian who wishes to contemplate the complex relationship between faith and experience.The Roanoke Times[Poganys] book is one of the most compelling personal narratives to come out of the Holocaust.BooklistA memorable family story, full of vivid atmosphere and stirring incidents.Kirkus sEugene Poganys power-packed and poignant narrative of his fathers wartime years, his return to his Jewish faith while his brother became a Catholic priest is highly readable and deeply inspiring. I recommend it to all readers who wish to know more about what happened to European Jewry during the Holocaust.Elie WieselIn this powerful and searing memoir Eugene Pogany opens his heart to share the incredible story of his Jewish father and his Christian uncle, twin brothers whose lives were profoundly altered in the crucible of the Holocaust. In My Brothers Image is a sensitive and overwhelming tale which constitutes a vital addition to the legacy of the Shoah.Alan L. Berger, Raddock Eminent Scholar Chair of Holocaust Studies, Florida Atlantic UniversityIn My Brothers Image is a very remarkable contribution to the Holocaust Literature. It is a riveting account of a very unusual familial conflict, caused by the conversion to Catholicism by some members of a Hungarian Jewish family. This fascinating conflict between two identical brothers echoes the schism between their separate religions. Reading the book turned me into a virtual witness to what happened, day by day, to the Jews of Hungary between World War I and the end of World War II. Eugene Pogany lovingly tries to understand and bring to life the struggles and soul searching of the generation before him. His book is a real page turner.Edith Velmans, author of Ediths StoryPENGUIN BOOKSIN MY BROTHERS IMAGEEugene L. Pogany is a practicing clinical psychologist in Boston. A frequent speaker on anti-Semitism and Jewish-Catholic relations, he has written for Cross Currents, Shma, Jewishfamily.com, and the Jewish Advocate. He lives in Newton, Massachusetts, with his wife and two sons.IN MYBROTHERS IMAGETwin Brothers Separated byFaith After the HolocaustEugene PoganyAnd still it is not yet enough to have memories. One must be able to forget them when they are many and one must have the great patience to wait until they come again. For it is not yet the memories themselves. Not till they have turned to blood within us, to glance and gesture, nameless and no longer to be distinguished from ourselvesnot till then can it happen that in a most rare hour the first word of a verse arises in their midst and goes forth from them.RAINER MARIA RILKEThe Notebooks of Malte Laurids BriggeACKNOWLEDGMENTSThe moment one definitely commits oneself, wrote Goethe, all sorts of things occur, raising in ones favor all manner of unforeseen incidents and meetings and material assistance which no man could

have dreamed would have come his way. In addition to those individuals mentioned in the Authors Note who helped with the factual content of this book, there are numerous others whose assistance and goodwill were invaluable in making it a reality. I wish to express my gratitude to Nancy Malone, O.S.U., the tireless and visionary former editor of Cross Currents: The Journal of the Association for Religion and Intellectual Life. Along with her discerning coeditors, Joseph Cunneen and William Birmingham, Nancy introduced this story to the journals interfaith readership by featuring my essay, In Each Others Likeness, in its Spring 1995 issue (Vol. 45, No. 1). I have quoted briefly here from both that essay and my later piece, Exile and Memory: Reflections on Tisha BAv, which appeared in the Winter 199596 issue of Cross Currents (Vol. 45, No. 4).My friend Jrgen Manemann, of Westflische Wilhelms University, Mnster, Germany, further advanced the telling of the story by translating In Each Others Likeness into German and facilitating its publication in the Swiss Catholic periodical Orientierung, where it appeared in August 1997 (Volume 6, Number 15/16). Similarly, I wish to thank Professor Randolph L. Braham, preeminent scholar of the Hungarian Holocaust, who graciously recommended my essay to the distinguished Budapest Jewish quarterly, Mlt s Jv [Past and Future], where it appeared in its 1997/2 issue.From the very inception of this book project, I have been especially grateful for the friendship of Beverly Coyle. Her support and goodwill have helped to open doors, and her timely advice has familiarized me with the publishing world. My agent, Helen Rees, believed in this story and convinced me of its viability as a book, and her endless enthusiasm helped find the book a home with Viking. My editor at Viking, Jane von Mehren, steadily and decisively stewarded this project through the entire editorial process, from the initial board meeting to the crafting and shaping of the book through its various stages. I was blessed throughout by her skill, sensitivity, and unflagging good judgment, as well as by her gracious support. Janes assistant, Jessica Kipp, provided a literary ear and thorough professionalism well beyond her youthful years. Copy editor Carole McCurdys meticulous attention to detail and style, as well as her profound sensitivity to the story, helped to make this a better book than it otherwise would have been.Abundant thanks, as well, to Joan Leegant and Ronnie Friedland for their generous editorial counsel during the early stages, and to Don Gropman and Sandi Gelles-Cole for their seasoned advice and adept assistance on the book proposal. My good friend Jeff Baker brought a keen and sophisticated sensibility to his reading of a first, voluminous draft of the manuscript. Charlie Puccia unselfishly did everything from arranging my travel to Italy to translating my uncles Italian letters.I extend my appreciation to Professor John Clabeaux of St. Johns Seminary, in Brighton, Massachusetts, and Father Tom Kane, S.J., of the Weston Jesuit School of Theology, in Cambridge, both of whom refined my understanding of Catholic ritual, liturgical practices, and Scriptural interpretation. I am responsible for whatever errors remain in the text.I also wish to acknowledge the dear members of the Boston One Generation After writers group, in whose warm and supportive company I thought and wrote, read, and listened for more years than I have worked on this book. Special thanks also to Cynthia Ozick, whose incisive correspondence alternately blessed my efforts and impelled me to think deeply and clearly about the painful history between Catholics and Jews.I am immensely grateful to Katharina Lamping for the many hours during which she shared stories and vignettes with me of her seventeen years of service to my uncle and his parish church. My brother, Peter, and sister, Ellen, were always in my thoughts, especially when I wrote of our early years together. Although peoples recollections of the same events can often vary widely, my siblings naturally served me as touchstones for those times. Thanks, as well, to Bob Buday, our long-lost relative, who also helped get this book off the ground. The excitement and love of the many extended-family members and personal friends who have watched me bring this story to life over the years, often in relative isolation, have been a source of ongoing comfort.Although my father and mother are noted in numerous other places for the contributions they made to informing the content of this book, there is insufficient room to adequately thank them. I was initially afraid that they would tire of the many hours they spent with me during the past several years being recorded on audio, video, and notepad. I can only hope that they have been as enlivened by our encounters as I have been. I can now more confidently say that I truly know my parentswhat they have lived and suffered and how their lives have influenced the person I have become. May what my father and mother learn about their son for his efforts at portraying them prove equally as precious to them.Finally, my dear wife, Judy, prolific reader and no-nonsense critic, gave timely and insightful feedback and showed immense patience and forbearance as wife and mother throughout the years of this project. This book would not have been conceivable without her abiding and loving presence. Last but not least, our sons, Ben and Elias, must often have wondered what this complex story was all about and when it would actually be completed. Now that I can place the book into their hands, may the silences that pervaded our familys life during my own childhood begin to be dispelled in theirs. I dedicate this book to them.

AUTHORS NOTE

I began work on this book a few weeks after the death of my uncle, Monsignor George Pogany, in July 1993. It is a sad irony that I could not begin to tell the story of my Jewish father and his Catholic twin brother until after they were separated by death. When my uncle came to the United States in 1956, he promised my father that he would not bring up religious differences with his brothers children. In the aftermath of the brothers nearly two-decades-long separation, however, they seemed to have little ability or willingness to discuss with each other the agonizing matters of grief, disappointment, and recrimination surrounding their mutual losses in the war and my formerly devout Catholic fathers return to Judaism after the Holocaust. Consequently, there was much silence growing up in their midst, interrupted by sometimes tense conversations about

