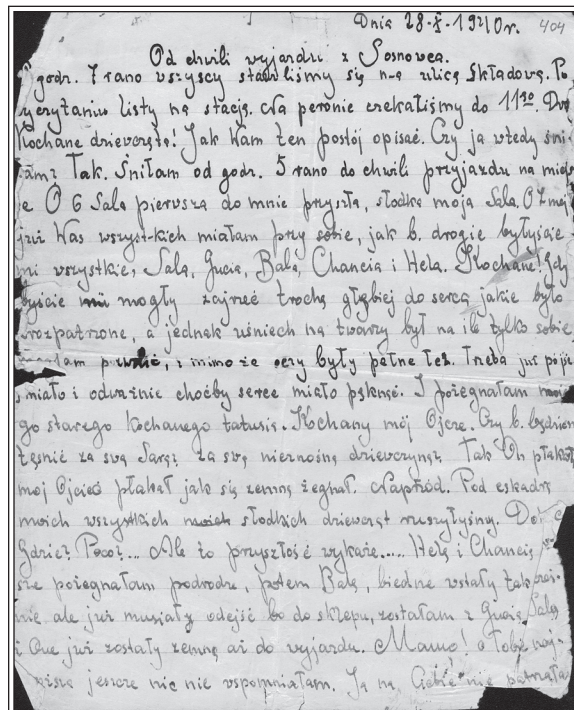
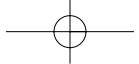
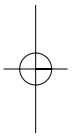
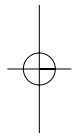


CHAPTER ONE

In Place of Her Sister



Her sister read the letter, translating from Polish into Yiddish for the benefit of their parents:

By order of the Jewish Council of the Elders, Raizel Garncarz will report on October 28, 1940, for six weeks of work at a labor camp . . .

Sala spoke as soon as Raizel finished: she would go in her sister's place.

Neither sister knew anything about a "labor camp." Nor did their parents. But since the calamity of the Nazi invasion of Poland the previous fall, the Garncarz family had been bracing for the next blow. Now it had arrived in the form of this short and official-looking document, vague on details, but stamped with the mark of the Council of Jewish Elders. The Council had recently been created by the Nazis. The first young men selected for labor camps by the Council had left the city a few weeks ago. No one had heard from them yet.

The family needed money. Raizel's name was on the list because her parents could not afford the "head tax" set by the Council; if you paid the tax, you were relieved of the obligation to send a family member. Only the poorest Jews would be going to the camps. The letter said that these so-called volunteers would be paid. No one else from the family would be required to leave.

Sala was the youngest of the eleven children of Josef and Chana Garncarz. Three died of natural causes before adulthood, and a fourth was killed during his stint in the Polish army, a victim of an attack by his fellow soldiers. Two older daughters and one son lived nearby with their own families. Another son had recently fled to Russia. Sala and her unmarried sisters, Blima and Raizel, still lived at home.

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Already struggling before the war, the Garncarz family was caught in an escalating cycle of poverty and danger. The father had become a virtual prisoner of the apartment since the invasion last year, when hacking off beards and beating elderly Jews became a Nazi sport. Some religious Jews had already shaved their beards and trimmed their side curls; Josef would not. He was no longer able to walk safely in the streets, no longer able to pray in the synagogue or to meet his students for Hebrew lessons.

Anyone who had ever met Raizel would know that her selection must be some kind of random, bureaucratic mistake. Raizel was pious and scholarly, always buried in a book, the least likely choice for anything involving labor. If the Germans were looking for someone strong, someone who adapted quickly to new, uncertain circumstances, they had found exactly the opposite. Childlike in her tiny frame, her eyes magnified by thick glasses, Raizel looked perpetually startled. Eighteen years old, she was already an astute judge of character, but few people knew it. She stayed close to home, preferring the company of her sisters, and filling the pages of her notebooks with essays and poetry. Frail and sensitive, she shrank visibly from contact with new places and people, nor were strangers particularly drawn to her—except children. Children loved her, never noticing her odd mannerisms and reveling in the intense delight she took in their comings and goings. It was easy to dismiss her as eccentric. But Raizel's demeanor disguised a powerful character and intellect: she was the best educated of the sisters, soaking up knowledge wherever she could, and for her single-minded devotion to prayer and Jewish studies she was known and respected throughout the closely knit community.

