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June Snow

Translated by Melody Winkle

1

Anastasia has no eyebrows. And at the age of 32, no husband. Doesn't she need one? Won't she get one? Because she has no eyebrows? Because she is a first daughter? The explanation is simple. The one destined for her has yet to become a man.

When she first sees her future husband, she is fifteen, and he is a little boy sent to the store next to the church. It's his first time. The adolescent Anastasia is standing behind the counter when the five-year-old enters the windowless store to buy candles and a herring from the barrel. The brightness of the street at his back, his cheeks red with excitement, he clutches a coin in a sweaty fist pressed in front of his chest. Anastasia wraps the change in a little cloth so it does not get lost. He will return this little cloth to her in 1927 when she is 32 and he is 22, and he can finally propose to her. She strokes a light blond strand of hair from the little boy's forehead and asks his name. He assumes a straight posture. "Fyodor Nikolayevich Bocharov," he recites his full name loudly and seriously and walks away. She smiles after him and murmurs, "Fyodor. Fedja. Fedjka.«

The store belongs to Anastasia's uncle, a brother of her mother's. The family is large, but the girl and her parents do not interact with most of its members. Anastasia's mother Jewgenija lives without her father's blessing because she entered into an improper union against his will.

Jewgenija's family is considered wealthy. The city of Kursk, where she has resided for generations, is located in the region of fertile black earth deep in the Russian province. Moscow is more than 300 hundred miles away, to the north. To the south, it is not far to Ukraine. The language of the inhabitants is colored by it, the vowels stretched and the consonants soft.

Among Jewgenija's ancestors, there are administrators of princely estates, popes, several teachers, small and mid-level officials, a military doctor, and even a lawyer. Education is seen as

the key to a good position in society, and from an early age, children are taught to aspire to it as the most important purpose in life. Jewgenija's father, Anastasia's grandfather, learned his ancestors' trade from a young age and eventually took over his father's lumber business, later passing it on to his eldest. Jewgenija, the firstborn child, and her sisters play no role in this chain. The first son inherits the lumber business. The two stores go to the second. The first, located in the city center, stocks an assortment that is in demand by an urban clientele. The smaller store in the lower, rustic part of the city is quite different. Although this district is also part of the city, it hardly appears to be urban. That is probably due to the geographical conditions. The land is flanked by two rivers that submerge it every spring. The people live in simple wooden houses lined along a dusty road. They live largely from their narrow gardens, which lie behind the houses and extend to the river. It was prudent to open a store here. The way to the upper town is long, the streets often not usable. During the annual spring floods, life comes to a standstill. People visit neighbors in boats and watch the water subside. The floods are always welcome, and if they fail to appear even one time, people worry about the fertility of their gardens.

In the meantime, a real city with a train station was built higher up, rails were laid, and progress rolled in, bringing building materials for factories and secondary schools. The new era swept past the lower town, its wooden huts squatted deeper into the brown earth, while above asphalt was mixed and roads were poured, and gray houses of stone grew out of them. All the developments took place in the upper town. For a long time, the people lived in the lower area without electricity, water supply, or sewerage. Those who went up to study or to work brought back stories that made the old people shake their heads in disbelief. With each passing year, the young moved further away from the mud, water pumps, and latrines, and they sought the comforts of the new age. They married "up", and the day after the wedding, they moved to the

stone city.

But not Jewgenija, the eldest daughter of the family. While still a schoolgirl, she fell in love with a fellow whose family did not have the means — or at least not the ambition — for advancement. She followed her groom down — geographically as well as socially.

