To my beloved Liora, who did not live to see this book completed,
and to our family members who were murdered in the Holocaust.

The survivor's duty is to bear witness for the dead and for the living. He has no right to deprive future generations of a past that belongs to our collective memory. To forget would be not only dangerous but offensive: to forget the dead would be a kin to killing them a second time.

—Elie Wiesel, Night (1)

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Acknowledgments

The urge to write this book was triggered by my visit to the Hall of Names at the Yad Vashem Holocaust History Museum in Jerusalem. The round hall lined with bookshelves along its walls is the repository of the Pages of Testimony, the biographical details of the known Holocaust victims: one or two pages for each one. Seeing the vast number of black binders on the shelves was breathtaking. But the huge void of empty spaces set aside for the binders which will contain the testimonial pages of the yet unknown victims was far more striking.

More than 70 years after the Holocaust we know the names of "only" 4.7 million victims. More than one million of the Holocaust's Jewish victims remain unaccounted for. Entire families and their communities were wiped out. No one was left to name the victims or identify them on the rare occasion that a picture of a person who once lived was found. Street after street of houses that were formerly occupied by Jewish families were seized by their gentile neighbors who were quick to erase evidence of former ownerships.

The generation of Holocaust survivors is nearly gone and my generation, the so-called Second Generation Holocaust Survivors is rapidly diminishing too. Soon there will be no one left to tell the stories of the victims and of those who survived. Thanks to Yad Vashem I understood my duty to tell the stories of my father, his family, and their community.

My research took me through old villages in Hungary, concentration camps in Germany and battle-fields in Israel. Along the way I met people from all walks of life and various cultures. Some spoke only Hebrew, others only Hungarian, German or English. But they all had an important story to tell. I visited large archives like the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, the Holocaust Memorial Center in Budapest, the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin, the US Library of Congress and smaller ones like the Memorial Museum of Hungarian-Speaking Jewry in Safed,

Israel or the Virginia Holocaust Museum in Richmond. Each one of them had at least one piece that fit perfectly into the big puzzle that I assembled. More importantly, these institutes are the dam that holds off the growing flood of "Alternative Facts" and "Fake News" that attempts to re-write the history of the Holocaust or simply deny that it ever existed. I am grateful to these institutes, the visionaries who founded them, and the dedicated people who nourish them daily with their wisdom, time, and money. I pray that their work will protect us from the torrent of lies, misinformation, or plain ignorance.

I am also thankful to the International Tracing Service archive in Bad Arolsen and the archive at the Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial Site for their numerous and accurate responses to my queries.

Ultimately, this book is based on the memories of living persons, on the clues my father left to me and others, those that my mother told and, of course, conversations with those who are still alive. I spent countless days with my cousin Tamás Gróf and his wife Erika Siegfried-Thompson traveling in Hungary between ancient Jewish cemeteries, synagogues, and family homes. Tamás's prescient memory of family relations and events helped me mesh the archival facts with the lives of real people. His translation from Hungarian of documents, long letters by my father and our grandmother during and immediately after the Holocaust transported me to another world. Through his introduction I met Dr. Tibor Várkonyi, a resourceful Budapest lawyer, who knew where to find lost information like the birthdate of my half-sister Judit who was murdered in Auschwitz at the tender age of three and tracked down a nobility award bestowed by the Emperor Franz Joseph I on one of my ancestors.

I am thankful to my sister Noemi Schaefer for guarding precious family documents and helping me navigate through the maze of Israeli bureaucracy.

Thanks are owed also to my cousin Erzsébet (Zsóka) Kiss who shared with me numerous family documents and letters that survived the Holocaust, the communist regime in Hungary and the ravages of time.

Thanks to my family member Ágnes (Ági) Palócz and my uncle István Dénes. They are the last survivors of my parents' generation and the only remaining people who knew my father and mother as children, teenagers and as young Holocaust survivors.