Until the Nazis came, the two sisters attended Polish public school, walking together in their navy blue uniforms with white cuffs and collar, always crisp and clean. In the afternoon, they continued to the nearby *Bais Yaakov* school, where classes on Jewish studies were taught in Yiddish, the vernacular of their community. They were the first girls in the family to receive any formal education, secular or religious.

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The *Bais Yaakov* schools had been created in 1918 by a revolutionary educator named Sarah Schenirer. Her concept of religious curriculum for Jewish girls was controversial, but it had spread rapidly to some 250 schools and nearly 40,000 students all over Eastern and Central Europe, taught by women who had graduated from a new seminary in Krakow, founded in 1925 by Schenirer. These smart young teachers projected an elevated sense of purpose. Their intellectual energy delighted and inspired Raizel and Sala. Everything about the teachers seemed special, even their clothes, stylish yet modest, and as unmarried women, they were allowed to keep their hair natural, not yet covered with a wig.

Sarah Schenirer herself was idolized by the girls. She personally visited every school, and when she died in 1935, thousands of her students mourned her passing as their spiritual mother. In the diary that Sala kept faithfully, she recorded events such as the visit of Sarah Schenirer to their school, and confided her grief over the death of the visionary who overcame the objections of old-fashioned religious leaders resistant to newfangled notions about educating girls. Her father, too, had been wary, but he acknowledged the changing times, and permitted his daughters to attend.

The sisters justified his confidence. Both were good students, but Raizel was a dedicated scholar who dreamed of being a teacher. She was gratified at first when her Polish teachers recommended that she pursue advanced studies at the *gymnasium*, but she was repelled by its more secular curriculum and atmosphere. She would never compromise her religious principles.

The Nazi invasion ended all thoughts of more education. The Jewish schools were closed down. The interesting young teachers dispersed to their homes. The doors of the Polish school were shut to Jewish students. Undeterred, Raizel continued to learn independently, and she began to tutor younger girls at home, offering Hebrew lessons and religious instruction in the style of the *Bais Yaakov* school.

It was no surprise when Raizel proved to be an excellent teacher, gently coaxing young students to follow her into more demanding

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and rigorous studies. Raizel had less patience for her sister, however. Sala squirmed under Raizel's strict discipline and dreaded the hypercritical eye that never missed an academic mistake or overlooked a religious impropriety. She meant no disrespect by using a comb on the Sabbath, or rolling up her long sleeves on a hot summer day, exposing a few inches of forbidden skin above the wrists. But she was horrified when Raizel threatened to tell their father. Shocking her sister was one thing, but she adored her father, who never raised his voice to her, and was indulgent of his youngest daughter. She could not bear to disappoint him.

Raizel was brilliant and strong-minded—but also uncompromising and inflexible. Whatever the requirements of this thing called a labor camp, Raizel would never adapt. It was even more unthinkable for the next oldest sister, Blima, to leave home. Blima was the emotional core of the family; even the parents depended on her gentle ways to soothe the rough edges of their grinding poverty. Blima was young and attractive. She wanted to leave Poland and join a cousin who was living in Palestine, but when her father disapproved, she accepted his decision. She always put the family's needs first, encouraging her sisters to rely on her rather than on their mother, who was careworn and tired after twenty years of childbearing. Sala had been a sickly, colicky baby, and it was Blima who carried the crying child out of the house to give some rest to her mother. As Sala grew into a strong and high-spirited young woman, Blima overlooked her sister's teenage exuberance and served as Sala's advocate.

At sixteen, Sala found life painfully predictable. Looking around the low-ceilinged room that she shared with as many as six family members, she could hardly believe that things could get worse. By day, the room was a crowded and noisy workshop, with Blima on her machine for embroidering linens, and their father and Raizel taking turns at the table with their students. The room had a few pieces of furniture: a worn, wooden table, which served as desk, workbench, and dining table; a rickety armoire that held clothes and linens. A small, low door led to a storage space and the communal clotheslines for the building. Neighbors filed through the apartment to reach their

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clothes, not always asking for permission. In winter, the clothes would freeze into thin sheets of ice that smacked Sala painfully in the face if she ran by carelessly. The storage space also held the family's straw mattresses and the chamber pot for the evening hours when it was too dark to walk down three flights of stairs to the privy in the courtyard. She shuddered to think of the filthy outhouse, where she walked on tiptoes and prayed that the neighborhood boys were not watching through the holes she knew they had drilled in the thin walls. At night, the family put the sewing machines away and dragged out the mattresses and covered them with cloth; she and her mother shared one, her sisters on the second and their father alone on the third. Once in a while, visiting relatives slept on another mattress in the storage space.

