

This book is dedicated to my mother, Eugenia (Genia) Lubowska, Devert (Krolikowska) Krol (1910–1972) and to my uncle, Jakub (Jasio) Lubowski (1915–1979) and to my children, Richard M., Elisabeth K., and Jeffrey C. Rosenthal

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Acknowledgments

This book was written for my children, to whom I wanted to convey the nature of survival and the importance of continuance. Their existence was a source of great pleasure to my mother. They were affected by my experience and by hers in ways we cannot fully know.

In writing this account of my own experiences, I found several sources that help to understand the enormity of these events, based on documented numbers of Jews living in Warsaw in 1939 dead or missing by the end of the war. Chief among these sources were: Wladyslaw Bartoszewski, *The Warsaw Ghetto: A Christian's Testimony* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987); Yehuda Bauer, *A History of The Holocaust* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1982); Stuart Eizenstat, *Imperfect Justice* (New York: Public Affairs, 2003); Gunnar S. Paulson, *Secret City: The Hidden Jews of Warsaw 1940–1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002); and Bernard Goldstein, *Five Years in the Warsaw Ghetto* (New York: Doubleday, 1961), first published as *The Stars Bear Witness* (New York: Viking Press, 1949), the best and most detailed description of daily life in the Warsaw Ghetto.

I owe special thanks to Paul Gilmartin, whose sensitive interview, taped in his home in Los Angeles, which became Episode 51 of his program *Mental Illness Happy Hour*, helped to open a window to my childhood memories.

Most importantly, the events depicted here would have forever remained uncomfortably in the confines of my memory if it were not for the encouragement and invaluable assistance of my oldest friend, Judith Chernaik. As a published author and one who likes to make things happen, having known my mother and the bits and pieces of our story, her conviction that the story should be told, and that I could do it, sustained me through the very painful time of writing, even across continents, as she now lives in London.

I also want to thank my husband, Robert Keese, for his understanding while I retreated into another time and another reality.

Introduction

Coming to Terms with Memories

I have been writing this book for over sixty years, mostly just in my head. As a child in the Warsaw ghetto, I kept a diary interspersed with poems and overheard stories. It had to be destroyed when we left the ghetto so that no traces of where I had been could ever be found.

A year later, during the Warsaw Uprising, I again kept a diary with patriotic songs I had composed, comments, and observations. This also did not survive our escape from the city, for the same reasons. Warsaw residents had been gathered into labor camps—now it would have been equally dangerous to be discovered as a past resident of the no-longer-inhabited city.

Time went on. The war ended. We moved to another country, another life, another culture. The past seemed less and less believable. I was busy with school, work, children. There never seemed to be time to focus on the ever-receding past, or a real desire to do so. If I began to tell my story, I could not stop without wanting to get to the end of it quickly, so it would be over, so I could be sure that I had survived. I made up many arguments for refusing to tell it. Why should I burden others with that history, the increasingly more unbelievable events of my childhood that, for those years, were just my ordinary life? When I first arrived in New York City, at the age of twelve, I felt like one who has just escaped from a lunatic asylum. I did not want others to know of my past lest they would examine me for signs of damage, or even blame.

“I am fine, thank you. I am just like everyone else”. Survival had for so long depended on my ability to pass undiscovered. I had been good at it. I wanted to continue my success.

In 1946, at the beginning of my first school year in New York City, one of my eighth-grade classmates asked me questions about the war. When I began to tell some of the story, another interrupted loudly. “Don’t believe anything she tells you,” she announced. “My father says that all these refugees tell fantastic stories, all lies, so that we feel sorry for them and give them money.”

That really shocked me. I was about to defend myself, offer proof, when I thought: *Do I really want to convince my classmates that people did terrible things to other people?* Perhaps it was better that they should not believe me, perhaps that meant that they could not imagine acting like that, so would never be capable of doing it themselves. It seems naïve now, but it made me feel better.

As an adult, I considered that perhaps the reason I could not write this book was that I had no point of view. Was I angry? Was I sad? The story of my individual survival seemed unimportant and not worth telling. The full realization of how tenaciously I resisted revisiting the past dawned on me about twenty years ago, when I was encouraged to register for reparation money offered by the German government. I did not want to register. Asking for reparations seemed like an admission of damage. It would question my survival, my *intact* survival.