themselves and their family. Their sisters only visit from Australia, in 1984, generated discussions among the three siblings that helped familiarize me with virtually all of the people in earlier generations of our family, as well as with some of the more poignant themes in their lives.When my uncle died, my father broke the brothers vow of silence about religion and the war. In the process, he revealed a truly astounding memory for details, going back to the beginning of their lives. He shared facts, conversations, and impressions of the various characters, as well as hunches about their inner lives and motivations. We took two trips to Hungary together, which liberated his memory and immensely enhanced my understanding of my fathers origins.As work on the book proceeded, my mother became equally engrossed in the project. She had always told dramatic and heart-wrenching tales of suffering, loss, and survival. Now, she provided necessary and gripping details, and courageously touched on closely guarded, painful stories of how her identity as a Jew had been threatened. These accounts only affirmed for me the resilience of the Jewish spirit, even after the Holocaust, and heightened my appreciation for my mother having so thoroughly instilled in her children a love of belonging to the Jewish people.Partly through my uncles lifelong love and solicitude toward me as his nephew, I gained a realistic and direct sense of him as a person. After his death, Katharina Lamping, Georges devoted parish assistant and housekeeper of many years, provided invaluable insight into my uncles faith and religious vocation. Katharinas reminiscences, coupled with the survival of a sizable collection of his homilies, as well as what my father eventually shared with me, helped me to form a picture of Father Georges life as a singularly devoted Roman Catholic priest. Although the conversations I recount between him and Katharina occurred more in my imagination than in actuality, they are based on everything I have learned about the relationship between them, on actual events in Georges life and statements he made, as well as on his psychological and spiritual sensibilities as evident in these sources.In regard to my uncles life with Padre Pio, in Rome I met with Padre Pio Abresch, Georges former boyhood student of Greek (and chess) in San Giovanni Rotondo. Soon after, I journeyed to that town to visit the Our Lady of Grace friary, where I was graciously guided by Padre Joseph Pius Martin. Both of these very kind padres helped me gain a vivid appreciation of the years George spent in the service of the saintly Padre Pio of Pietrelcina.In addition, the Reverend C. Bernard Ruffin was exceedingly helpful for his superlative biography of Padre Pio, which includes an invaluable interview with my uncle. The Reverend Mr. Ruffins encouraging correspondence and phone conversation were also extremely informative. The most gentle and generous Father John A. Schug, Cap., who is also an eminent biographer of Padre Pio, shared with me the correspondence of Father Dominic Meyer, English and German secretary to Padre Pio from 1947 to 1959, relating to my uncles life among the Capuchian fathers of Our Lady of Grace. Mrs. Anna Zegna of Biella, Italy, wife of the late Albino Zegna, was also helpful in this area. Both husband and wife had been close personal friends of my uncle and devoted followers of Padre Pio. Mrs. Zegna, along with her daughter and son-in-law, Gianna and Roberto Borsetti, provided valuable correspondenceincluding many of my uncles lettersand precious insight into the nature of the lifesaving sanctuary Padre Pio offered my uncle as a Jewish-born Catholic priest in San Giovanni Rotondo during the years of the war. Ms. Maria Callandra, of the National Center for Padre Pio, in Barto, Pennsylvania, forthrightly shared her understanding of the inviolability of Padre Pios spiritual purity in the midst of danger to innocent life during World War II. I wrestled greatly with her comments.Events occurring among family members, as narrated here, are based on history that I witnessed or that was personally conveyed to me. They are honest attempts at capturing the spirit and content of interactions, many of which I know to have taken place but for which I could not have actually been present. They serve to establish a more vividly realistic and textured portrayal of social and historical circumstances.I especially agonized over interactions among members of my family and historical individuals, such as those between my father and Bishop Vilmos Apor, a singularly courageous opponent of the Nazi designs on Hungarian Jews. My fathers distant memories of the content and spirit of Father Apors sermons while he was a pastor in Gyula, Hungary, helped to inform the statements I attribute to him. I was equally concerned with the credibility of discussions between my uncle and Padre Pio. My uncle had spoken with me and others about the nature and content of personal conversations with the padre. While no one still living knows precisely what warnings Padre Pio gave George about the potential dangers to him during the war had he left San Giovanni Rotondo, I have relied both on secondhand reports of individuals familiar with the two men (referenced in the Notes) and on inferences drawn from what I know of my uncles circumstances during those years. The nature of their discussion about my fathers turning away from Catholicism is also referenced in the Notes.My efforts, then, to reconstruct interactions among my ancestors and to elaborate the nuances of their beingstheir feelings, inner dialogues, points of viewspanning nearly an entire century, represent an attempt to enter and participate in the lives of those to whom I am admittedly connected through my own longings and imagination as much as through the historical record, personal reports, and my own life experience. My relatives speak through me about themselves, and I boldly speak for them in order to illuminate a religiously and historically turbulent landscape of Jews and Christians in the century of the Holocaust.All of the larger historical events narrated here are as accurate as a nonhistorians research would allow them to be. The seminal works of Randolph L. Braham, Eugene Levai, Moshe Y. Herczl, and Raphael Pataiamong a host of other resources referenced in the Notesprovided the backbone of Jewish and interfaith cultural history and Holocaust political history to which I can only hope I have done justice. In a few cases, names have been changed, abbreviated, or omitted in deference to the dead, in respect for the living, or in the

spirit of not unnecessarily invoking the various names of Amalek, the namesake of those who have been committed throughout history to the destruction of the Jewish people.Now, at the end of the millennium and the beginning of the next, much progress has been made among Jews and Christians in coming to some mutual understanding of their respective roles in the spiritual unfolding of history, and in the Catholic Churchs increasing willingness to take responsibility for the atmosphere of hatred that fostered the Holocaust. I know that many peopleperhaps my father among themremain skeptical about the possibility of a complete healing between the Jewish and Christian communities of faith in the aftermath of the Shoah. But even in deference to those whose life experience I must honor, I believe that if there is one singular and preeminent purpose for telling this story, it is to envision that Jewish and Christian brothers might someday standalthough my father and uncle could notat the gates of Jerusalem and embody the spirit of Isaiah 52:8: Together they shall sing, for eye to eye they shall see when the Lord returns to Zion.PROLOGUESorrow in Search of MemoryHow goodly are thy tents, O Jacob!How beautiful your sanctuaries, O Israel!NUMBERS 24:5A seminal fragment of my familys lore: on a sweltering afternoon in the summer of 1918, two five-year-old boys named Gyuri and Mikls scurry across the vast cobblestone courtyard of St. Stephens Basilica in Budapest. They climb the two long tiers of granite steps to Hungarys largest cathedral, located only a few blocks from the banks of the Danube, the fabled river that divides the nineteenth-century half of the city from its thousand-year-old counterpart. The boys look more alike than brothers. In fact, they are identical twins, indistinguishable in the smooth innocence of their faces, their wide brown eyes, and their shorn hair, nearly shaven to their scalps to thwart the summer heat. They are dressed alikein white, short-sleeve summer shirts and light blue short pants with attached suspenders of the same material, crossed in the back and buttoned in the front. Their cumbersome, high black shoes rise halfway up their calves. Most of the time, from the day of their birth, it has been difficult for almost everyone to tell them apart. The brothers know each other as only identical twins can.At the entrance to the grand church, the boys surreptitiously slip through the six-inch-wide opening of the formidable oak middle door, with its inlaid bronze bas-relief portraits of the Hungarian kings. They giggle gleefully and a bit nervously as they peer into the dimly lit chamber, which feels refreshingly cool in contrast to the scorching afternoon sun they have just escaped. In mannerism and impulse, the twins mimic and build on each others playful daring. Even their spirited laughter is identical, punctuated by squeals of delight.The awe-inspiring sanctuary, sheathed in red marble and gilt, is lined with magnificent statues of saints, angels, and kings, larger-than-life somber paintings of the crucified Christ, and four enormous central columns supporting a domed cupola that rises to where heaven meets earth. What natural light enters the sanctuary filters through a number of oblong windows at the base of the dome, interspersed evenly among painted friezes of celestial beings. There is also a circular window at the very height of a second dome above the apse, directly over the altar. It illumines the guilded paintings of archangels along the domes curved walls.At the moment the boys enter, only a few people occupy the unending rows of delicately carved mahogany pews that fill the nave of the church. An elderly woman with deep creases crisscrossing her face, wearing a plain black dress and a red flower print babushka covering her head, is seated in the last row on the right side of the central aisle as the boys tiptoe in, still giggling. When they realize that she is there for her own purposes, and is not about to tell them to leave or behave themselves, their anxiety abates as they stride in a make-believe processional up the aisle with the imagined solemnity of priests and the exaggeratedly stiff gait of soldiers.An old man in a coarse brown shirt, workmans trousers, and well-worn cavalry boots, hat in hand and his head bent over onto his chest, is seated on the opposite side of the aisle, in the front section of pews, just beyond the first two giant columns. The boys pay him no mind as they high-step past him with an air of impunity, making their way toward the imposing altar. Their solemn march dissolves, and they trot, then dash toward the front row of seats. Suddenly, the boys stop in their tracks and their attention becomes sharply focused. They stand transfixed, frozen and inert, gazing impassively at a brightly painted statue of a thinly clad man suspended on a cross, with drops of blood flowing from his hands and feet. As they stare at the figure, they instantly imagine the agony he must feel. Then the moment is over, as suddenly as it began, and the boys proceed to play at genuflecting, crossing themselves and mumbling imitations of incomprehensible Latin liturgy.These children have never been to a church service before. In fact, they have never been inside a church sanctuary. But on numerous Sunday mornings they have overheard the Latin chants issuing from the open doors of their neighborhood church, less than a block from their familys apartment on Tlgyfa, or Oak Street, in Buda, near the foot of the Margit Bridge. Some of their Christian playmates have told them about crossing oneself and bending ones knees to pray in church, so they have a vague notion of Christian ritual.Now, standing in front of the altar, they pretend to chant, interspersing familiar names or Hungarian words: Domino, pomino, Jesus, Maria, Isten riz...Lets go find his hand, says Gyuri, with an irreverent laugh.What?! What are you talking about? asks his brother.St. Stephens hand. The king who made the Hungarians Catholic. Thats his statue over there, he says, pointing to a shiny and colorful icon in the middle of the altar. I heard that his hand is kept in a golden box behind the altar somewhere. Lets go find it, Miki, Gyuri continues, with a look of mischievous relish.No! Mikls blurts out. Were not supposed to go back there, he says, with a reverence in his voice that borders on fear and panic. Then a laugh breaks his momentarily stiff mood. But thats the craziest thing I ever hearda kings hand inside a box in a church. He must have been pretty mad when they cut his hand off.Gyuri laughs and gives his brother a gently dismissive shove on his shoulder.Earlier that afternoon, the boys had become bored in