The property that Jewgenija's family had acquired over the generations was to be preserved at all costs and, where possible, increased. This could only be guaranteed by well-played moves. They had invested in five children, also giving the girls a good education. This investment needed to be profitable. The father was disappointed by his eldest's withdrawal. He almost regretted employing those home teachers with their newfangled ideas. He himself believed in progress, technology, and its achievements and in the liberation of people from toil, ignorance, and slavery. Although he was not in favor of a coup d'état, which the circulating pamphlets continually foretold, he was nevertheless impressed by the enthusiasm for many of the new ideas that these lines proclaimed. Later he had doubts. Perhaps the time was not yet ripe? Maybe he shouldn't have taken risks and should have brought up his daughters in the old ways. With the younger ones, he resolves to be stricter. Hopefully, it is not too late.

He did not want to pronounce a curse against his firstborn, despite his bitter disappointment at her disobedience. This would also have affected the next generation, and that seemed disproportionately harsh to him. And so he left it at the denial of his blessing. He permitted his wife to continue to keep in touch with Jewgenija, although no word is exchanged between them about the matter. And he allowed his granddaughter Anastasia to help out in his son's store. He never addressed a word to the girl, but he watched Anastasia furtively from a distance, searching for and discovering similarities. He liked her straight posture and her reserved seriousness.

When Anastasia met little Fyodor, her future husband, she had been working in her uncle's store several afternoons a week for four years, having finished school after fifth grade at the age of eleven — no talk of the home teachers her cousins had. For the remainder of her time, she took care of her younger siblings so her mother Jewgenija could devote herself to the laundry of foreign gentlemen in the upper town, a necessary source of income for the family since the misfortune.

Beams and bricks were piled up in the garden, helpers from the neighborhood were summoned, and the day was appointed for finishing the house. Jewgenija was barely pregnant with her third child when her husband had an accident at work, and as a consequence, his leg was paralyzed. From then on, he could no longer pursue his profession as a carpenter, and so he accepted training from a furrier and worked as his assistant. His wife and children were forced to experience how one person can become another before their eyes. His intention to prove himself to his father-in-law was thwarted, the pain in his leg at times unbearable. The ambitious but gentle man became someone who frequently shouts and was rough with objects, and later, with people. Alcohol could numb the pain somewhat, as well as the destroyed pride. The father-in-law was proved correct, and in the end, Jewgenija has four children, but no family and no love.

This left only the tiny cottage in which her growing family had to live. It consisted of a single L-shaped room where cooking, washing, sleeping, bickering all took place. Sometimes Jewgenija's mother, Anastasia's grandmother, came to visit. She was very fond of her eldest granddaughter. The two had something in common. When Anastasia was eight years old, her grandmother spoke for the first time about a special trait. And of an inherited sign, a proof. A stamp that nature imprints on certain women who are endowed with this innate gift. In her case, she said it was a hairy, crescent-shaped birthmark on her shoulder blade. Her daughter Jewgenija

had a split earlobe. And with her granddaughter Anastasia, the eyebrows were missing. "You are the first daughter of a first daughter of a first daughter. You are the link in a chain. You have powers. Later you will understand."

Anastasia began to observe her mother. Only now did she notice the small flaw the grandmother spoke about. Jewgenija knew how to cleverly hide it under her hair and headscarf. Neighbor women came to the porch, and there were whispers: she was called for sick cows or ducks losing feathers. They brought babies whose navels wouldn't heal or children with warts on the soles of their feet. Jewgenija mumbled certain words. The warts disappeared, the navel dried up, the ducks grew feathers, and the cows again gave milk. It is not allowed to accept money for these services, but the neighbors bring a piece of cake, a cup of sugar, or fabric for an apron. There is whispering, and people fall silent as soon as the girl comes within earshot. One day when Anastasia dares to ask her mother a question, Yevgeniya just shrugs gruffly and turns to her work.

At sunset, the women of the neighborhood sit on the benches in front of their houses and let the day come to an end. They remain silent a long time, until the light and sounds change all around them. Then they talk. Perhaps young Fyodor chose his profession only to get close to this brittle girl? It is obvious that something is wrong with her. Like her mother Jewjenija, (how could she be so clumsy and marry so inconveniently?) Anastasia also makes the people uneasy. What is she proud of? How she stands there so very straight in the dim store, forbidding, yet somehow radiant. She probably thinks she's one of those. Someone you need in the village, but at the same time, to be feared. No one dares to come closer to her than necessary.