I would be remiss if I did not thank those who guided me through the writing process with direction, ideas, and writing skills. Above all, I thank my late wife Liora who walked with me along most of this journey, traveling to Germany to visit the remnants of my father's concentration camp, his childhood home in Gyula, Hungary, the memorial of the victims of his family,

and the home of my early childhood in Budapest. She read my numerous attempts at writing this story and helping me find my voice. Sadly, cancer took her at the prime of her life.

I thank my children Aharon Laufer, Tammar Stein and Dan Laufer for reading and re-reading my manuscripts, wisely critiquing and editing it, until it finally met their exacting standards. No one can be more blessed than having such smart children.

I am indebted to my friends Prudence (Prue) Thorner and Lydia Harris for their tireless efforts editing and re-editing the manuscript and their thoughtful recommendations.

Thanks also to Veronika Farfan-Fürész and Leslie Gabor for editing the Hungarian content of the manuscript.

Last but not least I would like to thank my dear friend Marcie Solomon for being at my side in the long process of publishing the book and directing me to the Academic Studies Press where I met Alessandra Anzani and Ekaterina (Kate) Yanduganova who performed the heavy lifting of the publication of this book.

Notes on Transliteration and Formatting

To maintain authenticity, I chose to follow the Hungarian spelling convention. For example, Tokay wine was spelled Tokaji wine, street names were capitalized as "Andrássy út" rather than Andrássy Út, and last names were written ahead of first names, e.g., Kenéz Tibi rather then Tibi Kenéz. When necessary, the correct pronunciation was indicated in the text.

I italicized all quoted conversations to indicate that they were reconstructed from memory or assumed to have happened based on my knowledge of some or all of the participants.

Foreword

Our family's story was shaped in fire. Two generations, my father's and mine, participated in some of the most significant events in Jewish history: the Holocaust and then the rebirth and growth of the state of Israel.

The Holocaust ravaged our family: my grandfather and four of his siblings, my half sister and her mother were murdered in Auschwitz, and my grandmother was shot on the banks of the Danube by Hungarian fascist thugs. Eight siblings of my wife's grandfather perished in various concentration camps. My father barely survived.

But then, three years after the Nazi surrender came the miracle of Israel's founding, the rebirth of the Jewish nation. I grew up in Israel. My generation was often called the first generation of redemption.

It would not be an exaggeration to compare the heavy blow of the Holocaust to the destruction of the First and Second Temples in terms of the loss to Jewish demography, learning, and culture. The six million dead were not merely people; they were rabbis, teachers, philosophers, scientists, poets, writers, artists, lawyers, doctors, accountants, businessmen, or children who lost their chance to make their mark. Their wisdom, talents, memories, potential inventions, medical cures, and economic growth died with them: a loss to the Jewish people and to the world.

My father, a Holocaust survivor, lost his first wife, infant daughter, and his parents, he witnessed the unimaginable collapse of the Hungarian army on the Don River Bend north of Stalingrad while suffering the vicious brutality of his Hungarian army commanders; he endured the horrors of slavery in a German concentration camp and the degeneration of post-war Hungary into a Stalinist dictatorship. He fled this new tyranny to Israel with his new wife at his side and me, their baby, on his back.

Like so many Holocaust survivors, he hardly spoke about his past. He kept the memories of his torment and losses to himself. But they remained vivid in his frequent nightmares. For me and my younger sister, his dreadful past was the "elephant" in our home; it was there, we knew it was horrific, but we ignored it. Psychologists can offer many theories for his silence. But without a doubt, my sister and I did not really want to know. We hardly asked about his childhood, his adulthood in Hungary and the Holocaust, worried that we might stumble on an embarrassing or horrifying piece of history. Like many young Israelis in those days, we were embarrassed by our father's victimhood. And when we did ask, we were satisfied with brief and laconic answers, just like bees and storks are all that children want to know about sex.