their summer villa in Rkosszentmilhly, on the outskirts of Budapest. Their mother was ill in bed and their step-grandmother was not the most engaging of caretakers, especially when she needed to look after their baby sister. The twins roamed briefly and impatiently in the large garden of the villa, then decided on impulse to climb the lone mulberry tree at its edge, up over the high wooden fence surrounding it. They walked along the tram tracks toward the station, which they knew would surely guide them into the city. Then, acting on another sudden impulse, they decided that their destination would be the basilica, where they would go to pray. The boys father had been away at war for nearly four years, serving as a captain in the Austro-Hungarian Army, and they knew he had become Christian before his departure. Their impetuous pilgrimage may have been partially an impulse to be closer to him, the father they hardly knew.When the local tram conductor, who was familiar with the boys, saw them walking on the tracks, he stopped to pick them up. They told him they were going to pray at the basilica, and he offered to take them there. At least he would take them to another tram that would drop them within walking distance of the church. The boys didnt hesitate for an instant. If walking into the city was a feasible project, how much better to get a free ride on the tram. They even handled the transfer onto the next tram with confidence, sure that grown-ups would naturally take care of them.On their foray into the church, the boys were acting out an assimilationist impulse all-too-common among many Hungarian Jewish families, some of whom they were acquainted with. They had rarely seen Orthodox Jews in their neighborhood and had only heard stories of old men with beards, dressed in black, who spent their days in prayer and lived far away in the countryside, or at least in the Jewish quarter of Pest, somewhere on the other side of the river. None of their Jewish relatives or family friends gave them any idea of what being Jewish meant: these Jews observed the Christian holidays as national days of celebration and gift-giving. Today Gyuri and Mikls were Jews merely playing at being Christians, but, their own Jewishness notwithstanding, they knew more about Christianity for their visit to the basilica than they had ever learned about Judaism.The boys continue standing before the altar of the basilica for several minutes. It is a struggle for Gyuri to tear his gaze from the awe-inspiring figure suspended on the cross directly above him. He finds the image strangely comforting. He imagines that even a god as powerful and revered as this one is also human and tangible and can feel pain and suffering. The child studies the pierced hands of this suffering Lord and feels sad and sorry for Him. For reasons he cannot begin to understand, this sorrow comforts Gyuri and helps him feel less alone in his private melancholy, for his mother is often sad and sick, and he misses his father terribly, fearing that he will never see him again.While Gyuri remains entranced, Mikls turns away from the wounded god on the cross. Though just as enraptured as his brother, on this hot summer day he is more aware of how refreshed and revived he feels in the cool and mysterious sanctuary. Here in this marvelous chamber, Mikls feels, if only momentarily, welcome and at home.Well before dawn on an autumn night in 1992, seventy-four years later, the city was darkly quiet. Directly outside our hotel, the Chain Bridge connecting Buda and Pest was still partially illuminated, as were the facades of palaces and other imperial buildings overlooking the Danube. Budapest was undeniably beautiful, yet its predawn serenity felt as tenuous and fragile as the momentarily quiet surface of the river that flowed through its heart. I sensed a subtle but grinding tension just below the surface, and below that a deeper current of sorrowsilent, unclaimed, and unredeemed.My family had arrived from New York the previous afternoon. There were fourteen of us scattered throughout the Budapest Hyatt. My brother, sister, and I had come with our respective families to accompany our parents back to the country of their origin on the occasion of our fathers eightieth birthday. Among all the members of our immediate family, only my uncle George was missing.George had not ignored the importance of this landmark occasion, for as my fathers twin it was his birthday, too. But the country of their birth had come to possess painfully different and seemingly unbridgeable meanings for them. Neither had left it with pleasant memories, but the nature of their earlier choices and the timing of their departures colored how each felt about coming back.My wife lay asleep beside me as I listened to her breathing and that of my two young sons in the adjoining room of our suite. I lay still, gazing at the faintly illuminated city through the gossamer curtains of our hotel window. I could hear the occasional rumble of a car or taxi disturb the stillness of Roosevelt Square, by day a bustling thoroughfare to the Chain Bridge.A shrill, high-pitched ring cut through my unfocused consciousness. I grabbed for the telephone.Good morning, said a mans monotone voice in Hungarian-accented English. This is your wake-up call.Thank you, I said, and hung up. I glanced at the digital clock on the nightstand as I replaced the receiver. It read 5:30.I arose without hesitation, reached half-blindly in the unlit room for some clothes that still lay packed in open suitcases on the floor, and proceeded to wash and dress without disturbing my wife and children. I then put on my hooded green woolen coat to meet the cool air of the city that was bornaccording to Gyula Krudy, a turn-of-the-century Hungarian novelistof the same mother as autumn. Almost surreptitiously, though no one was watching, I stuffed two satin-lined velvet pouches, one blue and the other gray, each decorated with colorful and arcane embroidery, into my coat pockets. I vaguely feared that on the streets of Budapest someone might take them for implements of sorcery or black magic. I carefully made my way past the cots on which my seven- and three-year-old sons slept, opened the door to the suite, and quietly pulled it closed behind me. I walked down the stairwell to the main lobby, where I signaled the young Magyar doorman to hail me a taxicab.As he opened the door to the cab, which had been parked at the head of a short row of taxis directly in front of the hotel, the doorman asked me in Hungarian where I wished to go.Wesselnyi Utca (Wesselnyi Street), I answered.Milyen cim? (What address?), the cabbie continued in