Fyodor, born in 1903, was also not allowed to be a child for long. His parents were poor and early on, as the older of the two sons, he had to help in the garden, which was primarily used to grow potatoes and cabbages. And in the stable — even though this stable housed not even a cow, only a goat, a few rabbits, and a small flock of chickens. At the age of nine, he was sent to school, because he is supposed to be able to read, write, and do arithmetic. After class and during vacations, he worked all the harder at home.

His father Nikolai had a profession. He was a roofer. He was dependent on the availability of jobs and the weather. He couldn't always bring home sufficient wages. Sometimes the family of four had to make do with a day's wages for a week.

Once Fyodor turned twelve, his schooling was deemed sufficient after three grades. The younger brother took over the stable and garden, and Nikolai took Fyodor to the construction sites. So he learned his father's trade, without apprenticeship training, without a journeyman's examination, without a master craftsman's certificate. That the lad was fascinated by mechanics and dreamed of repairing bicycles or even inventing new kinds of machines for working in the fields was of interest to no one. At fourteen, he earned half as much as his father. When he was seventeen, a civil war raged through the country, which will later be called the Revolution, for which Nikolai was too old and his sons too young. Houses were destroyed, roofs damaged. Nevertheless, the father became unemployed and with him, the son.

Fyodor got his first employment in the huge flour mill, which had belonged to a factory owner and was now put under state administration.

Then followed the period of the "New Economic Policy", which tolerated private property and self-employment, and Fyodor went into business for himself. With his father and

two other craftsmen, he formed a brigade. One of them always had a job on hand. The spirit of optimism promised the young man a good existence. But after only four years, the men were ordered back to the factories or collective farms. Fyodor went back to the flour mill as an unskilled worker. The foreman recognized his skill with his hands and his curiosity about machines, and he apprenticed him in the workshop as a precision mechanic. Soon he employed him as a skilled worker, no longer as an unskilled worker. Fyodor would soon be able to ask for Anastasia's hand in marriage.

By 1922, the country had become a new state and was now called the Soviet Union. In 1924, the revolutionary leader died, and in the following year, Fyodor's mentor was relocated along with his family. There was talk of Kazakhstan — Fyodor never heard from him again. He himself had to go back "in the flour" because now the regulations had to be strictly observed, and Fyodor could not prove he had completed vocational training.

He regularly went to the small store next to the church — which was no longer a church — to see Anastasia's smile. To make sure she was still unmarried. She told of the dispossessions and "dislocations" in her mother's family of origin. And that her grandfather had left this world in a timely manner. His death, she said, spared him from watching his family fall apart and the destruction of all that he had amassed.

Fyodor applied to the mill's works council for an apprenticeship as a precision mechanic. He learned to read and write again so that he can keep up with evening classes. The written exam was a disaster. In the practical exam, he was the best in his class, so the commission granted him a repeat attempt. Until then, he was allowed to work in the mill's workshop as an apprentice — a job he knew very well from the past. Someone must have turned a blind eye to the second attempt — writing just wasn't his thing, although his hands were so dexterous. He could,

however, read plans and drawings well. At the beginning of 1927, Fyodor was regularly employed as a precision mechanic in the factory's workshop. He joined the Communist Party, and now he could finally ask Anastasia to be his wife.

Fyodor had large, blond, hairy forearms, light straight hair, and gray eyes. As a boy, when he was sent to the store, he always had a strange feeling — was it fear? If so, this fear felt somehow pleasant, as if something soft were brushing the back of his neck and causing a slight chill. One day, his bright gaze sank into her dark eyes, and he thought it would never resurface. He was attracted by the austerity of this girl, which many feared and considered a reason for her celibacy. She was pretty, no doubt, but one look from her brown eyes commanded respect from the people around her.