“When they get my application,” I said to a friend, “they will take out a big ledger and add me to the list of over six million victims. Here is one more, they will say, one that we did not know about.” One more victim. I would not give them that satisfaction.

“But surely terrible things must have happened to you,” my friend reasoned.

“No,” I said. “I was lucky, nothing bad happened to me. I would be compensated for the suffering of others, no longer able to speak for themselves. And anyway, there can be no compensation.”

My friend persisted. “Weren’t there people close to you who were killed?”

“No,” I insisted. But then, I thought for a minute; that sounded crazy. “Oh, yes, I guess. My father and my grandparents and all my friends by the time I was eight years old.”

Oh . . . it was just too frightening for me to classify myself as a victim. Victims do not survive. Survival requires constant struggle and vigilance. One cannot afford the luxury of not surviving.

It always seemed to me that survival needs to be practiced and rehearsed. Early in 1942, my mother would manage to cross to the other side of the walled ghetto to sell foodstuffs we were receiving from her husband, my stepfather, who briefly found himself in Brazil. These packages could be delivered because they were shipped from a neutral country. Strange luxuries for the starving inhabitants of the ghetto: coffee, tea, cocoa, sardines, canned pineapple. Things that were coveted by high-end restaurants on the Aryan side. My mother would go to sell them there and brought us bread, potatoes, and sometimes a piece of sausage or eggs, *our* luxuries. When a package arrived, she would announce in the afternoon that she was planning to take it to “the other side.” This short notice limited the dire warnings of her brother, my uncle Jasio, and my own choked-down fear. Stopped without a pass and identified as a Jew, she could be summarily shot. My mother was young and attractive, and trusted her luck. She often would be accompanied by her mysterious romantic friend Phillip. Phillip wore a beret and a scarf, and rode a motorcycle. Her friends were suspicious of him. He could seemingly come and go as he pleased. Who was he? How was he able to get his “pass”?

I liked Phillip. Getting into my good graces and buying me treats was his way of courting and annoying my mother. I had no choice but to trust him.

“Don’t trust him,” Jasio would say. He was my mother’s younger brother and lived with us. Jasio’s anxiety would cause me to imagine the most unimaginable of disasters: she would not be coming back. But as it got late, Jasio was often not there, spending the night with friends, and I would lie awake in my bed, in the bed my mother and I shared, and try to sleep, waiting for her return. As I waited alone, when the anxiety became unbearable, I would rehearse my survival.

There is a knock on the door, it is someone coming to tell me that my mother has been caught, arrested, or killed. Word of such events always spread quickly among friends. I have to plan exactly what I will do. I will

get dressed, put my things together, and go across the courtyard where my best friend Ella Taitelbaum lives with her mother and little sister. I tell them what has happened and Mrs. Taitelbaum says I can come and live with them. I will go back and get my things. I will leave a note for Jasio telling him not to worry about me. I fill this activity with as much detail as I can, so it runs through my mind slowly like a film on a hand-cranked reel. If I really take my time with this fantasy, I will hear my mother's steps on the stairs before I need to start it over.

Years later, when I was first married, my husband's work took him from Boston to New York for two days each month. I drove him to the airport; sometimes on my way back, the familiar feeling of anxiety would seize me. Did the plane make it to New York? How would I find out? The familiar way of rehearsing for disaster could still soothe my anxiety.

I get home and there is a message or a call that tells me of the disaster. I will put together a list of people I should inform. I will begin to make arrangements, sort documents, take care of the children. These plans would keep me calm till I could get home and check on the safe arrival of the plane.

I lost that defense a few years later while staying with friends in Vermont. The children were now four and six. My mother and stepfather were to stop by and pick up the children to take them for a week. It would be a long car ride, and I was concerned about my stepfather's driving. I made sure that the children would sit in the back seat with seatbelts on, but I could not shake off the anxiety. Soon it became intolerable, so I began the narrative that had always soothed me in the past.

OK, now comes the phone call about the accident—what do you do? It did not work. I can do nothing; there is nothing to do. I had no idea it would ever be like that. We had made the usual plans of a young couple with free babysitters, a dinner out, a movie. But I was paralyzed with an irrational grief that I could not share with anyone. I had made the assumption that my children were lost and now I could not go on living. I could not bear the cheerfulness of my friends looking forward to the free evening. I was in another world.

Lest my friends think I was crazy, I announced to everyone that I was suddenly feeling quite sick, perhaps the flu.