Hungarian, overhearing my response to the doorman.Ht (Seven), I replied. In childhood, this language had rolled smoothly from my tongue, but now speaking even these few words felt thick and wooden.The cabbie smiled, instantly recognizing my halting accent, and seemed to humor me by saying in Hungarian, So, good, I think I know where it is. Come, please get in. Well find it.Driving through the still-darkened streets of Pest toward the former Jewish ghetto, the cabbie, a good-natured man in his fifties, asked in carefully measured Hungarian, You are American?Yes, and arent you Hungarian?No, I am Greek. I have been here for five years.Then he took the opportunity as a non-native worker to express his concern over how difficult life had become since the fall of Communismnot because he bemoaned its fall, but simply because life was harder and less predictable than many people had hoped it would be.Now where is this 7 Wesselnyi Street? Whats there, an office? he asked, changing the subject, as if my hesitation had made him doubt my comprehension.No, a small synagogue, next to a large one, I think near Dohny Street. I am going there to dream.The driver looked puzzled, but still he humored me in a helpful, nonpatronizing way. You are going to dream? A person dreams when he sleeps. Now, arent there those who do go to church to sleep and dream? But maybe you are thinking of worship because it sounds like the word dream. Perhaps what you really want to say is pray. You are going to the synagogue to pray.So the kind man finished the first of the many impromptu language lessons I was to receive that week. But, unwittingly, in my initial attempt at reviving the language of my childhood, I stumbled upon the fluid boundaries between dreaming and praying, memory and longing.Now realizing that I was an American Jew, the cabbie returned momentarily to his more serious tone and shared with me his sense that the life of Jews in Hungary seemed once again uncertain and even threatened. Not good, he said. Its not good for Jews now. Even people in Parliament speak against them. Such a shame. Do people never learn, especially after what happened?Heading down the street, the driver pointed out the magnificent Moorish-style building of the Dohny Street Synagogue, the largest in Europe. It was surrounded by scaffolding and was, like its attendant Hungarian Jewish community, in the process of being rebuilt after nearly a half-century of neglect by its Soviet oppressors. Driving past the synagogue to the end of the block, the driver turned left, then left again onto Wesselnyi Street, before stopping in front of a nondescript city building that housed the synagogue I was seeking.I thanked the driver warmly and gave no thought to earlier warnings I had received about the gouging tactics of Budapests cabdrivers. I gladly paid his fee and gave him hundreds more forints of the still unfamiliar Hungarian currency for his friendly language lesson and introduction to the city.Once inside the musty Orthodox shul, I took a black linen yarmulke out of my coat pocket and placed it on my head. A slightly surprised and nervous-looking middle-aged man dressed in a drab gray suit and a wide striped tie approached me as I stepped into the central hall. With my arrival, he was apparently relieved that he was now one person closer to reaching a minyan, the quorum of ten men required to conduct a Jewish prayer service. He graciously shook my hand and took me by the arm, escorting me down the hallway to the sanctuary, which looked like a large yeshiva classroom.As I looked around the room, three old men, somewhat crusty and embittered-looking, gave receptive nods as my eyes met theirs. They offered garbled and terse salutations in Hungarian with a mixture of warmth and mild distrust. Two or three young men, in their twenties or early thirties, in threadbare suits or faded trousers and well-worn shirts, also appeared reserved, but they were friendlier. While neither I nor members of my family had ever practiced Judaism with the devotion of these Orthodox Jews, I had the uncanny feeling of being deeply connected to the members of this remnant community. To be praying now as a Jew in Hungary was for me a way of binding my fate to theirs. I felt I had come home.All those present were in the process of wrapping tefillin, or phylacteries, to their arms and foreheads. Tefillin consist of thin black leather straps attached to small leather boxes housing parchments inscribed with the Shma Israel. Jews had been commanded thousands of years before to bind the words proclaiming the oneness of God as a sign upon your hands and for frontlets between your eyes. I walked to the back of the room and drew my blue and gray pouches from my coat pockets. I took off my coat and placed it on the wooden school chair behind me. I then took my long white-and-black-striped tallis, or prayer shawl, from the blue embroidered bag and draped it around my shoulders. Next, I withdrew my tefillin from their gray pouch and, while reciting the appropriate blessings, wrapped them according to the ancient custom. I had learned the technique and correct sequence in my youth, but I had fully mastered it only a few weeks earlier and still felt self-conscious about binding my religion to my head, my arm, and my hand. But it was at that moment of draping and binding Jewish law to my own body that I truly entered the sacred space in which observant Jews have, for countless generations, offered their daily words of worship and prayer to their one living God. The space inside ones own head and body, wrapped in the tefillin and the soft, soothing cloth of the tallis, was the ancient inner sanctum of Jews.By now there were twelve or thirteen men in the room. Without prior notice, a grim and brittle-looking leader, in his late sixties or early seventies, launched unceremoniously into the daily liturgy. He prayed with what seemed to be perfunctory speed and precision, in driven tones that rose, nonetheless, from a source much deeper than his mouth or throat. I imagined that his words emerged remotely, from grooves and scars embedded in the recesses of his heart. Had those scars been present, I wondered, ever since he returned from his own hell in Poland or Germany to thisits local, Hungarian antechamber?Early in the prescribed sequence of prayers, the cantor rapped his knuckles on the wooden bema on which his prayer book rested, standing directly in front of the makeshift ark housing two Torah scrolls. In that same instant, he issued a piercing signal for the mourners prayer, Kaddish!Except for the cantor, we were all seated. At his signal, I sprang to my feet

with four or five others and began to utter the ancient words extolling the greatness of God and the inscrutability of His will, even in the shadow of the death of loved ones. I spoke these words that I had only recently begun to speak among members of my home congregation in Boston, but which were so familiar to me I could almost recite them in my sleep. The words rose from an unknown and perplexing source of pain inside me, drawing now choked and halting, then sure and robust sounds from my voice. The Kaddish illuminated that usually dim and distant region of my mind where I unconsciously carried the collective memory of my ancestors, a chamber beyond my own lifes memories where fantasy, dream, and longing reside:Yit-ga-dol vyit-ka-dash shmei rabba.Exalted and sanctified be the name of God in this world of His creation.A run-down, dilapidated factory building on the margin of a quaint Hungarian town.May His will be fulfilled,A beautiful spring dawn; the grass is green, flowers bloom in the fields and gardens of nearby houses and cottages.and His sovereignty be revealed in the days of your lifetime,Birds are singing, but their songs are barely audible over the chaos in front of the factory.and in the days of the life of the house of Israel, speedily and soon, and say amen.Surrounded by a few onlookers, armed gendarmes are herding the Jews of the village out of the front entrance of the provisional factory ghetto. The Jews are terrified as they are prodded onto horse-drawn wagons. Their muffled cries of panic and terror have quieted the cock, as if it has postponed its call.Be His great name blessed forever, to all eternity.One by one, at riflepoint, hundreds of Jews, young and old alike, are forced onto the wooden wagons.May the most holy One be blessed,The faces of the onlookers wear veiled expressionsand praised,of malicious joy,honored,of composure,extolled,or resignation.and glorified.They are standing frozen and inertAdored and exalted supremelywhile others peer from behind their drawn curtains.be the name of the most holy One blessedLike many in the crowd, one heavyset middle-aged woman, with graying hair and swollen hands, struggles with a small suitcase. Her other hand is closed around an unseen object.beyond all blessings and hymns,As she exits the factory, two gendarmes, acting as if they were waiting specifically for her, separate her from the others. They escort her to a waiting cart, relieve her of her suitcase and sheepishly help her board; then one of them places her suitcase beside her. She peers with bewilderment and anguish at their faces, which she seems to recognize. Her own face possesses the look of one who has been utterly betrayed.beyond all praises and consolations that may be uttered in this world, and say amen.Leaning against the side of the cart, she lowers her head and places her closed hand on her breast. Her hand opens and the object is revealed: a small wooden crucifix bearing the image of her Lord. She is being deported with the Jews of her village because she was born a Jew and is considered a Jew even though she has lived for decades as a pious and devout Christian. She will be carted away with the hundreds of others of her community to the train station, where she will board a cattle car and never return.May He who creates peace in the heavens create peace for us and for all Israel, and say amen.The devoted mother of twin boys and a young girl, my fathers beloved mother, the grandmother I never knew, was taken away to be killed in an Auschwitz gas chamber. And, it was as if then, and only then, that the cock crowed and the sheep were scattered and...Kaddish ended.As their afternoon reverie winds down, the twins leave the coolness of the basilica more subdued, with less ceremonial fanfare. Once past the outer doors, they leave each others side for a moment. Gyuri quickly moves out of the midafternoon shadow of the church. He flies down the stone stairs and follows the sun in its path of retreat above the rooftops ahead of him, in the direction of the river.Already young Gyuri feels the strangely liberating sorrow of the captivating figure hanging on the cross above the altar of the basilica. He experiences a peculiarly reassuring feeling that it is all right to be alive, despite anything he does or deservesthat he is loved, deeply, in his soul, regardless of his continual misbehavior and ever-faltering degree of virtue.Standing completely alone in the middle of the square, Gyuri cocks his head back on his neck, closes his eyes, and feels rapturously caressed and comforted by the warmth and light. He is pleased by the tranquillity of the vast and vacant courtyard. What a fitting end it is to his first encounter with the figure on the cross.For Mikls, the immense courtyard of the basilica seems frighteningly empty and abandoned. Though he sees his brother below him, he feels isolated and exposed. Mikls squints and averts his gaze from the still intense midafternoon sunlight and steps back into the sheltering shadow of the basilicas entryway. He feels oddly distanced from the feelings he has just experienced in the sanctuary, where, only moments before, he fleetingly felt reassured and embraced. How peculiarly estranged Mikls now feels from the churchs cool and sublime sanctuary, which had, only moments beforeif ever so fleetinglydrawn him and his brother to her bosom with such exquisite enchantment.And so they stood, these identical twin brothers, one in sunlight, the other in shadow. They were as alike as two human beings can be, but on this sweltering afternoon in the wartime summer of 1918 neither they nor anyone else could possibly imagine the totally different lives they would lead. Nor would it have occurred to anyone that, nearly eight decades later, I, the son of the twin standing in shadow, would strive beyond my own memory to tell their story. CHAPTER 1 DepartingSalus extra ecclesiam non est.(Outside the Church there is no salvation.)St. CyprianOn a fine spring day in Budapest, in 1914, Bla Pogny (n Popper), a recently trained veterinarian, knelt before a Roman Catholic priest at the Regnum Marianum Church to receive entry into the Catholic faith through the rite of baptism. The priest drew water from the baptismal font and poured it freely over the forehead of this short, stout man with brown, careworn Jewish eyes and high cheekbones like a Magyars.As the celebrant chanted, In nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti, Blas thoughts wandered from the Lord he was about to accept into his heart to his beloved wife, Gabriella, and their two-year-old twin boys. Bla was a practical man not given to religious reverie or philosophical reflection. But I am willing