The five-year-old Fyodor was uncertain in her presence, but the 18-year-old, and certainly not the 23-year-old. He saw what others did not, including the arches of finest fluff over her eyes.

No one was ever witness to any tenderness between the two. But their faces could not be hidden, and the whole world saw that this was a pair of lovers. Even after the third child. This was a pair of lovers. In the village, people speculated and gossiped. She must have bewitched him, the women conjectured during their evening sessions. That's not normal, such a smart young man. He turns the heads of all our girls, and he chose her of all people.

The men stood in a circle with their beers after work. They also needed an explanation. Something was definitely wrong with that guy upstairs. He must have a simple mind, that fellow.

It was supposed to be a birch tree. On the day of the birth of his first daughter, Nina, in the middle of winter, Fyodor went into the woods at the bidding of his mother-in-law Jewgenija and dug up a young tree to plant in the garden behind the house, as was the custom when a girl

was born. The birch tree would grow together with the child, and the shape and nature of the girl would resemble that of her tree — upright, light, and graceful. If necessary, her grandmother Jewjenija or her mother Anastasia would keep all manner of mischief, harmful looks, and illnesses away from the girl with special words and a bundle of leaves from the tree. Later, on Nina's wedding day, there would be a sprig from her birch tree in the bridal bouquet. The older women would place the little branch under the mattress of the bridal bed before the wedding night. They had it in their minds that the first child would be a girl— even though the men next door, who were already quite drunk, loudly and insinuatingly wished the newlyweds a son.

When spring came and the trees grew leaves, everyone saw the mistake. It was a poplar tree, not a birch. The young father was mocked by the neighborhood as somebody who thought every white trunk was a birch tree — and the first available woman was a bride; as the one who took the only alien in the birch grove, of all things; as the one who fell in love with a grumpy woman ten years his senior.

Removing the poplar from the garden would have brought bad luck. So the women designated another young birch as Nina's tree. It stood next to the path to the well, so Anastasia could touch the trunk while fetching water every day, and she murmured those words that custom demanded. That her daughter would later leave home, she would not be able to prevent, and also no one else could have either. It was surely predetermined. Nothing can hold a person who doesn't have solid roots.

The young poplar, meanwhile, grew much faster than a birch would have and it proved to be useful. Apart from the downy flight of the seeds, the June snow that delighted children in the middle of summer, tempted youngsters to safely play with fire, and that adults claimed purified the air, the tree soon became an indispensable piece of furniture. Fyodor attached a water

dispenser, a small bucket made of zinc, to the trunk. After gardening or returning from the outhouse, you could wash your hands. And on a branch forced into a horizontal position, Fyodor later hung a swing for his three children, to which Anastasia gave birth during the first four years of their marriage.

3

May 1934. A yellow postbus stopped in the main square of a small village in the Weinviertel district of Lower Austria. Eva, a woman in her early thirties, got out, followed by about ten children between the ages of five and thirteen. They wore sturdy shoes, anoraks, and backpacks. Finally, a young woman climbed out. The bus moved away, wheezing. It was afternoon. The spring sun warmed the air, but the fields were still brown and damp, the vines bare. The group started to move. At the top of the slope was a wayside shrine, where they headed to rest and have a snack. A little girl cried for her mama and was comforted by the young woman. A skinny, freckled nine-year-old asked Eva for the umpteenth time why she wouldn't go with them. "I still have things to do in Vienna, Karli. Dad will meet you tomorrow in Brno. I'll join you soon." He nodded bravely. His mother tousled his hair, which the boy didn't like one bit. "Slavko will look after you in the meantime." She winked at a twelve-year-old who was holding himself very straight. He wanted to look grown-up and he hid his anxiety.

It was not the first excursion of this kind. In recent weeks, Eva had repeatedly gathered children of killed, wounded, or fugitive February fighters from other provinces in her apartment in the working-class district of Favoriten in Vienna. The children were taken to different places in the northern part of the Weinviertel or Waldviertel regions, where they were handed over to volunteers who waited for them and then took them to foster parents or Czech comrades.