Her only escape beckoned through a small slanted window that led to the roof. When there were no neighbors in sight, she would climb through, a drop of butter rubbed on her face to catch the sun. It was worth risking even the sheer drop to the courtyard below and a scolding from Raizel for a few golden moments of privacy.

This was the only home that she had ever known. Soon after the death of his first wife in childbirth, her father had taken his young sister-in-law Chana as his second wife, according to Jewish custom. Together, Josef and Chana raised the baby girl and the ten children who followed. From the small town of Wolbrom, the family moved a short distance away to the larger city of Sosnowiec, where Josef hoped to find more students.

Chana struggled to find food for the family—always cooking something from nothing, their father said ruefully. Blima was already a talented cook and baker, her mother's confidante and helper. Their family meals were spare but nourishing, and any special ingredients were saved for the Sabbath meal and festivals. Everyone's favorite dish was goose, a special treat in the winter months, when the bird was fattest. The preparations took all day, and her mother used every bit of the bird: the meat for dinner, the bones for soup, and the feathers for a down pillow or a cozy blanket. The fat was rendered and put away in the coldest part of the storage space, the *schmaltz*

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that she saved from the winter until the spring, when it would be used for Passover preparations.

On bad days when the cupboards were empty, Chana burned some paper instead of food and pretended that there was something in the stove. It was important to avoid the appearance of needing charity. "People will see the chimney smoking and think that we're cooking some food," Josef instructed her.

In the winter, Chana's knitting needles were in constant motion, producing wool scarves, mittens, and stockings to keep her girls warm. When Sala closed her eyes, that was how she saw her mother: dressed in the black dress that she always wore, her brow furrowed beneath the wig that had been fashioned from Sala's own long braids, her mother's hands busily knitting, knitting, knitting.

She was frustrated by Chana's ceaseless activity. She disliked housework herself and dreamed of making money to release her mother from the daily grind of cooking and cleaning. Even as a child, she was full of plans. Her friends still laughed about last summer's scheme to sell homemade ice cream. They helped her to churn a hand-cranked contraption that she borrowed from a neighbor, but when they tried to sell the meager output, they were chased off the streets by a policeman.

To the relief of her parents, Sala had a practical streak as well. She apprenticed herself at the age of eight to her sisters and brothers. Her first ambition was to earn enough money for a new coat. Her sisters and brothers ran small businesses at home and taught her to operate their most complicated machines: she was soon helping them to embroider linens, assemble sweaters, and attach leather uppers to shoe soles. By the time she was sixteen, she was an excellent seamstress.

Friday was the busiest day, the preparation for the Sabbath when work would cease, and prayer and family would smooth over the stresses of the week. She loved the weekly activities, even the chores that she usually preferred to avoid. Her mother and her sisters prepared something special for the evening meal, perhaps a piece of carp for *gefilte* fish, reserving the head of the fish for Sala's father. Water came from a pump in the courtyard. Sala needed several breathless

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trips up and down the stairs before she had enough water to fill the large pot that her mother used for boiling the fish. Since no work was permitted on the Sabbath, they prepared Saturday's meal in advance, assembling a special stew, a *cholent*, with potatoes, barley, and sometimes a piece of meat. A sweet and savory pudding made from left-over bread simmered within the stew. Her mother removed the pot from the coal stove and covered it with brown paper, then tied it around several times with string. Sala wrote their name on the paper and carefully carried the large pot around the corner to Shimon the baker, who inserted it on a long paddle into the recesses of his giant oven, together with dozens of other pots from neighbors, each tied and identified, ready to be served hot for the next afternoon's meal.