to imagine that by the power of this solemn and mysterious ceremony, his life passed before his eyes as if he were about to die, as he presumably wasfrom the life of the bodyto be born again to the life of the spirit in his new Lord.Blas background provides only an incomplete picture of how he had come to such a pivotal juncture in his life. He had been brought up by professed but less-than-perfunctory Jewish parents in Galgocz, a small town in the northwestern, Slovakian region of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. His birth was recognized by the Jewish community, his birth certificate signed by the rabbi of the town. On the document, biblical names of his family members, such as David and Isak, appeared alongside appropriated German ones, like his grandfathers, Adolf. Slovak and German were spoken at home even more freely and fluently than Hungarian. The family knew only fragments of Yiddish and even less Hebrew. But for those few socially obligatory occasions when they might have attended synagogue services or spent holiday evenings at friends or neighbors, they were not at all religious. As a family, they observed none of the Jewish holidays or ritual practices. Blas father had no interest in religion. His mother, Regina, was independent, intelligent, and completely secularized. She would have stayed working at her sewing machine on Yom Kippur had her family members not restrained her.Jewishness for my grandfathers family was a fact of social life, not of religious identity or practice. The familys four children received no religious educationno bar mitzvahs for the sons or training for the daughter in setting a Sabbath table or keeping a Jewish home. The boys, however, were circumcised. For Jews of any inclination in Hungary at the time, it was a foregone conclusion that their male children would receive the Brit Milah of circumcision, thereby bringing them into the Hebrew covenant. To do otherwise would have surely antagonized the small, closely knit, even if not uniformly religious Jewish community of the town in which they lived and did business. For practical reasons, they could not afford to perturb that community because the success of the familys brewery was as dependent on the areas Jews as it was on non-Jews, despite the reputation of the former as nondrinkers.Blas motivation to become a Christian probably stemmed from his years in Budapest, where he had arrived in the autumn of 1901 at the age of eighteen. He entered a five-year course of training at the Veterinary University, which would enable him to attain his supposedly lifelong ambition of being an animal doctor. The uninspired manner with which he pursued those studies over more than a decade would suggest that his ambition was less than fierce. The coffeehouses that lined the inner city of Pest had a much more magnetic allure to such occasional students than the lecture halls and laboratories of the university. And Blas family didnt seem to mind indulging his protracted student life.In Budapest, Bla circulated in a predominantly Jewish, bourgeois culture. Yet he was at best only ambivalently tied to that culture and almost completely disconnected from its religion and tradition. He never fully recognized the matter-of-fact sustenance he received from the familiarity of his Jewish brethren, much as a fish never recognizes the water in which it swims. Instead, like the other Jews with whom he associated, he acted as if Jewishness and Judaism were merely a part of his ancestral identity that only minimally figured into who he was and how he saw himself. As a result, he lived along the surface of that culture, never exploring its depths and never taking into account the buoyancy he gained from living in what was certainly a prosperous and creative era for Jews in Hungary.At some point, however, the realization of his Jewishness did break into Blas awareness, with an event that became part of family lore. It supposedly took place on a blustery winter afternoon as he sat with some friends huddled over steaming coffee at a favorite caf near the university. In the midst of this subdued atmosphere, a disheveled and wild-looking patron, who had earlier been sitting glumly in a corner averting anyones gaze, suddenly shot to his feet and accused the caf owner of cheating him on his change and pandering to the Jews. Reaching across the counter and grabbing the terrified proprietor by his shirt, the enraged customer howled, What kind of Jew nest is this? You rob me and treat me like Im inferior to these swine. Slamming the owner against the rear wall and knocking him senseless, he glared at Bla and his friends, screaming, You dirty Jews. You think you own this city. You drink our blood and act like innocent lambs. Well have our revenge some day. Our Lords blood be upon you and upon your children. Then he stormed out, leaving the other patrons to stare after him in shock and disbelief.Until then, Bla had not been keenly aware of the ages of discord between Christians and Jews in his native Hungary. In his own personal experience, he had known only indirectly of anti-Jewish sentiment and agitation. A year before his birth, there had been a notorious case that revived the age-old blood libel against the Jews that had stained the European landscape since the Middle Ages. A Jewish man, a ritual slaughterer in the distant town of Tisza-Eszlr, had been accused of killing a Christian girl and using her blood to make matzahs for Passover. The Jew had eventually been acquitted after a highly publicized and lengthy trial, but Bla always remembered how his family talked for years about the rioting that had taken place in the wake of the verdict, as close by as the city of Pozsony, only thirty miles from his familys home. The story had planted a small but enduring seed of fear in his own heart and the hearts of many Jews who otherwise enjoyed a privileged and protected life in the Hungarian kingdom.After the enraged patron exited the caf, Bla turned to his friends, and, with a mixture of naivet and denial, asked, Whose blood be upon whom? Whats this crazy man saying? But even as he spoke those words, he felt the stirring in his gut of a mysterious and ancient terror that awakened memories, not in his mind but in his bonesmemories of being hated and hurt. Bla wondered if these were real memories from his childhood or residual fantasies of what it meant to be a Jew. And were they his alone or were they shared by all Jews? He wanted to forget the whole incident, but he couldnt. Where had this poisonous hatred come from and where would it end?In truth, even after that day, Bla was still far from the baptismal font. He did not