We often lose sight of the miracle that is the state of Israel. There is no other country founded in the twentieth century that made so much of itself. Whereas new African and Asian countries rise, gain independence and then fail to form stable governments and societies, and while Israel's Middle Eastern neighbors are ruled by autocratic regimes that promote ideologies of bigotry and hate; this tiny Middle Eastern democracy within less than seventy years has become a vibrant economy, a cultural and scientific hotbed, the home of Nobel laureates, some of the best universities on Earth, hatchery of multiple billion-dollar startups, and by necessity a powerful army, all the while springing metropolitan cities out of the desert sand and absorbing masses of broken refugees from the entire world.

It took half a millennium from Joshua's conquest of Canaan to reach the high point of King Solomon's kingdom. Modern day Israel has reached greatness in less than a century. The territorial expanse after the Six-Day War was comparable in Jewish history only to the size of King Solomon's empire.

I became an officer in the Israeli Defense Force barely a generation after my father's liberation from a German concentration camp. Along with men of my age and reservists my father's age, I served during the victories of the Six-Day War and the Yom Kippur War. In 1967, at age nineteen, I experienced desperation when powerful Goliath-like enemies tightened a noose around the neck of our young nation. Then, within hours on a sunny day in June, our David-like nation flung its slingshot—a daring and imaginative air attack—to deal a powerful blow to the Goliaths.

But in 1982, I also saw deceptive and thoughtless Israeli leaders take our country to a war in Lebanon that could not be won but that would sink us into a quagmire from which we have not yet fully emerged even decades later.

Much has happened in our family too. I cannot avoid trying to see through my father's eyes the marvel of the family that grew out of the seed of his own survival. He was left for dead on a bunk in a German concentration camp, delirious in the terminal stages of typhus. A day after his German captors fled, an American army doctor, Dr. Michael Shimkin, arrived and saved him and nearly two hundred of other dying prisoners. Had Dr. Shimkin arrived only a day or two later, they would have been dead.

In the course of history, only a few generations were fortunate to witness a stellar revival of a nation and victories as I did, or be cursed to live through defeat and disasters as my father did. Yet, my father died without ever telling his story and I am aging without having told mine.

Memories of our experiences and their lessons belong to our children and the generations to follow. We owe them our stories. I am my family's last surviving witness to many of these events and the only store of information for the rest. It is my duty, as the Passover Hagaddah and Elie Wiesel would say (1), to tell our story.

To learn about my father's past I contacted and visited archives in America, Hungary, Germany, and Israel, searched records of family members in three continents, read a vast volume of literature in three languages, interviewed relatives, gathered pictures from old albums and visited sites. And when documents and testimonies could no longer fill the gaps, I filled them with what I believed to be the most plausible accounts.

I pray that our stories will be source of inspiration and pride to our children and the generations to come. I hope that my father, wherever he may be, is smiling at this book with approval.

Let his memory be a blessing.

June 1942: Imprisoned in the *toloncház*

"I assess the power of a will by how much resistance, pain, torture it endures and knows how to turn to its advantage."

—Friedrich Nietzsche

Despite the hot summer that overwhelmed Budapest's streets and choked the residents in the tall apartment buildings and the elegant stores, László Laufer[1] cell in the infamous Mosonyi utcai toloncház[2] prison was damp, dark, and cold. The intense summer heat could not penetrate the thick brick and concrete walls. The large complex was completed in 1888 as part of a new Hungarian prison system. It was intended as a "collection" facility and was considered at that time as one of the most advanced prisons in Europe. Although it had central heating and electricity, it was never designed for comfort. But in 1942 conditions deteriorated even below the minimum that was acceptable the previous century. It was overcrowded and run down.

The *toloncház* was a quadrangle of four brick buildings built around an inner courtyard where prisoners got their daily walk. The gallows at the center of the courtyard reminded them that not everyone would be leaving the prison through the front gate. Those who resided in cells facing the yard knew that the gallows were indeed in use—quite often.

Each of the grim looking buildings was three stories tall with rows of cells arranged along long corridors. The cells were sealed with large steel doors. A small window at the top of each door was covered by a steel plate that could be opened only from the outside. Guards would occasionally lift the plate to peek in. Small openings at the bottom were barely wide enough to slide bowls with meals or remove the night pots that were emptied once a day. Even those openings were closed from the outside by steel plates.