Everything had to be finished before sundown on Friday. The single room, always clean, was now immaculate. Sala's last chore was to clean the floors. She scrubbed every inch of the old wooden planks, spread sawdust over them and protected them with burlap, then removed the rough cloths and swept the floor clean again at the last possible minute. Her mother washed Sala's hair and braided it into two long plaits. Finally, her mother changed into her other clothes, the stiff black dress that she wore only on the Sabbath.

It was time for her mother to light the tall candles in her brass candlesticks. When her father returned from synagogue, wearing his black long coat tied around with a sash, he would gather them to the table and lead the songs that welcomed the start of the Sabbath.

In the morning, she walked to the synagogue with her father, carrying his prayer shawl, and then returned home for her own prayers, supervised closely by Raizel, who reprimanded her if she asked questions in Polish, since their father had asked them to speak only in Yiddish on the Sabbath. Before lunch, Sala returned to the baker to retrieve the cooked stew. Once she took the wrong pot, and hid behind her mother when the rabbi's wife charged up the stairs in search of her *cholent*. She heard their voices with relief; the exchange was made with good humor on both sides.

The rest of the Sabbath was spent with her friends. She was their leader, the fastest runner, and the most daring. It was their habit to

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spend the day moving around to different apartments. Since her family's one room was already overcrowded, the girls would meet her outside when the weather was fair, jumping rope or playing hide-and-seek around a dilapidated wooden wagon in the courtyard. No one knew why the old wagon was there, but it was their favorite landmark for a noisy game of tag, at least until angry neighbors would yell out the window or pour water over the girls, who were helpless with laughter.

They saw each other during the week as well. Blowing in like a storm after school, still dressed in their uniforms and full of high spirits, they usually gathered at the large and welcoming apartment of the Rabinowicz family. Sala was well liked by her friend's older brothers, handsome and well-educated boys with a gallant air about them, who needed no encouragement to be nice to their sister's prettiest and most vivacious friend. She was also a favorite with their younger sister, Frymka, who clamored for a game of cards and had to be chased from the room when the older girls needed some private conversation.

When the Polish army paraded through Sosnowiec, she disregarded her mother's entreaty to stay home and convinced her friends that they could get an excellent view of the parade by climbing up to a small balcony on the second floor. The balcony collapsed, injuring several people. She and the other girls escaped unharmed; no one ever knew how dearly they almost paid for her curiosity.

The games began to change even though Sala was still a tomboy. Romance was already in the air. She steered her friends to the streets where the teenagers of Sosnowiec gathered for an afternoon promenade. Boys walked on one side, girls on the other, their exchanges limited to an energetic nod of the head or a stiffly formal greeting. Sala was beginning to attract attention, with her finely sculpted features and womanly figure, her thick dark hair no longer held captive in the two long braids of her childhood. Her natural poise and style belied her family circumstances. Although marriage still seemed far off, she had already preempted any possibility of an arranged match, the usual rite of passage for the young women of their com-

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munity. Her mother lamented the scarcity of learned young men who would take a bride without a dowry, especially in these uncertain times, but when the matchmaker came to call, Sala took off through the window and sulked on the roof. She would not be like her mother, who had been required by Jewish law to marry her brother-in-law. Nor would she be like Blima, who was already meeting suitable young men in a designated public place, everything arranged by the matchmaker. Blima never suspected that her sister and her friends were spying on her as she walked and talked with a prospective suitor. Imagine having everyone know exactly where, and with whom, you were courting! Sala would find her own husband.

Caught in the strange and unprecedented circumstances of 1940, Sala was searching for adventure and freedom. Even the unknown world of a Nazi labor camp seemed like an acceptable alternative.

She was resolute in her decision to take Raizel's place. Her wages would help the family, her sisters would be left in peace with her parents, and she would get the opportunity for change that she sought so desperately.

Her parents weighed their alternatives. It was only for six weeks, or so the letter said. There was a certain restlessness about their youngest child, they recognized. Unlike her sisters, who flourished within the narrow orbit of their religious community, Sala chafed against her limitations as the youngest daughter of a poor Hebrew schoolteacher and his tired, worried wife. What about her future? Would she outgrow this rebelliousness and settle into her place as a traditional wife and mother? She was struggling against their way of life. The poverty that the rest of the family disregarded as merely inconvenient, she found mean and confining.