“What a shame,” they said, “we had such a nice evening planned.” They should go ahead and never mind me. “I’ll just take a couple of aspirins and go to bed. I am sure it will all be gone by tomorrow.”

So they left and I went to bed, and cried and cried, mourning my children. And so, after all those years, I learned that there could be something in my life that I valued above my own survival. That made life a more complex and dangerous journey. It made me realize that it must have been that way for other adults who survived with me, that my existence must have contributed to my mother’s will to survive, and she might not have been as brave or as resourceful if it had been only on her own behalf.

Some years later I was asked to translate testimonials collected in Polish from Jewish children newly arrived in Israel, about their experiences in concentration camps, ghettos, and hideouts. This was for research work by a psychiatrist who was interested in the effects of such experiences. It was very difficult for me to read and retype these stories without weeping over the horrors that the children had endured. My children were of school age then, and I was terrified that they might find and read those typewritten pages, so I hid them more carefully than I would have hidden the most graphic pornography. After a while, I refused to read or translate any more of these testimonials.

As my ordinary life went on, I still couldn’t bring myself to write my story. Why bring to others what I was trying to get away from myself?

You write to bear witness, they say. A witness to what? To this single event? The horrors of the world kept multiplying around me, while my own experiences receded into the past. There was South Africa. I had recurring nightmares of the Charlottesville Massacre. Then came the Vietnam War. I was there too, huddled in a hut, terrified of those who wanted to kill me for reasons I could neither understand nor prevent. I refused to keep the graphic anti-war posters that my friends hung on their walls. *You may need those to remind you, but I carry those pictures in my head all the time. I don’t need to be reminded. I need a space where I can try to forget.*

I studied and taught social science, which has to do with how people behave and why. Yet I did not find the explanations I was searching for. I wrote books and articles, but not about my own

experience. The current wars and horrors kept happening. My children were grown and had children of their own. My stories trickled down in partial versions as part of the family history. I still believed that it was better that they should not know the whole story.

But then, quite unexpectedly for me, I too became older. There was no one to ask questions about my memories, no one to fill in the details, and very few were left who shared my experiences. My children were now being entertained by films that depicted parts of my experience. I wanted to know what they were being told. So I went to see *Life is Beautiful* with Robert Benigni. The *New Yorker* published my letter, in which I contested the reviewer's objections to the humor and his disbelief in the story. Survival is always hard to believe, full of strange coincidences and unpredictable events. There is always humor and all the other constant aspects of life, no matter what the circumstances. I went to see *Schindler's List* because my children were going to see it. I also saw *The Pianist*. Some friends were warning me to stay away from that film, as it was too close to my experience. But my Aunt Marysia, who is also a Holocaust survivor, said "Don't worry, you won't see anything you have not seen before."

Afterwards, she asked me, "Do you remember it being so frantic?"

"No," I said, "but this was three years depicted in less than three hours."

Then, I started to think that there would be no one left to tell it all, not just my story, but that of my parents, my grandparents, and my great-grandparents. They are all part of this history. My children would never know what they have inherited, what has been passed on from generation to generation, would not know of their endurance, the twists of their fates, the flow of history that was their world. And there will be no one to honor them. So I am writing this for my children. They are the roots and stock of the living plant. We are just the latest shoots, this one spring's harvest, and maybe at some future time when we stop the killings, maybe then there will be flowers

*The living owe it to those who no longer speak for
themselves to tell their story for them*

—Czesław Miłosz

1. My Personal War

I am five years old. We have moved into an apartment where Mietek, my mother's new husband, has always lived with his parents, now deceased. It is the same apartment where my mother had resided for a year in a room rented with two of her friends, when she first came to Warsaw, some ten years previously, to attend the University. It is on the second floor. The front door opens onto an entry hallway, with a coat closet, a small table, and a chair. One door leads to the dining room/living room and another to a study with a large adjoining bedroom. From the dining room, there is an entry to the kitchen with another small bedroom to the side. That is my bedroom. There is a small bureau, a table, and a narrow iron bed, painted white.

That apartment building, at 9 Zlota Street, burned down when the first German bombs fell on Warsaw in 1939. I was with my grandparents in Wloclawek. When we came back to Warsaw, my mother took me to look at the burned-out house and I saw my white iron bed, now mostly turned black, hanging out of my bedroom window, its bottom legs caught on the window ledge. The image of the burned bed is etched in my memory. It is, to me, the symbol of the whole war.