Eva's partner Karl Kafka had been living in Prague since mid-February. Karli's father and Slavko's stepfather had the position of a union steward in the "Democratic Protection League". The paramilitary group of the Social Democratic Workers' Party of Austria had been founded in order to be able to counter the resistance of the "enemy on the right", by force of arms if necessary. It was imperative to defend the social achievements of Red Vienna at all costs.

Ideologically from the opposite side, homeland protection and people's militias formed soon after the First World War. Coming from western Austria, they spread throughout the country, opposing the Social Democrats and supporting the police and military in their actions against the leftists. The individual groups and organizations joined together to form the strong "Heimwehr". The home guards did not have a uniform, but they did have a distinctive mark: the fluttering tail feather of the black grouse, with which hunters decorated their hats. Those who spoke disparagingly of them call them "cock-tailers," who wore what birds had "on the ass" on their heads.

These associations were well supplied with money, equipment, and infrastructure by forces that were no longer willing to accept the electoral defeats of their parties: Christian Social, Civic, Heimatblock, Wirtschaftsblock, Landbund. They could all be assured of the blessing of the Catholic Church. Moreover, new competition was emerging — Hitler's NSDAP triumphed in the spring elections in Germany and was also showing up in Austria. The time seemed ripe to finally put an end to the reds, Democrats, and other shenanigans.

A year earlier, the first step was taken. On March 4, 1933, the parliament in Vienna was eliminated in a type of coup d'état — aided by the misjudgment of the Social Democratic leadership. On February 11, 1934, Christian Social Vice-Chancellor Emil Fey — co-founder and leader of the Heimwehr — triggered the February Uprising with a provocative speech.

To avoid unnecessary bloodshed, some leaders of the Schutzbund shied away from the call to arms and did not reveal their hideouts, while others — poorly equipped and militarily inexperienced — bravely fought and died against the superior forces.

To escape the summary executions staged by the victors, Karl Kafka fled to Prague with a group of Schutzbündler. Disappointed by the hesitant and half-hearted actions of their leaders,

Karl and Eva immediately joined the — already banned — Communist Party. Eva stayed behind in Vienna and worked underground for the "Rote Hilfe," the CP's aid organization. She raised donations for families who had become destitute — collecting membership fees for a banned party was no longer permitted — and acted as an escape agent. Espionage flourished in those days, so their doings would not remain secret for long. After two arrests, it was obvious that Eva would not be spared, and she took her own boys on one of her country tours as a precaution.

The group continued hiking and reached a forest. It started to get dark. Everyone was tired. The younger ones grumbled, the smallest ones wanted to be carried. The women were tense. They kept stopping to listen. Suddenly a man dressed as a hunter stepped out from behind a tree and said a password. He and Eva swapped backpacks. Since the end of February, a tabloid exile edition of the banned Workers' Newspaper was appearing weekly in Brno, which Eva smuggled into Vienna on her excursions.

The Czech comrade put the youngest on his shoulders and urged them to go. His young female companion took Karli by the hand and pulled him from Eva's embrace. Just before the group disappeared into the darkness, Slavko turned around and raised his fist in salute. Eva was left alone. In the meantime, night had fallen.

The family would have one last reunion. Czech comrades organized a camp for the children in July, to which parents were invited. Happy, carefree days by the river, in the forest, around the campfire. Everyone would remember this idyll for the rest of their lives.

In the fall, Eva was arrested a third time, and this time she was held in custody for eight months. All-night interrogations. Torture. She suffered physical harm. Chronic pain and recurring paralysis on one side of her body lingered. They held out the prospect of her release if she agreed to act as a police informer. In May 1935, when she was finally released after eight

months and expelled from the country, she left for Czechoslovakia to join Karl. By then, her sons Slavko and Karli had been in Moscow for a long time.