Josef Garncarz thought that these matters were settled a few months before, when he refused to allow her to go to Russia with Hersh Leib, the last unmarried son. Hersh Leib had been attending secret political meetings, risking the wrath of his father as well as the Nazis. Like other religious Jews in Sosnowiec, Rabbi Garncarz

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rejected any radical influences, regardless of whether the ideological source was secular, Communist, or Zionist. Now his son declared that he was a Communist, and was threatening to run away and take his sister with him. Even worse, Hersh Leib warned his father that they should all be leaving Poland.

Sala cared nothing for her brother's politics, nor was she frightened by his tales of future catastrophes; she saw only the alluring prospect of change. Together, she and Hersh Leib campaigned for her freedom.

Josef Garncarz was unconvinced. People were running away, it was true, but to where? They had no resources and few connections outside of Sosnowiec. They had no passports, and it was far from certain that Hersh Leib would even be able to smuggle himself into Russia, let alone with his teenage sister. The Garncarz family had always lived in Poland, the center of Jewish intellectual, cultural, and religious life for nearly one thousand years. They lived in relative peace with their Polish neighbors. Although the 28,000 Jews of Sosnowiec formed a smaller minority among the general population of 130,000 than in cities such as Warsaw or Lodz, they were a thriving community. Sosnowiec had Jewish banks, business associations, hospitals, orphanages, and schools. There was an equally large Jewish community in the nearby city of Bedzin. Of their seven surviving children, all but one lived in Sosnowiec. Blima had abandoned her plan to leave for Palestine and would be the next to marry and raise a family within the community. It was better for Sala to stay and hope for the best.

Hersh Leib left without her. They received one postcard from him postmarked from Russia, and then, silence.

Hersh Leib's departure and the grim reality of the occupation had not changed her parents' outlook. But now the Council's letter had arrived.

Suddenly, the very air seemed charged with uncertainty. The risks were considerable wherever they turned. If they did not com-

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ply, they could be arrested or lose their ration cards. If Sala stayed at home, she would face other threats. The policeman who chased a teenager for selling ice cream was now more likely to be wearing an SS uniform and carrying a gun. A young girl could no longer walk proudly by her father's side. She was courting danger every night, racing along the rooftops of the buildings and dodging Nazi snipers to be first in line at the bakery in the morning. Her daring escapades thrilled her friends but terrified her parents.

The decision was made: she was determined to go and they would not stop her. Someone had to show up at the train station—and they agreed that Sala was the best choice.

One year earlier, on the night of September 3, 1939, the sounds of heavy artillery had been heard just outside Sosnowiec for the first time.

Only a day's march from the German border, Sosnowiec was the gateway to the strategically important region of Eastern Upper Silesia, the center of Poland's coal mining industry. On September 4, the Germans had entered the city from all directions, on motorcycles, from the train station, riding in tanks and armed vehicles, walking the streets, rifles turned toward the buildings. SS troops followed closely behind the German soldiers, arresting people indiscriminately, shooting others on the spot. Dozens of shops were plundered. Hundreds of Jews were forced to assemble in the marketplace and watch the Great Synagogue, and two other smaller synagogues, burn to the ground.

The Germans had long coveted the coal- and iron-rich land around Sosnowiec and considered it rightfully theirs, one more insult by the League of Nations in 1920 when it designated the area of Eastern Upper Silesia, also known as Zaglembie, as Polish territory. The Germans immediately annexed this region and a few other selected areas into the greater Reich. One large section of Poland became a separate Nazi administrative district known as the General Government. The rest of Poland, and over one million Jews, fell

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under Russian occupation, in accordance with the secret alliance between Hitler and Stalin.*

The invasion of Poland had been swift and successful, but along with the territory had come a large and unwelcome civilian population. There were simply too many Jews. Although Hitler would eventually require their elimination, the Nazi government was not fully prepared to deal with the immediate reality of removing or killing two million people. In Germany and Austria, the number of Jews had been gradually reduced as they fled to other countries during the six years of Nazi brutality and repression that led up to the start of the war. But now the borders were closed.