The dining room has a large oval table in the middle. It is covered with a white linen cloth edged with ecru lace. I sat with my grandmother while she made lace like that. Usually, the table is just polished wood. I often sit there tracing letters, trying to teach myself to read. I do that from newspapers that are left lying around, and I find it especially difficult to make what I consider a proper "e," with a straight line across the top and a neat curve around it.

The special tablecloth means that we are expecting company. A smell of freshly baked babka, which Zosia is baking in the kitchen, wafts through the house. It comes to my bedroom first because my room is connected to the kitchen by a small passage that also has a door to the bathroom. The large bedroom on the other side of the entry is

where my mother and Mietek sleep. I like having my little bedroom so close to the kitchen. In the morning, when I first wake up, I can slip into the kitchen, absorb all the smells, and stand around the large enamel sink while Zosia puts away the dishes from the night before and makes preparations for the day's housekeeping. Zosia sleeps in an alcove in the back of the kitchen. There is a narrow bed and a chest of drawers; at the opening, a starched cotton drape can be drawn shut to separate it from the rest of the kitchen.

I love the kitchen. Ever since my mother remarried, I am in enemy territory. Every day there are new rules I am told I must obey, such as not talking to my mother when she is resting, because she has frequent headaches. My mother does not belong to me anymore. When Mietek is critical of my behavior, or makes more rules for me to follow, she gets a pained look on her face but she does not interfere. He says I have been spoiled and he is improving my character. I know he hates me. He looks for things that give me pleasure and finds reasons to deprive me of them. My mother was divorced when I was three. In the past two years, I spent a great deal of time with my grandparents or with my mother and Zosia, and weekends with my father.

Zosia has been with us off and on for as long as I can remember. I have an early memory of my mother and Zosia standing at one end of the room, encouraging me to walk toward them. I teeter in their direction and they both extend their arms to catch me. I know it is a genuine memory because I remember a bookcase they stood next to that was huge—I only reached up to the second shelf. The picture of all this is magnified and a bit fuzzy. I was very nearsighted, so that would have been the way I would have seen things around me.

Zosia had come to work for my grandmother as a young peasant girl, when my mother was just a child. She was like a second mother to her, and my grandmother sent her to help my mother in Warsaw when I was born. She is the only one that my mother still listens to since she married Mietek. He does not like that. She often takes my side, but silently. She would not speak out.

I still spend summers with my grandparents, and my father comes most weekends to take me out for part of the day. Those are wonderful

times. My father has bought me a blue wool dress with a white collar, just like a dress that Shirley Temple wore in one of her films that he took me to see. I wear the dress every time we go out together. My mother does not like it when he takes me to see films. After I saw *Snow White*, I kept having nightmares and could not sleep. Mietek says I should not be allowed to spend so much time with other family, my grandparents especially, as they spoil me.

My mother and Mietek had married the previous February. My mother and Zosia packed my things, and my uncle Jasio came to take me to my grandparents. We went by train, which was exciting. I was not quite sure what was going on, just that I had to be out of the way. I was told that, when I came back a month later, we would be living in a different house and Mietek would be there all the time.

In my grandparents' house, there was always something for me to do. The whole house was theirs. The square cement block building stood at the back of a narrow walled-in courtyard closed off with a heavy padlocked gate that opened onto the street. The walls on both sides of the courtyard were lined with low wooden sheds. The shed on one side, by the gate, served as an office. The larger shed on the other side was a stable with two horses and a wagon, used to deliver boxes of soap that my grandfather manufactured, as well as a small, light carriage they took out for picnics and rides. The courtyard was paved with cobblestones with a deep rut that ran the length of each side, ending under the gate, so that the whole space could be hosed down. A large doghouse stood by the side of the stable, where their watchdog, let loose at night, would be chained.

The soap factory was the first floor of the main house. A loading platform ran across the front of the house, ending at a set of stairs leading to my grandparents' living quarters on the second floor. On the other side of the stairs was a cement deck covered over with a trellis of grapevines. A large wooden table under the trellis was where we had our meals in good weather. A faint smell of perfumed soap was always in the air.