1 My father, Dr. László Laufer. His name of endearment Laci is pronounced "Latzy."

2 *Toloncház* is a Hungarian term for detention center. Mosonyi utcai toloncház (pronounced "Moshonyee Outzayi Tolontzhaz") means "the detention center on Mosonyi Street."

The cell windows were protected with heavy steel bars. The whitewashed glass plates beyond the bars allowed some natural light in but deprived the prisoners of the little joy they might have from looking out. Once inside, prisoners were isolated from the outside world.

The cells were originally designed for single occupancy. But as the prison population grew they were modified for double occupancy. Although the cellmates had less space, they enjoyed some relief from the eternal boredom and despair with each other's company.

The large prison was within walking distance of the Keleti pályaudvar.[3] Many of the prisoners could hear the frequent whistles of the trains carrying carefree travelers in and out of Budapest and dream about exotic trips. Centrally located, the Mosonyi utcai toloncház became the ideal place to hold the ever-growing number of political prisoners and Jews. They could be easily removed from their offices and thrown into this enormous prison that swallowed them without a trace. *Toloncház* was Budapest's version of the Bastille in Paris, the Tower of London or Lubyanka in Moscow during their heydays.

Laci never told me that he had been in prison, though apparently, it was never a secret. His cousin Ági[4] knew about it. "Everyone knew," she told me. Laci did tell me that during the war – that's how he referred to the Holocaust – while in prison, he heard one night the gallows being prepared outside his cell. He was certain that they were being readied for him.

At that time I did not dare ask him why he was in prison, what prison or why he thought that he might be executed. I just assumed that this was another anecdote in a larger tale that took place in the alien world of concentration camps rather than downtown Budapest.

Laci also told me that our friend Mr. Miller (or Miller úr, as he called him in Hungarian) shared the cell with him. I knew Mr. Miller. He was a jeweler in Hungary but in Israel he was a part-time clerk for Új Kelet, the Israeli-published Hungarian paper. Miller taught me how to fold sheets of paper into airplanes, birds, and even a salt and pepper holder.

I stumbled on Laci's imprisonment account when reading his file in the archives of the Budapest Bar Association.[5] The file told the story of a young

3 The Eastern Railroad Station, pronounced "Kelety Payaoudvar."

4 Ági (Ágnes) Palócz, my first cousin once removed from Syracuse NY. Her father, Sándor Neumann was my paternal grandmother's brother. Ági was 16 years old at the end of the Holocaust, surviving by hiding in Budapest.

5 The files and other family documents in Hungary were located by Dr. Tibor Várkonyi, a Budapest lawyer.

and bright lawyer who was prevented from getting a law license by the discriminatory Jewish Laws.[6] Instead of the customary three year training period, Laci was forced to work as a law associate for seven years, until he was drafted into the Hungarian Forced Labor Battalions.

Three years later, after surviving the war and returning to Budapest, Laci could finally apply for a law license. The archived file included a declaration that his felony conviction and imprisonment in *toloncház* should not disqualify him because his crime, helping a Hungarian Jew to return from Germany to escape his fate there, was no longer a crime in post-war Hungary. He received his law license a few months later, ten years, rather than three years after graduation from law school.

The statement is concise, written in a lawyer's matter-of-fact language. It does not describe his first night in jail, alone, scared, desperate, and worried for his family. "*Men keep their feelings to themselves,*" he often told me. I can imagine his feelings though, all too easily.

A month earlier Laci was a free man, a Law Associate in the large law office of Dr. Lipót, a well-known Budapest lawyer. Today he was a convicted felon with 364 days remaining of his one-year sentence. The little cell had two bunk beds, his at the bottom, a small metal chair and a table bolted to the floor. The few rays that penetrated the whitewashed windows through cracks in the paint were all the sunlight that would enter his cell facing the inner courtyard.

On the upper bunk was Miller úr, a short, slim, white-haired man with a small white mustache. Miller was the jeweler who sold Laci the diamond engagement ring he gave to Lili[7] and soon after, their two wedding rings.