The MOPR, an aid organization of the Communist International, made an offer to the homeless and unemployed Schutzbündlers to take their children to the seaside in the Crimea for the remainder of the summer vacation, and, if necessary, after that to Moscow, where they could attend the German Karl Liebknecht School and live in the requisitioned palace of a nobleman in the center of the city until the situation in Austria improved.

But nothing improved. On the contrary. Immediately the old forces, who meant well for capital, industry and the military, took the helm again. Everything was followed up with drastic measures. The fight against the excesses of both the left and the right was officially declared. Unpopular organizations and parties were banned, and personnel in departments and agencies were replaced. Red Vienna and its improved living conditions for the "little people" became a myth overnight.

The pupils of the "Children's Home No. 6 for Austrian Schutzbund Children" returned tanned and refreshed after their vacation to Moscow at the end of the summer of 1939, this time in Tuapse on the east shore of the Black Sea. Most of them had been living in the Soviet Union for five years by now. No one could explain why the exile, which was meant to be temporary, dragged on for so long. In the meantime, however, the question of why arose less often to the children and their caregivers. People got used to it, and everyone did well there, while Hitler's Third Reich only gained in strength back home.

Boys and girls were hardly distinguishable. All were given the same short haircut. All were healthy and had gained weight. The mood was nevertheless depressed, the return trip took place prematurely one week before the end of the vacation, which probably had to do with the latest political developments. The Soviet Union had made a pact with its arch-enemy, Hitler's fascist Germany, which now included Austria. The confusion - not only among the Schutzbund children and political migrants - was great. How was such a thing possible? Suddenly the pupils noticed something strange about themselves. They restrained themselves from saying certain words. The lauded and readily cultivated free speech was tamped down. Weren't we allowed to say anything against Hitler's fascism? If such an elemental thing could change so radically, maybe you shouldn't stick your neck out? Now they all wanted to return as soon as possible to the familiar world, to the children's home. The closer the train got to Moscow, the better their mood. The children looked forward to the Bohemian cook's delicacies and to their caregivers.

Karli, who didn't like to study, even looked forward to school. And to seeing Slavko again. He had not been living in the home for several months now because he was considered an adult and had to leave the children's home. The brothers had only seen each other twice since

then. Erika, on the other hand, who was in Karli's class, often met with Slavko in her free time. To do that, she made the over one-hour drive to his dorm, or the love birds met somewhere in the city. Slavko would ask her about Karli, and she brought the younger one greetings and admonitions from his big brother.

How great the surprise of the children and teenagers must have been on that August day, when, hungry and tired from the long journey, they entered the palace in the city center. The house was empty. Most of the furniture had been removed. Not a single picture hung on the walls. The rooms felt cold and dark, and they produced a harsh echo as they walked through them. Strangers asked the children to pack the contents of the lockers, the only furniture left, into their suitcases and then to join the two comrades sitting at the last remaining table in the dining room. They sat skimming through lists. "As quickly as possible, ladies and gentlemen!"

There was talk of new directives, of reorganizations as a result of foreign policy necessities.

The older ones, those already undergoing an apprenticeship or on the verge of starting one, but still allowed to live in the home, were given slips of paper with addresses and instructions to go there immediately, either by subway or streetcar, and to ask for a Comrade So-and-So. Further instructions would be forthcoming.

And so the gates of paradise were shut. The group of "little ones" stood in front of the house waiting for a bus that should have arrived some time ago. It was dusk already, the children shivered in their summer clothes. The long, warm summer came to a close.

[From the middle of the novel.]

15

Ten Commandments of Survival in the GULag (1951, handwritten, from the estate of Karl Arnautović).