The factory space was full of vats of dyes, chemicals, and strange mixtures that I had to keep away from. But at the other end, closer to

the doors to the loading dock, was the equipment that stamped out blocks of soap. I was allowed to stand by that end and watch pink and blue squares of soap tumble down to be stamped at the final step with a figure of a young dancer in regional costume from the Polish region of Kujawy: a *Kujawianka*. That was the trade name of my grandfather's soap. Finally, the small squares of soap were packaged in colorful boxes decorated with a picture of the dancing *Kujawianka* and the address and name of the manufacturer.

Since my grandfather was present at all meals, the household revolved around these preparations. When I was there, the focus was on what I liked or what they thought I should be eating. Every other morning the milkman came, pushing a hand cart with vats of milk, cream, and sour cream, a big part of Polish cooking. These would be ladled out with a long-handled ladle into containers that my grandmother Babusia brought down to him. In the summer, he also carried baskets of berries: strawberries, blueberries, and currants, which his family members had picked that morning. Sometimes, there would be mushrooms brought in from the woods, probably picked by the children in the family. In Poland, gathering mushrooms is often a task for small children. Poisonous mushrooms are so easily recognized that there is little danger of a mistake.

The house had an attic where my grandmother kept a few chickens. There was no room for more than four or five, as they had to be kept in enclosures to protect them from rats. There were also white pigeons that nested in the rafters. So we had fresh eggs as well as chicken soup, and occasionally my grandmother would make pigeon soup, just for me, which was a great delicacy. I loved to go up to the attic and feed the chickens and watch the pigeons fly in and out, though I tried not to think of them when soup was served.

Although my photos from those times show a round-faced, pudgy little girl, my grandmother always thought I should be eating more. She had my favorite dishes prepared and still coaxed and bribed me to eat. I did not like drinking milk, which had to be boiled and was always hot. A box of chocolates in different animal shapes contained the milk bribes. She would drop a chocolate creature into my hot milk, and

I would try to drink it fast enough to still identify the animal before it melted away. There was a small, pretty jam spoon for scraping the melted chocolate out of the bottom of the cup.

If the dish was not so well liked, but something she thought I should eat, there were also scare tactics. For that she would conscript my grandfather. After I was told that there was a monster in the closet who was upset because I would not take three more bites of whatever it was, my grandfather would emerge with a heavy coat over his head, and in a threatening gruff voice tell me I must eat them or else . . . Surely I knew it was him, my very beloved Dziadzius, and yet, there was always an edge of doubt, a small fear of a possible unknown, *what if* . . .

My grandfather was the one adult in my childhood whom I loved unreservedly, the one adult into whose lap I could always climb and know I was welcome. He was a tall, handsome man with a full head of white, silky hair. After supper, sitting in his lap, I would take a comb and run it through his hair, changing the part to make him look funny, then returning him to a perfect look. I can easily recall the feel of his hair and the smell of his jacket as I tucked my face into his shoulder, a mixture of the soap he manufactured and the tobacco he smoked in his pipe.

I had learned that refusing to eat was the only way one could stand up to an adult, or refusing to get out of bed, but that was to be used as a last resort. Later, I learned that those things only had an effect on adults who cared.

Mietek did not mind sending me to my room with no supper, glad to be rid of my presence. That much I soon guessed. I felt that he hated me, but it was not till I was an adult that I understood his character and the circumstances that led to that hatred.

But I also found out that to understand is not the same as to forgive.

That year, the summer following the marriage, Mietek vetoed my usual stay at my grandparents. He found a children's camp where I could spend the summer without being a favored child and so begin to "build my character." He and my mother took me by train, and then a

horse cab from the station, to a large house in the country surrounded by woods. The property was enclosed by a tall wrought-iron fence and gate. I was five years old.

My mother was obviously concerned about leaving me with strangers. She lingered as I clung to her, not quite believing that she would actually leave. Finally, protesting tearfully, I was sternly led away by one of the caretakers. I saw my mother glance back with a confused look. I broke away from the woman restraining me and ran to the fence, only to see my mother disappearing from view. Grasping the wrought iron fence, I screamed and kicked until, defeated and worn out, I was led away. My things and I were put into a room with several cots in it and I was sat down at a long wooden table with other children. It was suppertime. I think I was the youngest child there. I have always been rather tall for my age, but I remember being the smallest when we lined up.

I cried myself to sleep that night and the next day refused to eat any breakfast.