The diamond ring was a true artwork, one of Miller's best. The large, nearly perfect, glittering diamond was held by four branches that split from the ring itself making the solitary diamond appear as if it floated above the ring. Four rows of tiny diamonds decorated all four branches. Using nearly microscopic letters Miller engraved Lili's name on the inner surface. Miller had to prepare several models before Laci accepted this one.

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6 Starting in 1938, Hungary began enacting anti-Jewish laws, better known as the Jewish Laws, aimed at restricting Jews from participation in various professions and enterprises. The first law limited the number of Jewish professionals including lawyers in Hungary to 20%. A year later, the Second Jewish Law reduced that number to 5%, the proportional representation of Jews in society. Since the number of practicing Jewish lawyers far exceeded that limit, new Jewish lawyers, including Laci, could not be admitted to the Bar. An early version of these laws, the Numerus Clausus (1920), limited enrollment of Jewish students in Hungarian universities.

7 Lili was my father's first wife, neé Liliá Rozenzweig.

Laci remembered Miller úr's arrest. He was prominent and well-liked in the Jewish community. Miller was the least likely person to be accused of aiding the enemy in a time of war. The case was discussed in Lipót's office even though he was not a client. It was egregious and demonstrated the tactics that the László Bárdossy government, one the most anti-Semitic governments in Hungarian history, was using against Jews. Bárdossy enacted the Jewish Laws that severely limited the participation of Jews in the Hungarian economy, outlawed marriage or even a sexual relationship between Jews and non-Jews. Bárdossy authorized the deportation of 16,000 Jews to Ukraine that was already under German occupation where they were slaughtered by the SS *Einsatzgruppen* (killing squads) near the town Kamianets-Podilskyi. (2)

Miller had been in the Mosonyi utcai toloncház since January. He was arrested on Sylvester Night.[8]

Even for Hungarians, who love a good party, Sylvester stands out as a unique party night. Little children stay awake until past midnight to welcome the New Year. Adults, Gentiles and Jews alike, celebrate by drinking, dining, and dancing. The ongoing war that the Bárdossy's government declared on the Soviet Union and the just-declared war on the United States barely diminished the intensity of the celebrations at the dawn of 1942. Siding with Germany, Hungarians felt that the German victory over Russia was imminent. They had already recovered territories they lost in the Great War and the gains of the new war would be theirs to share. The war on the US, most people agreed, was just politics to please the Germans. It would never amount to anything. Even the Jews who were suffering under the wrath of this anti-Semitic government felt hopeful. Of course, the new Jewish Laws were a serious blow and the ongoing hostile policies were a burden. But compared to the Jews of Poland, Czechoslovakia, Austria, and Germany who were confined in ghettos, deported to concentration camps and murdered by the thousands, the Hungarian Jews in Budapest felt they were safe.

Miller was returning home with his wife well past midnight after partying with friends in a restaurant on the Duna-korzó,[9] the beautiful strip of elegant restaurants and hotels along the Pest side of the Danube. From their table they could see on the Buda hills on the opposite side of the river, the illuminated Castle, and the Royal Palace. London, still fearing attacks by

8 The Hungarian popular name for New Year's Eve, it is derived from the name of the Catholic Pope Sylvester, the saint of the last day of the year.

9 The Danube promenade

German bombers, was dark that night. Paris under German occupation was depressed. But Budapest, the loyal Germany ally, had nothing to fear. All the lights were on that night.

After a wonderful dinner, washed down with sweet Tokaji wine and aromatic pálinka,[10] dancing the Csárdás to gypsy music and toasting champagne at midnight, Miller and his wife walked home along the Danube, past the magnificent Parliament building, enjoying the crisp cold night.

After passing Margit híd,[11] they turned onto the Nagykörút[12] towards Nyugati Pályaudvar,[13] leaving the Danube behind and then turned left towards Pozsonyi utca, one of the main streets of the new and mostly Jewish residential neighborhood. Their apartment was down the street on the fifth floor of an apartment building. Miller liked to brag that he could see the Danube from his balcony.