care enough about Judaism to embrace it, but neither did any other religion interest him. And he didnt feel sufficiently threatened by these occasional moments of fear to want to run away from his Jewish identity. He was content enough to live as a nominal Jew in a culture and a nation that had been, for the most part, immensely hospitable to Jews.This would change after Bla met his future wife, Gabriella Groszman. On a late spring day in 1907, he stopped into the B. Fehr tailoring house, an elegant shop in the fashionable inner city of Pest, to purchase a suit of clothes. By chance, Bla happened upon a young woman who worked there as a bookkeeper and office manager. He was immediately drawn to her beauty and vibrancy. Perhaps it was an attraction of opposites, for her focused energy was in sharp contrast to his casual manner. Yet her vitality seemed balanced by a subtle reserve. Her smile was warm but reluctant. It needed gentle and whimsical coaxing. And beneath the sparkle in her eyes he sensed a hint of deeper sadness and remotenessnot aloofness, but rather fragility and vulnerabilitywhich made Bla feel safe.Acting on the impulse of the moment, he invited Gabriella for coffee when she was free. They met at an outdoor caf one warm spring afternoon. Custom demanded that they be accompanied by a chaperone, so Mrs. Lednyi, an older woman with whom Gabriella worked, went along with her. As soon as the couple, undeterred by their lack of privacy, began to share bits and pieces about themselves, they immediately if tacitly recognized the differences in their respective stations in life. His family was well-to-do, hers was poor. But there was an instant rapport between them. He was thrilled by her intelligence, by her eloquence in Hungarian and fluency in German, which she had, like most Hungarian Jews, learned at home (in her case, aided by her fathers long stint in the emperors army). She had read novelists and poets in both languages, writers with whom Bla himself had only passing familiarity. For her part, Gabriella was amused to find that such a bright, well-bred, and seemingly ambitious man knew more about the interior of various coffeehouses in Pest than about the anatomies or breeding practices of the animals he was supposedly studying and about which he could speak so glibly. He was drawn by her intensity; she was taken by his affability, by his gentle, ingenuous manner. He was easy to like.They saw each other again, at first, not too frequently. As months passed, they began a more serious courtship, as much as Bla was capable of anything serious or sustained. His comfort in her presence never vanished, and he became assured, as she did, of the growing inevitability of their union. But that union was not a foregone conclusion. Blas family opposed it from the start.The need and the occasion for converting to Catholicism would not come until later. But a fatefully overheard comment and a clash of sensibilities added to its eventual desirability. It may have crystallized in one day, at a family Passover seder in 1911, four years after my grandparents met and three years before my grandfather actually converted. The seder, if it could be called that, might just as well have been an Easter celebration, for there was no ritual observance of the Jewish holiday. As far as Bla was concerned, the overriding purpose for the occasion was to allow his stuffy relatives to meet and evaluate Gabriella. Some of them had already met her, but so far the response was not encouraging: they simply didnt think she was good enough to marry into their family. So when Bla received the invitation from his sister, Laura, he considered the option of declining it. He didnt realistically believe that his convention-bound family members would warm up to Gabriella, but since he foresaw no particular danger, he couldnt very well refuse the invitation. He accepted.As Bla and Gabriella got off at the tram stop and walked down Damjanich Street toward his sisters well-appointed, sumptuous flat in the predominantly Jewish area of Pest, they were a modest-looking couple. Their plain attire contrasted with that of many of the other more fashionable passersby, as well as with the atmosphere set by the ornate marble facades and elaborately carved friezes of the buildings lining this street in the Seventh, or Elizabeth District of Pest. Gabriellas cloth coat was handsome but unpretentious. Bla, who could easily afford to dress more lavishly, wore one of his two dark woolen suits with a brown tie. But his mind was not on clothing fashions or architecture. All he could think of was his family. He was already imagining the persistent rumblings going on inside his sisters apartment about the couple who were supposed to be the guests of honor.Bla had visited his sister and her family many times and thought he knew precisely what he was walking into. In his minds eye, he saw the spacious apartment with its high-bourgeois decorationthe Austrian crystal chandelier over the massive, distinctively Hungarian mahogany dinner table, the heavy plush drapes over the windows, the rich Persian rugs on the floors, the lavish French tapestry on the wall. He had little use for this ostentatious display of wealth. His own tastes were simpler, and he usually found his sisters apartment stuffy and oppressive.He squeezed Gabriellas hand as he thought of their host, his brother-in-law Kroly (Karl) Schneider, the unquestioned patriarch of the family. Karls marriage to Laura seemed an unlikely coupling, as it had little to do with love; she had been a stunning young beauty and he was twenty-five years her senior. But Karl was such a wealthy and successful man that Lauras parents couldnt imagine refusing when he asked for her hand in marriage. Now he was a heavyset, overbearing man in his sixties, smug, self-satisfied, and always convinced that he knew best.Bla imagined Karl impeccably dressed in his customary formal black suit, high-collared white shirt, and crimson silk tie. He envisioned him in his drawing room, sitting in a Queen Anne armchair upholstered in green and gold brocade, holding forth for his guests, passing judgment. One hand would be raised to underline a point, the other holding a cordial glass of Tokay from his vineyard in Md, wine that he had presented at the courts of the emperor and czar. But shes just an office girl, Karl would proclaim in his commanding bass voice. How could a young man with such a promising future and a family of such means marry an office girl?One entire wall of the drawing room was covered, from floor to ceiling, with a pastoral landscape. It had been painted by a local artist of growing renown and Karl took great pride in

it. Bla could readily envision his brother-in-law rising from his chair to pose in front of the prized canvas, the very image of a wealthy, strutting Budapesti Jew, as if Karl were patronizing the humble peasants in the painting. Karl would shake his head with mock pity and say, Yes, just a poor Jewish girl...Bla had heard this refrain before, but as it played in his mind he could feel the muscles of his stomach tighten. He longed for an ally in the group, someone in the family who would take his side. Perhaps it would be his recently widowed mother, Regina, who had come from their village of Galgocz to live with Karl and Laura after Blas father died. He had reason to hope. During a number of family discussions about Gabriella, Regina had said, So shes poor and doesnt have a dowry. So what? Regina herself had become a prosperous woman who knew all too well the importance of wealth and social standing for her childrens well-being. But neither had she, Bla realized, forgotten her own humble origins. Bla had heard her say many times, We didnt exactly come here from the court of Maria Theresa.In his need to find comfort, and to ease his growing sense of dread, Bla imagined his mother defending Gabriella. Karl needed to be deflated, and perhaps only Regina had the sass to do itif not in reality, then at least in Blas wistful reverie. Its not as if shes some Hasidic girl, Bla imagined his mother saying, who just got off the train from Galicia and had to have her marriage arranged by her family. The subtle dig at Karl would, of course, be inadvertent. She has only a stepmother who is gracious and proper and not in the least anxious about marrying her off. What relish Bla took in these private mental conversations. Let her be, Bla longingly fantasized his loving mother saying. She may seem unapproachable, but shes quiet and reserved, very modern, and better read than you or I. Shes simply more nervous and frightened of all of you than unfriendly. And Bla adores her. Dont dare hurt their feelings.Although hed fantasized them out of whole cloth, his mothers imaginary words offered Bla some comfort as he and Gabriella, still holding hands, walked up the two flights of stairs to Laura and Karls apartment. They paused on the landing. Bla gazed at Gabriella. He loved the way she lookedher sculptured face, her sad eyes, her modest, unpretentious appearance. He squeezed her hand again and said softly, Remember what I told you about my family, especially Karl. He doesnt have much good to say of anyone. She nodded and returned a faint smile, as if everything was all right. But her hand was cold and he saw apprehension in her eyes. He swallowed hard, wiped his sweaty palms against his trousers, and pulled the bell cord.The chatter in Karls drawing room muffled the sound of the bell. Laura had been in the kitchen and, not listening to the shrill commotion, opened the door herself and welcomed the couple. As she waved Bla and Gabriella over the threshold and into the foyer, Karl was obliviously disparaging Gabriella with precisely the same tone that Bla had imagined: But we all know what secretaries and office girls are really hired for.Bla was stunned. The words struck him like a slap across the face. Then he heard Gabriellas audible gasp and saw the fleeting look of pain in her eyes. He saw her try to regain her composure as he himself tried to will away the blood that quickly rose to his flushed cheeks. He leaned closer to her and promptly whispered, Remember what I said about Karl. He envies our happiness and makes a fool of himself.Karls words still hung in the air as the couple entered the drawing room. At the sight of them, a mortified silence fell upon the scene, for the others were certain that the newly arrived guests of honor had overheard Karls remark. They were also certain that the two had understood its meaning and intent.Bla would not look at Karl. He coughed to clear his throat, as if to signal his defiance of the atmosphere in the room and his disdain for the words that had caused it. But the insult had struck home. Gabriella had succeeded in masking her humiliation, and Bla was more or less able to conceal his shame and outrage. The moment would pass quickly. But neither of them would ever forget it.Bla resolutely introduced his fiance to the others. They had little to say in their embarrassment and humiliation, but they awkwardly tried to be gracious. Then it was time to gather around the dinner table.The impromptu and now subdued festival meal went ahead without further incident. Fine domestic wine from Karls vineyard had been readied for the occasion. No one cared that it was hardly appropriate for ritual purposes. Nor was there a proper seder plate on the table; separate dishes of parsley and minced apples and walnuts, sitting in isolation, were all anyone could remember of the symbolic Passover foods. Someone had brought matzah, almost for noveltys sake and because it was so readily available among the citys large Jewish population. These few vestiges of Jewish tradition, however, did not prevent Laura from baking the breadsforbidden on Passoverand cooking the nonkosher Hungarian creamed meat dishes that were the family favorites. Despite some brief and satirical commentary on the liberation of the ancient Hebrews from enslavement in Egypt, there was an undercurrent of collective embarrassment and unease among the Schneiders and Poppers, these modern, middle-class, and affluent Budapestis who somehow still referred to themselves as Jews. Feeling set apart from the others by the incident, Bla more than anyone noticed the farcical quality of the ceremony.Now Karl spoke up for the first time since his hateful insult. Isnt it curious how we still call ourselves Jews when all this means so little to us? Nobody answered, but Karls question was merely rhetorical and he was prepared with an answer. But theres more to being Jewish than these ridiculous rituals, he said, his tone growing more self-assertive as he spoke. We live in the Golden Age of Hungarian Jewry, but I assure you its not because we are such a religious people.Why then? one of the wives asked.Karl cleared his throat and answered. As he began, his voice was uncharacteristically subdued. Because we are brilliant and talented and have become gloriously prosperous in this wonderfully hospitable country of ours, and all within the past fifty years. This city has been built with Jewish genius. With each word, Karl was regaining his earlier self-inflation.Gabriella, who had been silent and remote, raised her eyes to meet Karls. At the same time, she raised one of her hands from her lap and placed it, with symbolic defiance, onto the table next to her plate. Her voice