During the day, we went for walks in the woods and games were organized. I did not know any of the games; in fact, I did not know how to play. At home, I usually spent time by myself or with adults. I was clumsy and not very outgoing, and it was a few years before it was discovered that I was very nearsighted, something I inherited from my father. But I liked going out into the woods. There, I usually sat by myself away from the other children, looking closely at flowers and insects that I could then see better, crying a little, but comforted by the plants around me and the smells of the woods. I was left alone since I was not being a bother to anyone.

The evening after my first day, my mother telephoned to ask how I was doing. When I was called to the phone and heard her voice, I became so hysterical and wept so violently that the receiver was yanked from my hand. She was asked not to call again until I had some time to adjust. Hearing them say she was not to call threw me into deeper despair.

I still refused to eat. This time it was not a ruse; I could not swallow a bite.

A decision was made to force me to eat. After the other children had finished their food and left the dining room, I was told to stay. As I sat over an untouched plate, one of the adults sat next to me and forced me to swallow, spoonful after spoonful. As the food mixed with tears in my throat, I gagged on my sobs and finally threw up all the forced food. It was cleaned up and I was put to bed.

The next morning, a different strategy must have been decided on to break what they considered my “stubbornness.” Again, I was forced to eat after all the children had left. I will never forget that meal. It was oatmeal and the husks left on the flakes irritated my already raw throat. I threw up, but this time, the caretaker held a bowl under my chin and coolly made me eat again what I had just regurgitated. I can vividly recall all the feelings that went with that event, but I have no memory of how it ended or what happened the rest of that day. I am sure I was in hysterics. I don’t remember ever eating a meal at that place. I don’t know how many days I was there. It could not have been many.

I just remember the morning when they packed my things and led me to the gate. And there was the most wonderful sight. It was my grandfather’s carriage with his driver, who was handed my suitcase. I was lifted up and deposited on my grandmother’s lap, while Zosia, who sat next to her, started smoothing my hair, saying how thin I looked.

“No wonder they refused to be responsible any longer,” my grandmother said. “She could have gotten sick. Imagine sending her off like that—what were they thinking?”

Was anyone ever told that I was made to eat the food I threw up? I doubt it. I never told.

I spent the rest of that summer at my grandparents. It was the last summer before the oncoming war overshadowed all else. I remember eating wild strawberries with sweetened fresh cream, a chicken soup my grandmother made with one of the attic chickens, whose insides contained potential eggs, of all different sizes. Small round yolks floated about in the delicious broth. For dessert, there would be Zosia’s wonderful honey cake and gingerbread.

When the summer was over and I returned to Warsaw, Mietek decided to hire a governess for me who would come in the mornings to

help me dress and comb my hair and take me out for a walk. All the things my mother used to do with me. I was also to enter kindergarten that fall. Thus battle lines were redrawn.

Combing my hair in the mornings was always a bit of a production. My hair was long, and fell below my waist. It had never been cut and since I was not a particularly pretty little girl, I was well aware that my hair was the one thing that drew admiration. It was fine and knotted easily and the morning comb-out was difficult. I would often scream in pain as the knots were tugged on. It was in fact painful, but it was also satisfying when my mother expressed concern over my discomfort and was especially careful not to pull my hair, combing it out carefully. The hired governess, probably trying to do her best, was not able to pacify me easily. One morning, as I was objecting loudly to the yanking of my hair, Mietek rushed in and told me harshly to be quiet because my mother had a headache and was lying down. I expected that my cries would bring her to my side. I knew she must have wanted to come in and help, but Mietek stopped her, determined that I would not be “spoiled.” This was the last straw. As he was telling me to be quiet, I said, “This is my room and I will scream as loudly as I want.” I could see him start to go into a rage, but I knew he would not hit me.

“Then you can stay in your room all week,” he said, “And don’t let me find you in any other part of the house.”

I could go outside with my governess but all my meals were served in my room. The particularly onerous part of that for me was not being able to go into the kitchen, where Zosia would let me help her cook and lick out the pots with left-over delicacies. Raw babka dough made with yeast and raisins was my favorite. There, I always felt welcome and cared for. I don’t know how long this exile actually lasted, but I was aware that it created tension between my mother and Mietek, leaving me with a combined sense of guilt and satisfied revenge.

I had more than one governess through the first few months of that year. I can’t remember any of them, but I became very adept at having them fired. Knowing how easily Mietek became irritated by any infraction of what he considered proper behavior, I found ways to blame

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