Despite the late hour, their custodian was standing at the open front door, the lobby behind him illuminated. It was unusual to see him out that late. The old man liked to retire early, even on Sylvester nights. But before the Millers could greet him, the concierge waved his hand towards someone across the street. Miller turned around. Two men wearing long dark coats and wide brimmed hats emerged from a parked black car with their hands in their pockets.

There were rumors of night raids by the secret police in Budapest along with accounts of people who vanished from their homes. Of course, few witnessed such raids and those who did, did not speak.

In a polite but firm tone, one of the men asked Miller to identify himself and then, without specifying any charge, told him that he was under arrest. The second man pulled him by the arm to the car, brutally pushed him into the back seat, and slammed the door. The two then sprang into the front seats and sped away.

Mrs. Miller remained standing on the cold sidewalk stunned, choking with tears. The concierge took her arm gently and led her into the warm lobby, closing the front door behind them and mumbling some apologies.

The side windows of the secret police car were covered by drapes. Miller could not and did not even try to see where he was being taken. But after speeding through empty streets the car stopped and his door was opened.

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10 Distilled fruit brandy, usually plum, pear, apple, cherry or apricot.

11 Margit híd—"Margit Bridge" in Hungarian, pronounced "Margeet Heed."

12 Nagykörút—"Great Boulevard" or literally, "Big Ring Road" in Hungarian, pronounced "Nady Keuroot."

13 Nyugati Pályaudvar—"The Western Railroad Station" in Hungarian, pronounced "Nyugati Payaoudvar."

Miller recognized the building on Andrássy út, one of the most elegant streets in Budapest. He was about to enter the Secret Police building. The inscription at the entrance to Dante's Inferno flashed through his mind, "Abandon Hope All Ye Who Enter Here."

Without a word, the two men flanked Miller on both sides and almost carried him through the front door into the empty lobby. A sleepy policeman at the front desk waved them in. They took the steps down. The rumors were true, Miller thought, suspects were taken to the basement. The building was quiet. They entered a long corridor lined with rows of doors on both sides. The sounds of the steel-toed shoes of the two agents broke the quiet in the brightly illuminated corridor. Miller watched in horror the many doors they were passing. Who were the people locked behind them?

They reached the door of his cell. One of the men pulled a large key ring from his pocket, opened the door into a small cell and pushed Miller in. Miller heard the key turn and the sound of steel-toed shoes fading away. Less than an hour passed since he left the restaurant on the Korzó with his wife. What happened to her, he wondered, was she arrested too? He sat down slowly on the thin straw mattress covering a steel plate attached to the wall. He looked around the cell but nothing made sense. He was frightened and confused. The walls of the narrow cell were closing in on him. He tried to think what could be his crime. His mind was blank.

For three days, he did not see a person or talk to one. His meals were pushed in through a slot in the door and empty trays taken away. The only sounds were heavy steps along the corridor or the guards or agents bringing in new prisoners. One night, he heard a prisoner scream briefly.

On the fourth day, the door opened and Miller was taken to his first interrogation. The interrogation did not make sense. He did not understand why the interrogator asked so many questions and what their purpose was. When one interrogator was replaced by another, the new one repeated the same questions. Miller was exhausted, hungry, and scared.

After a week in jail, he was led for the first time to the shower and was handed a clean suit. He recognized it as his own. It was brought from home. Did his wife bring it in? "*Put it on when you're done showering*," ordered the guard. "*Your trial is today.*"

Nothing made sense, not even his crime of aiding the enemy at a time of war. He had not seen any foreigner since the war had broken out. He never traveled outside of Budapest and he did not speak any language other than Hungarian. He did not even listen to the BBC like some of his friends.

But then in the courtroom the prosecutor called his only witness, Mr. Szöllősi Árpád. Miller recognized the slim tall man. Szöllősi wore a perfectly tailored suit, his shoes shone, and his dark hair was meticulously combed. His appearance projected importance. Szöllősi was the director in the Ministry of Interior. He visited Miller's store last month.