was steady and calm. But in the meantime, she asked, what has become of the soul of this city?My dear Gabriella, Karl said, as deferentially as he could muster, Budapest gets its soul from the Christians. There are enough priests and churches to save the city for another thousand years. We have inspired its mind and heart. We have enriched this city and made it a jewel in Europe. He emphasized his words with a wave of the piece of matzah he held in his hand. Look at the banks, the universities and professions, and the artists and writers. Youre no doubt well acquainted with them. And Jewish journalists love and defend this country more than the Hungarians do.Karl was irrepressible, Bla thought, and on this subject he seemed especially impossible to argue with, as much as several among them would have liked to. For his imperious tone, Karl drew silent scorn, but his words were weighty. Gabriella bravely pressed on. Why do you so willingly leave the domain of soul and spirit to the monopoly of Christians? she asked.Because they need it more than we do. The Christian spirit has always been the thread binding the Magyar masses to civilization. There are fewer of us, so in their enlightened state, they have emancipated us, so to speak, and have even made our religion virtually equal to theirs. We are as Hungarian as they are. Weve shared the same history and have been here since the beginning. Its a beautiful partnership. Im not terribly interested in their religion and they dont seem particularly worried about ours. Whats more, I dont need to be involved in the Jewish religion in order to be quite content with being a Jew in this most extraordinary city and country.But you must admit, said Bla, theyve also used that Christian spirit to keep us at arms length. We dont accept their savior, and weve paid for that throughout what you call our beautiful thousand-year partnership. For all weve done for this country, were still seen as a self-interested foreign element that panders to the aristocracy. Were as liberal and patriotic as it suits our need to get ahead. Were resented for it and weve periodically paid for it. Im not so sure we have seen the end of it.There was some truth in what Bla was saying, but he had never until that moment acknowledged such acute awareness as to the status and fate of the Jews. He was drawing on his own admittedly thin personal experience with anti-Semitism and his even more flimsy political understanding. In truth, he was simply taking a swipe at Karl, at this stereotypical bourgeois Jewish admirer of the ruling Hungarian aristocracy.You know, Bla, in all the time I spent in America, said his brother, Louie, reclining in his chair and twirling his wineglass between his thumb and forefinger, I never thought youd become such a keen observer of our Jewish culture. Louie had spent fifteen years in America, where he became a bookbinder, and had returned to Budapest following his fathers death. And this from my little brother who was always more content to be playing with animals than becoming politically educated.I dont have to be such a keen observer to see the obvious. Look at how people feel about Jews in spite of how weve helped build this country. You watch: as the emperor and empire grow old, we havent seen the end of Christian hatred of Jews. Bla himself was startled by the raw feelings that were welling up in him.What are you so afraid of? asked Karl, with a subtly dismissive wave of his hand. Youve never suffered as a Jew. And youll probably do just fine in life with such a generous family, a good profession, and of course your lovely and devoted wife-to-be. At that, Gabriella reached her hand over to Blas lap and clutched his wrist as if to beg him not to respond to Karls sarcasm.Karls insinuations were once again offensive, but Bla was still preoccupied with his own thoughts. And his eyes were opening. No, he wasnt terribly afraid of suffering as a Jew. But he was terrified at the prospect of having to try to make a life for himself and Gabriella in the midst of the kind of culture that Karl represented. Bla deferred to Gabriella; he did not respond. Karl had succeeded in effectively silencing both of them.Bla looked around the table. He glanced at his poor sister, who had done so well by wedding this pompous ass. She looked beaten down and servile. She had lost some of her former beauty, but she would be well taken care of materially for her dutiful solicitude. Bla then looked at his mother, sitting next to Laura. She was always a loving and devoted matriarch. He admired and appreciated her. He could not have survived all those years as a university student without her generosity. But this was also the same mother who, terrified for her childrens welfare, had forced her daughter back into her unhappy marriage with Karl when she wanted to leave him. What made it worse, Bla knew, was that his mother privately detested Karl even while she kowtowed to his wealth and position. Bla felt blessed to have found someone in life whom he loved and who loved him in return.As the dinner proceeded, these frontal assaults and subtler attacks at the flanks were suspended. But, to add to their earlier wounds, the couple increasingly felt quietly but painfully excluded. Karls bombast eventually died down, partly because of the watchful eyes of his otherwise submissive relatives. Bla sensed the tacit scorn in their pursed lips and slightly raised brows, in the hesitant, guarded questions directed at Gabriella. Somehow, she represented happiness, a rarer, unarranged, and more fateful happiness than these striving, insecure relatives were used to.Bla turned to Gabriella and saw her looking defeated and unable to resume eye contact with anyone at the table. With her downcast eyes, she seemed disappointed and empty. There was always so much he could tell from her eyes. He wasnt certain if she still suffered from the earlier humiliation or from the discomforting conversation at the table. But he also wondered if these religious occasions evoked a deeper and more elusive longing in her. He had noticed it before, but it had barely been talked about. He never knew what to say or think about it.By all outward appearances, Bla and Gabriella had survived the evening. But they were permanently wounded. On leaving Karl and Lauras home, they glanced over at each other with a combined look of relief and exasperation, as if they had been forced to hold their breath for three painfully long hours and could now once again freely draw air. They stood silent for a moment in the soft glow of the gaslight street lamp in front of the apartment. Bla spoke first. You know we cant go on living among them.I know, Gabriella said, as the pent-up tears