The Nazi government considered the alternatives. Since any final solution would require mass evacuations, they commenced a program to consolidate the population. Soldiers systematically emptied the smaller Polish towns and *shtetls* into urban areas, where railroad connections would facilitate the deportations to come. In the General Government region, the Jews were herded into enclosed ghettos.

The annexed region around Sosnowiec, however, merited a second look. Its abundant natural resources and manufacturing facilities would keep the German war economy strong. The availability of such a large skilled labor force in close proximity to Germany could have practical and economic benefits. The Polish Jews were not rich: before the war, the eight hundred thousand Jews of Austria and Germany owned more property than the more than three million Jews of Poland. But as slaves, they were highly valuable.

Nazi industrialists and army experts successfully made the case for a different approach here. While the rest of the Polish Jews lived in guarded ghettos, the Nazis would make an exception within the annexed region. These Jews would be concentrated within the cities, but not forced into ghettos—at least, not for the time being.

In the spring of 1941, the five thousand Jews of Oswiecim were

*The Russian occupation of Poland was a result of the secret nonaggression treaty between Hitler and Stalin, also known as the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact, signed in Moscow on August 23, 1939.

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given a few hours notice before they were evicted. Oswiecim had been chosen as the site of a major Nazi labor camp and industrial complex. A small town within the annexed region, it met the most important criteria: good rail connections and close proximity to densely populated areas that would supply slave labor for the enormous factories already under construction. But first, the Jewish local residents had to be forced to relocate to the nearby city of Sosnowiec. Since Jews were banned from the railways, horse-drawn wagons were used to transport the sick, aged, and small children of Oswiecim, while everyone else walked in a caravan that stretched for miles.

Overnight, new maps appeared. The familiar Polish designations had been Germanized. The postmark for Eastern Upper Silesia became Ostoberschleisen. Sosnowiec was renamed Sosnowitz. Bedzin became Bendsburg. Sala's own Kollataja Street became Oderbergerstrasse. Oswiecim would be known henceforth as Auschwitz.

As the Nazis continued to debate the fate of the Polish Jews, the delays opened up unexpected opportunities for wealth and power. Albrecht Schmelt was a Nazi officer and former police chief. Moses Merin was an obscure Jewish politician. They were soon to become informal partners who would play a major role in the lives of 130,000 Jews, including Sala and her family.

Schmelt was a World War I veteran who joined the Nazis in 1930 and rose quickly through the ranks. Average in stature, he was described in his Nazi party application as "ostisch" or "eastern" in appearance, but neither his swarthy and undistinguished figure nor his lack of formal education stood in the way of his career. In rapid succession, Schmelt became the local representative to the Prussian parliament and government deputy, then a member of the Reichstag. He was named regional police president in 1934, and joined the SS in 1939, rising quickly to the post of SS *Oberführer*.

Because of his familiarity with the local political and social conditions in the annexed region, Schmelt was handpicked by SS head Heinrich Himmler to be "Special Representative of the *Reichsführer*

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SS for the Employment of Foreign Labor in Upper Silesia.” After his official appointment in October 1940, Schmelt took up his post aggressively, setting up headquarters in Sosnowiec and formulating a plan for the creation of the labor camp system that would become known as Organization Schmelt.

Schmelt's first camps were dedicated to the major construction projects undertaken by his patron Himmler. Chief among these was “the Führer's Road.” Hitler himself broke ground for a modern highway, declaring that the Autobahn would symbolize his empire: modern Germany's answer to the Acropolis or the Great Wall of China. The war gave urgency to the completion of the highway, which would transport trucks, tanks, and troops. Initially, only Germans were permitted the privilege of being construction workers, but as more and more of them were conscripted as soldiers, or found better jobs, other sources of labor were essential. To keep the project on schedule, Schmelt requisitioned thousands of strong young Jewish men, and also brought women to work in the office, kitchen, and laundry.

The German town of Geppersdorf was chosen as one of the first labor camp sites. In addition to its strategic location along the highway's route, it was close to large Jewish populations in Sosnowiec and Bedzin. Geppersdorf also had sentimental associations for Schmelt himself, whose family settled there in the mid-eighteenth century.