When Szöllősi entered Miller's store with his wife, he demanded to see Miller. They were looking for diamond rings. Very quickly Mrs. Szöllősi set her eyes on a beautiful ring with a large diamond surrounded by seven smaller ones. Miller remembered that ring well.

But then Szöllősi pulled Miller to a corner, introduced himself and asked that the ring be given to his wife as a gift. Miller did not mind bribes. It was not unusual to extort Jews, particularly rich store owners. Miller despised those who demanded bribes but he saw it as an inseparable part of business, like insurance. But this was excessive. And there was no favor offered in exchange. Giving away that diamond would erase his profit for the entire holiday month. He tried to plead with Szöllösi, offered another excellent diamond, but Mrs. Szöllősi would not relent. Finally she stormed out the store angrily. Szöllősi followed her, calling Miller a "dirty Jew" and promising that he would hear from him.

Szöllősi stared briefly at Miller as he walked by him to the witness stand. Miller thought he saw a hint of a smile. Szöllősi spoke briefly. His testimony was sufficient to send Miller away for three years.

The next day, Miller was lying on the upper bunk in his cell in *toloncház* when the door opened and a new prisoner was pushed in.

That night his new cellmate was dragged out half asleep by two guards. The poor man could not even say goodbye. Soon, loud sounds of pounding hammers came from the inner court. The gallows were being readied for execution. From his upper bunk, through cracks in the paint on his window Miller could see his cellmate being dragged by the same two guards to the gallows. Minutes later, he was dead.

Miller remained alone in his cell. Szöllősi's curse followed him through the prison walls. Alone for months in his tiny cell, he feared that he too might hang on the gallows; until Laci was pushed in.

Four weeks before joining Miller, Laci was sitting at his desk in Lipót's office. Working for Dr. Lipót was depressing. Without a license, or prospects for getting one, Laci could not argue in court, have his own clients, write contracts or provide counsel. He was allowed to prepare court cases for younger and less capable lawyers, who were lucky to be born a Gentile. They used his work to win cases and promote their own careers. With their

permission, he could sit with them when meeting clients that he himself brought to the office or write drafts for contracts that they then presented as their own without changing a word. When other young lawyers already had their own private offices, Laci still had to share an office with two young graduates of the Budapest law school who were not even in high school when he got his law degree.

That morning, his office door opened and two men wearing dark suits and Borsalino hats walked in without knocking.

"*Is Dr. Laufer here?*" one of them asked.

When he introduced himself, they asked him to join them. Flanked between the two, he was paraded through the waiting room and past the waiting clients. Mr. Lipót stood at his office door, visibly embarrassed. The two detectives intended that.

The walk with the agents was short. Lipót's office was near the courthouses and the central police station. Two of his colleagues passed him while walking between the two agents. They ignored him. Association with someone in the hands of the secret police could be dangerous.

Laci tried to speak to the agents, but they remained stone-faced and quiet. "*You will find out soon enough,*" was their only reply when asked where were they going and why. Laci could not remember any violation or any interaction with the authorities that could cause his arrest. But real guilt no longer mattered in Hungary, particularly if you were a Jew.

They arrived at the police station that he knew well. He was led to a small waiting room. The windowless walls were lined with wooden benches. The only decorations were two framed pictures hanging on the opposite wall. One was of Admiral Miklós Horthy, the Hungarian Regent, and the other of Prime Minister Bárdossy. Both faces were gravely serious.

He stepped into the room, the door behind him closed and the two silent detectives disappeared. There were two other doors to the room, closed as well. One of them must have led to an interrogation room. No sound came through these heavy doors. The white paint was peeling in the corners and the ceiling, but the room was clean. Laci knew about the interrogation rooms in this police station. He visited the station often for work and to meet clients. But he had never been in this part of the building. Prisoners' lawyers were not allowed there.

Hours passed, he was thirsty and hungry. He was arrested before lunch. He never ate breakfast but made it up at noon, but not today. He still had his watch; the agents did not take anything from him. The associates at the office