streamed down her face. They expect too much of me, and their disappointment is painfully obvious. They treat me like Im a gold digger. I dont think they ever really wanted us together.As Gabriella spoke, Bla sighed and sputtered with indignation, Theyre jealous, especially Karl, that our marriage will not be engineered by our families. My poor sister has suffered all these years from her supposedly successful marriage. Shes never found happiness, but even she is infected by the scorn.They walked down the street arm in arm. The district was alive on this cool spring night with the murmurs of Jewish families conducting seders in their homes. From the open windows of the more religious Jews they heard Hebrew songs and blessings drift out on the night air.Youre hurt over the seder? asked Gabriella.No, I only wish I were more so. It means less to me than I want to believe. Bla had never truly found any sustaining warmth or light in his religious tradition. For that matter, he had never sought any protection from the cold or dark, neither of which he particularly feared. The cold was as familiar as the chill in the spring air. And the dark was tolerable, for he was a practical man not given to much soul-searching. As for the darkness inside others, it had only touched his life on rare occasions and not inspired any need to hide or flee. What bothers me intolerably, Bla continued, looking straight ahead, feeling too embarrassed to look at Gabriella, is the haughtiness and divisiveness of my Jewish family. I need to get away from them. I think we both do if we are ever going to survive.It bothers me as well, said Gabriella, terribly, especially the emptiness that you mentioned at religious occasions like this. I know God speaks to us through the stories of his chosen people. But people dont see it. Bla was coming to understand that Gabriella feared the emptiness, the hollowness of a life that didnt speak to her soul. Unlike himself, she needed warmth and light, and was disheartened not to find it in Blas familys Passover celebration that night, nor in their common religious tradition or culture. Bla needed to depart, Gabriella to arrive. But they hadnt yet found a common path, nor was the time ripe.On a cold January day, soon after the New Year of 1912, Bla and Gabriella were huddled next to each other on a wooden bench in the hallway of a drab Budapest courthouse. They were waiting outside the chamber of a justice of the peace who would marry them. Four or five offices with wooden doors and opaque glass windows bearing the names and titles of their occupants lined the narrow corridor. The air was stale from the tobacco smoke that wafted endlessly through the stark public hallway.Im so relieved we can do this in a civil ceremony, said Bla, rather than go through the ordeal of a religious one with our families involved.Yes, I suppose were reaping the benefit of the enlightened ruler of this holy empire, said Gabriella, exaggeratedly inhaling the musty air as she began to be warmed by the heat of the buildings clanking radiators. Hes even provided a hearth and sweet incense to adorn our ceremony. May God bless him. Not many years before, Emperor Franz Jozsef had invoked the institution of civil marriage. Hundreds, even thousands of Hungarian couples had since exercised the option, much to the chagrin of the various Christian churches as well as the rabbinic leaders of the country.Bla quickly felt Gabriellas sarcasm and consternation. You obviously are not very happy with this.Im sorry. I dont mean to be so harsh. Gabriellas tone softened and she reached for and tenderly held Blas hand. You know that I am very happy. I have always loved you and Im certain that you love me. After a pause, she continued, But I wanted to be married in the presence of God, not just in the presence of official witnesses in a court of law, in the dead of winter. And I wanted to do it with our families blessing, without feeling that we were going behind their backs. She was still shivering slightly from the cold outside, her teeth clenched together so that they wouldnt chatter. But there was a sweetness to her voice.Of course, my dear one, I love you, and I would like the same thing. He hesitated, then continued, But thats not reality. His smile stiffened. My family would have come, begrudgingly, but we would have felt their disdain. Look, Ive made my choices. Were not going to live the way they do. And, he added as an afterthought, I cant imagine youd want to have your stepmother present.I know, weve been through this already. But shes happy for me, and dont forget she likes you very muchnot because of the life you can provide me, but for who you are. I felt bad that I couldnt invite her, or even my aunt Bertha and cousin Elza. Having Bertha here would have been as close as I could come to my dear mother being present. And Elzas my best friend. But I accept that we couldnt have family herenot yours, not mine. Gabriellas words trailed off on a note of resignation.Bla went on disjointedly, without fully acknowledging Gabriellas feelings. And what kind of religious ceremony would have been more meaningful than the uninspiring Jewish ones to which weve been such strangers? There was a pause. Bla knew that Gabriella was not disagreeing with him. But her eyes evaded his. He knew something was missing for her and he had come to believe that, indeed, it was a spiritual and religious matter. But he still didnt know how to address it.Neither of them spoke for a minute. I know well find our way and Im not any less happy for this moment, Gabriella finally said, trying to reassure Bla. He didnt believe her but felt comforted nonetheless. Bla knew that Gabriella would never complain, but in the back of his mind he reminded himself that the woman who was about to become his wife was searching for something more than material sustenance and comfort, and that her life would not be complete without it. Even though their marriage would not be religiously sanctified, they both knew what a triumphant achievement it was. It was not only a public tribute to their love but also a monument to their strength and will to separate themselves from a commanding family and a binding culture. And it had taken them almost five years from the time they met to finally get to this musty, cold hallway outside the office of the justice of the peace.A few days after the wedding, Gabriella moved from her familys flat in Buda to Blas apartment in Pest, near the university. By that spring, Bla was preoccupied with preparing for his final examinations and the completion of his studies, after more than ten years as a habitual student. Following his marriage, he had instantly become serious and focused about

his work. His mentor at the university kept Bla on as a veterinary assistant and part-time instructor, which helped the couple make ends meet.Virtually within weeks, Gabriella was blessed with a pregnancy. In early autumn, she gave birth to identical twin boys, Gyrgy (who would always be called Gyuri, or Georgy) and Mikls. Family lore suggests they were each born in a caulan unbroken amniotic sackwhich, according to legend, is a sign of individuals who will fulfill lives of destiny. The boys were small and dark, with the high cheekbones of their father and the large, brown, sad eyes of their mother. From the moment of their birth, it was difficult for almost anyone to tell them apart.Blas family, unmindful of the aloofness he and Gabriella had put between them, descended on the couple after the children were born. Regina was thrilled that her youngest son was now the father of two boys. Laura, who had four children of her own, seemed ready to moderate the distance at which Gabriella was kept by the family, in deference to the newborn sons. The fact that the boys were, in the natural course of events, circumcised according to Jewish ritual had nothing to do with the influence of either of the couples families, nor was it a sign of the parents determination to perpetuate the Hebrew covenant. Just as with their father before them, it was unthinkable for these Jewish boys not to be ritually circumcised. The rabbi insisted on it and carried out the Brit Milah with both boys at the couples home. That Bla and Gabriella agreed to this, even without much devotion or fanfare, was, nevertheless, a significant event. Gabriella, more than Bla, was concerned with giving her children more of a religious heritage than either of their parents had received. Beyond that, she may also have overestimated the importance to Blas family of this Jewish ceremony. Frequently solicitous of them, she was unwilling to disturb their supposed Jewish sensibilities, especially regarding as ancient a tradition as circumcision. The childrens subsequent exposure to Jewish ways, however, would not exceed that which their parents had themselves experienced.It was a brisk day toward the end of March in 1914. Gabriella was in the third month of her second pregnancy. Her active two-year-old boys were momentarily occupied by their step-grandmother, who was visiting and helping mind the twins, whom she adored. Bla had just finished teaching an anatomy class at the university. On his arrival home, he hurriedly coaxed Gabriella to sit down in the drawing room. He took the soft velvet armchair and she sat on the Victorian sofa to his side.After class, I met with Professor Nagy and he offered to submit my name for a civil service job as the animal doctor of a small village called Brnd, not far from Debrecen and next to Pspkladny. Speaking in one breath, Bla could hardly get the last few words out.Gabriella could barely respond. She was as dumbstruck as he had initially been. What? she finally managed to utter. Thats...marvelous!Of course, its a big decision. Life would be harder and Ill never get wealthy as a civil servant. You know that the civil service is called the mules steppingstone.Well, youre obviously no mule, Gabriella managed to inject. At least not anymore, she said, poking fun at her husband. But weve always lived modestly. Wed manage.And Ive always believed rural life would be our natural element. His hands moved to the quick tempo of his words. Barely managing to stay seated on the edge of his chair, he went on impetuously, without giving his wife another chance to respond.But there is something further I have to tell you about this, he said, rising from his armchair and trying to check his excitement by clasping his flailing hands together and holding them still under his chin. Its an important matter well have to give much thought to.How much more important could it be than what you just told me? Gabriella teased with a smile, raising an open hand in a gesture of playful naivet. So, end the suspense and tell me what it is.You know Nagy wouldnt do this if he didnt like me. And you know his feelings about Jews.Gabriella looked puzzled. Yes, its always been peculiar, but its not news. Hes done well by you, and you by him. But what of it? Dont keep leading me on this way.Well, he seemed to have my best interests at heart when he told me. Bla was still hedging, but then he blurted it out. You know how difficult it is for Jews to be appointed to the civil service. Nagy suggested that we Christianize our surname and cross over to Christianity. It might be our only chance, and it would be a way of blending in with the community and not becoming too isolated in a place with only a small number of Jews living there.Gabriella appeared not to hear any of the words after Christianity. She turned her head slightly away from Bla and gazed off into space, looking through things, not really at them. He recognized that she had turned inward, toward her private thoughts and feelings. That sounds like a good idea, she said in a measured, understated way. Well truly be making a new homewont we?with a new faith and a new community. Bla thought he could detect a tone of peace and contentment that he had hardly heard before.He himself could not have thought of a better way to accomplish all that he wanted to in regard to his hovering and hostile family. Leaving Budapest would separate him from them and allow him to live by his and Gabriellas own standards and values, which were so different from theirs. He had never wanted to be a visible and wealthy Budapesti Jew. He just wanted a simple life as a country veterinarian. And Catholicism, what a brilliant way, he thought to himself, of loosening his emotional ties to his family and his culture. He didnt much expect Catholicism to save his soul. But maybe it would give him a livelihood and free his spirit so that he could live a life of his own choosing.Bla felt exhilarated. He laughed. Then well go. Well tell the children and our families, and well go. Well work out the details, but for now I may have to proceed faster than you and the children need to, at least as far as our name and our professed religion. As far as Bla was concerned, the religious matter didnt really require as much thought as he had let on. And he was instantly encouraged by Gabriellas apparent euphoria. The children and their grandmother Rosa had entered the room and they shared in the excitement and anticipation.In subsequent days, Bla informed his family of his decision to accept the position in Brnd. They were shocked at first and became increasingly forlorn that theyd be losing contact with him and his family, especially at

such a tender time in his childrens lives. But they realized soon enough that Bla could not go on indefinitely working as an assistant at the university. His mother had hoped for a university appointment for him, but in two years it had not materialized. When he told them of their decision to convert to Catholicism, his family seemed indifferent in their response. Indeed, they recognized that it would be prudent for them to blend in with the local population. Appearing in their new rural home as worldly and bourgeois Jews from Budapest was simply unwise. They all seemed to accept Blas decision matter-of-factly.