After Schmelt's first attempts at large-scale labor deployment proved slow and cumbersome, he sought an ally within the Jewish community. Moses Merin was thirty-seven years old, small and intense, a Zionist and minor political figure with a questionable reputation as a divorced man and a gambler, an ambitious hustler who was always looking for a loan or a favor. He impressed the Nazis early in the occupation when he volunteered to negotiate the release of influential Jews who had been kidnapped and imprisoned. Although Merin spoke no German, he successfully raised a large ransom from the frightened families, mediating skillfully between the Jews and the Germans through his trusted assistant, Mrs. Fani Czarna, who

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spoke German fluently. The Nazis rewarded his initiative by appointing him as the head of the new Jewish Council, known as the Judenrat, which they substituted for the autonomous Jewish community organizations that existed before the war. Similar Councils were created throughout Nazi-occupied Poland.

In Sosnowiec, Merin put a Jewish face on Nazi policies and actions. One of his first duties was to conduct an accurate census of the Jewish population, segmented by sex, age, and occupation. Signs appeared on the walls of the city and in the stores, written in German, Polish, and Yiddish, requiring all Jews to register immediately with the Council and threatening anyone who failed to comply with the loss of ration cards and prosecution. The Nazis warned the Council leaders that they would be held personally responsible for the results of the census under the threat of being deported. The result was a comprehensive list of eligible workers for Organization Schmelt.

Merin proved to be an impressive administrator, as autocratic and efficient as his Nazi patrons. The census was completed ahead of schedule. Still unknown to many of the Sosnowiec Jews, and mistrusted by his former colleagues, Merin rapidly consolidated his power. Soon, nothing of importance happened in the Jewish community without his knowledge.

Once the census was completed, Merin and his staff matched the lists to Schmelt's labor requirements. Families that paid the Council's head tax were exempted. To the rest, Merin promised "mountains of gold" and the safety of their families. Merin's staff counted heads, not specific names. Soon, they had enough volunteers to fulfill Schmelt's quota. Most of them were from the poorest families of Sosnowiec.

In his zeal to comply with Schmelt's orders, Merin deported the first workers to Germany at least four weeks too early. They reached their destination at night, only to discover that little more than a sign marked the camp; there was no water or equipment, and the wooden buildings that would serve as barracks were still under construction. Merin did not dare to recall the transport, which might discourage other volunteers. The men slept in the open for weeks.

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A handful of women were on the short list that Merin gave to Schmelt for the deportation of October 28, 1940, including Raizel Garncarz. But it was Sala who was bound for the camp.

The date set in the letter for her departure was three days away. Each person was allowed to bring a small suitcase and some money. Sala borrowed an old leather briefcase, which would hold her few belongings. She had no money to bring. At home, her mother cried all the time, and the three days seemed endless.

She escaped from the weight of her mother's grief by spending time with her friends. She was the only one who was leaving. Her parents had accepted the order from the Council, had never considered an outright refusal to comply or the possibility of borrowing money for the required tax. Should they have tested the resolve of the Council? The risk of arrest or losing their food ration cards was too terrible to contemplate.

She had made her decision and wanted only to look ahead.

She spent her last night with her friends. They planned a festive occasion and pooled their resources for a parting gift: a warm and colorful wool hat, scarf, and mittens, plus some spending money. It will be bitter cold in Germany, they said, and we want you to remember us when you are wearing this.

It was almost time for the evening curfew. They would meet again in the early morning and walk together to the train station.

They embraced. She was surrounded by her best friends and basked in their admiration. They shared her belief in a future without limits.

On October 28, 1940, Sala rose early. She removed a few blank pages from her diary and folded them within the clothes she had already packed, locking the rest of the small paperbound journal and her favorite blouse in the one drawer that belonged to her. She had designed and sewn the blouse by hand, delighting in the bright coral

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color, but decided that it was too delicate. Instead, she took a sturdy navy blue shirt that her brother Hersh Leib had left behind.

The sleepers on the other mattresses stirred, then came to life. The room filled with activity, as her sisters and her mother dressed quickly to accompany her to the station. Her mother wore her everyday black dress, and adjusted her wig neatly on her head. Her father could not risk leaving the apartment. He called her to him and held his youngest daughter close to his heart. As he wept, he blessed her and prayed for her protection.

Unexpectedly, it was Raizel who forced a joke: "Remember me, I'm the ugly one, but I'll be the one to write to you."