1. *Never lose your pride. Do not humiliate yourself in front of anybody.*
2. *Always remain human to yourself. However, among wolves howl as a wolf. Man is man's wolf: You die today, and I die tomorrow.*
3. *Never give up hope. There is always a way out, even if it may seem hopeless.*
4. *Never show inferiority.*
5. *The greatest danger is starvation. Be your own accountant. Always balance debits and credits (loss due to labor performed versus input).*
6. *When in doubt, play dumb. The toughest inquisitor is powerless against stupidity.*
7. *Adapt to the conditions.*
8. *Once you've decided something, stay stubborn as a goat – until victory or the bitter end.*
9. *Do not sell yourself to anyone under any circumstances.*

Trust no one.

[Near the end of the novel.]

30

Brothers to the sun, to freedom.

There they sit, the betrayed children of two revolutions. They spread their blankets on the grass, eat cold chicken, beetroot salad, pickled cucumbers, and watermelon. They drink tea from thermos flasks and take a short nap. Then they play badminton with the children and cards or chess with the adults. Mathematical puzzles are particularly popular.

Their youth is over. They left it in the camps. They are in their thirties and are ashamed of their accents and faulty grammar. Reluctant to speak to the locals, they have to re-establish themselves in their mother tongue. They already bear responsibility for children and for the wives they brought, who are even more foreign than themselves. Hardly anyone has a career, but they all have ambition. They need to catch up on their education and connect with their generation. They prefer to spend their free time in the company of their peers. They speak Russian because that is still the language in which they think and dream. These men and women know the same songs, and they tell anecdotes that only they find funny. In this circle, they don't need to pretend nor do they have to play the role of victim, as they do for the authorities in order to get an apartment or a disability certificate. Some lost their health in the camps, where the only thing that mattered was to survive. Every single, solitary day. Every single, solitary year.

Nina gave in to Karl's insistence and moved to Vienna last winter with her two daughters. Meanwhile, it is summer, and every Sunday they go "to Jesuitku", to the Jesuitenwiese in Vienna's Green Prater. That's where the friends from their youth, sent by their parents in 1934, after the bloody civil war, the February Uprising, into a supposedly safe exile, gather in the hope that they might escape looming fascism and instead participate in a promising future. In a

peaceful country that is in the process of building a just society, after Red Vienna had fallen into shambles. Their sons and daughters made this dream their own – and are all too eager to keep dreaming it.

The conversations become more agitated, the voices louder. How can they explain that the land of their refuge held in store only absurd accusations, night-long interrogations, torture, imprisonment in camps, cold, hunger, disease, and death? Were they were the much-cited eggs that have to be cracked to make an omelet? Was it was all one big mistake, and if so, who was wrong? They agree on one thing: the principle, the essence of communism was and remains true. Things may have gone wrong, mistakes may have happened, misunderstandings may have occurred, but that's no reason to deviate from this grand, singular idea.

But weren't we promised happiness?

And now, shouldn't we at least be welcomed? Our parents saw the disaster coming. Being warned about it, they fought and sent their children to safety. The Soviets liberated Austria from fascism, and now hatred of everything Russian is flourishing.

The Russian wives are making an effort. They will never be genuine locals, even the Austrian women in this circle feel it, and that's what hurts the most. Nina knows very well that language is the key to this new life. She hardly has an opportunity to learn. There is no talking at work in the seamstress shop. She speaks Russian with her husband and children. She avoids her mother-in-law.

Then when the sun sinks lower, someone takes out a harmonica, another a bottle. Vodka makes the tongues heavy. A woman quietly hums a song, a second joins in and a third, the men add the bass, the harmonica sustains their voices. They find themselves in harmony, and then it's evening. They wake the children and bundle the tableware into blankets and throw them over

their shoulders. In their sidecar machines, proudly bought from their first savings, the fathers drive their families home. Karl lifts his children, one after the other, into Nina's arms, as she waits in the narrow sidecar. As he drives away, he tosses a greeting to Erika, then the motorcycle turns sharply and drives off into the night. The little girls, carried half asleep into the apartment by their parents, will later remember the smell of the stairwell, which permeates all Viennese public buildings, and is found nowhere else in the world.